In *Ways of Meaning* Mark Platts gives us the first comprehensive, textbook presentation of what has come to be known as the ‘Davidson Program’ in natural language semantics, viz. the view, developed by Donald Davidson in [4] and a host of subsequent papers, that the correct approach to the theory of meaning for natural languages lies in the provision of Tarski-style truth theories for them. A very large literature has grown from Davidson’s proposals, and Platts undertakes the formidable task of putting it together into single, coherent picture, defending the resulting picture, and relating it to a variety of important epistemological and metaphysical questions. A brief overview of Platts’ project will provide a useful backdrop for my subsequent remarks.

I

The book is divided into three parts. Part One (Chapters I-III) begins by introducing the technical apparatus of a Tarskian truth-theory in application to simple artificial languages (Chapter I). There follows an excellent discussion of the sense in which a theory of truth for a natural language can be thought of as a theory of meaning for that language (Chapter II). Finally, there is an extended comparison of the present approach with traditional notions of “meaning analysis” and with Grecoan “intentional” theories of meaning (Chapter III).

Part Two (Chapters IV–VIII) concerns itself with applications of the truth-conditions approach to various English constructions. General problems attending the assignment of “logical forms” are introduced via a sample treatment of standard and nonstandard quantifiers (Chapter IV). The problems of intensionality are explored in connection with rival accounts of the ‘says that’ construction of indirect discourse, and Davidson’s “paratactic” theory is examined and extended as a way of handling these difficulties (Chapter V). Classical puzzles about proper names are introduced to motivate the rejection of a naive “individual constants” theory of names in favor of treating them as austere predicates in logical form (Chapter VI); in the course of this discussion Platts provides an extremely perceptive treatment of some influential criti-

cisms levelled by Michael Dummett against truth-conditional semantics, and a very interesting diagnosis of the lessons to be learned from Kripke’s causal theory of names. There follows an important criticism of the traditional “attributive/predicative” distinction for adjectives in terms of the phenomenon of “semantic attachment” (the dependence of the meaning of an attributive adjective upon the meaning of the noun or noun-phrase which it implicitly or explicitly modifies); various proposals concerning the logical form of adjectival constructions are then examined in light of this phenomenon and found wanting, and some suggestions are made regarding possible lines of further research (Chapter VII). Finally, Davidson’s proposals anent the logical forms of action-sentences and causal sentences are explored in detail, and sundry connections with matters ontological and epistemological are clearly and usefully analysed (Chapter VIII).

Part Three (Chapters IX-X) comes to grips with a number of issues which have lurked in the background throughout earlier chapters. The first set of issues concerns the nature of a native speaker’s “linguistic competence” and the sense in which the realist, truth-conditions approach can be said to “explain” as well as to “describe” that competence. Platts’ splendid discussion of this notoriously difficult and obscure topic (in Chapter IX) is perhaps the best part of the book and ought to be read by anyone who is seriously interested in the matter. The second set of issues concerns the prospects for applying the Davidson Program to the controversial area of normative discourse, an area in which talk of truth-conditions has been widely regarded as inappropriate. Platts sketches (in Chapter X) a sophisticated from of Ethical Intuitionism, which he goes on to defend as the proper realist stand.

There is insufficient space here for a detailed critique of a work of such large scope, so I shall limit myself to criticism of a few specific passages, followed by some general remarks about the book as a whole.

(1) The presentation of the technical preliminaries in Chapter I is marred by several minor infelicities and one outright error. The error in question occurs at the top of p. 25, where two-place sequences are confused with ordered pairs. This identification would be unobjectionable if, like many authors, Platts simply stipulated that ordered n-tuples (built from ordered pairs in the usual way) are to be called (n-termed) sequences. However, wishing to have infinite sequences at his disposal, Platts has previously given the standard definition of sequences as