

**Philosophy 146: Philosophy of Language
Spring 1996**

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Organization of Course

The course will meet for lecture every Monday and Wednesday at 1pm in Sever 106. There will be a section for the course, which will meet Fridays at 1pm in the same room. This section will be taught by a teaching fellow, should enrollment warrant the assignment of one; otherwise, the instructor will teach it himself. The section is open *only* to those enrolled in the class—undergraduates and graduate students *not* in philosophy. There will be a graduate section, the meeting-time for which will be arranged during the second week of the course. It will open to graduate students in philosophy who are enrolled in the course—and, possibly, to auditors, although we shall have to wait to see how many people are enrolled before making that decision.

Readings

We shall be reading a number of articles by different authors. Unfortunately, there is no very good collection of articles on the philosophy of language. Not that there aren't collections—there are—just that they don't cover the sorts of topics I'm interested in covering. I would like to have been able to produce a "sourcebook", containing xeroxes of the various articles, and then have these distributed, for the cost of the photocopying, in the department office. Unfortunately, however, current copyright law prohibits this, making no distinction between uses of copyrighted material for educational purposes and uses for commercial purposes, nor caring at all whether what is charged for sourcebooks merely covers the costs of photocopying or exceeds it. It is still possible to make sourcebooks. However, to do so, one has to obtain the permission of the various copyright holders, and then pay them some kind of royalty—which frequently exceeds 25¢ per page. That adds up. Big time.

However, each of you is free to make a copy of the relevant reading materials, for your own personal use. (Why exactly it should be illegal for me to *make* the photocopies for you, say, after you've given me the money to do so, is somewhat puzzling.) So, what we're going to have to do is this: I'll put both the books and journals from which the various articles come, and individual copies of them, on reserve in Robbins Library. It will be up to each of you to make copies of the articles along the way, or to make a copy of the complete packet. If this bothers you, write your senator or representative.

Course Requirements

Every student in the course will be required to submit one short (3-5 page) paper, from a list of topics, to be due 22 March, the Friday before Spring Break. For undergraduates and graduate students from departments other than Philosophy, I hope to be able to offer a choice (although approval for this plan will have to wait a little while)—between writing a longer term paper, of 15-20 pages, and writing a

second short paper (this one 5-8 pages) while also taking a final examination. The point of offering the choice is this: Those intending to do further serious work in philosophy, such as philosophy concentrators, should, I think, spend some time thinking hard about a single, specific problem; but those who are taking the course as an elective, or are just looking for a general familiarity with the area, are probably better off reviewing the material as a whole, as would be required for a final exam. Philosophy concentrators are therefore *encouraged, though not required* to write the term paper. Graduate students within the philosophy department, on the other hand, will be required to write a term paper of 20-25 pages.

Syllabus

Literal Meaning

- 31 January Introductory Meeting
 2 February P.F. Strawson, *Introduction to Logical Theory* (London: Methuen, 1952), pp. ???
 5 February H.P. Grice, “Prolegomena” and “Logic and Conversation”, in *Studies in the Ways of Words* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. ???
 7 February
- There is a lot more to be said about these sorts of questions—but they could form a course in themselves. A number of the most important papers are collected in Steven Davis, ed., *Pragmatics: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). Another interesting topic, on which we won’t touch, in metaphor: For papers on that subject, see the papers collected in Robert Harnish, ed., *Basic Topics in the Philosophy of Language* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994).

Davidson’s Proposal

- 12 February Donald Davidson, “Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages”, in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 3-15
 The basic idea here goes back at least to Frege; Wittgenstein too was fond of stressing the ‘creativity’ or ‘productivity’ of language. For another modern development of it, specifically in relation to syntactic theory, see Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1965).
 14 February Donald Davidson, “Truth and Meaning”, in *Inquiries*, pp. 17-36
 Donald Davidson, “Semantics for Natural Languages”, in *Inquiries*, pp. 55-64. For a very different approach to questions about meaning, see David Lewis, “General Semantics”, in his *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. ???
 19 February Presidents’ Day Holiday
 21 February P.F. Strawson, “Meaning and Truth”, in his *Logico-Linguistic Papers* (London: Methuen, 1971), pp. ???
 The approach Strawson is defending is originally due to H.P. Grice. See his “Meaning” and ???, in his *Studies in the Ways of Words*, pp. ???
 26 February John McDowell, “Meaning, Knowledge, and Communication”, in Z. van Straaten, ed., *Philosophical Subjects: Essays Presented to P.F. Strawson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. ???
 Michael Dummett, “Language and Communication”, in his *The Seas of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 166-87
 28 February Alfred Tarski, “The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4 (1944), pp. 341-75
 Alfred Tarski, “The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages”, in his *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), pp. ???; for a simple account of Tarski’s theory, see W.V.O. Quine, *Philosophy of Logic*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), Ch. 3

- 4 March John Etchemendy, "Tarski on Truth and Logical Consequence", *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 53 (1988), pp. 35-63
 Hartry Field, "Tarski's Theory of Truth", *Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1972), pp. ??? For a discussion which goes well beyond the present bounds, see John Etchemendy, *The Concept of Logical Consequence* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). There is now a fair literature on what Tarski was trying to do.
- 6 March Donald Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth", *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990), pp. 279-328, esp. Part I

Meaning, Understanding, and Knowledge

- 11 March John Foster, "Meaning and Truth-Theory", in G. Evans and J. McDowell, eds., *Truth and Meaning: Essays in Semantics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. ???
- 13 March Donald Davidson, "Reply to Foster" and "Radical Interpretation", in *Inquiries*, pp. 171-9 and 125-39
 Donald Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth", Parts II and III; W.V.O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1960), Chs. 1-2. For a critical discussion, see David Lewis, "Radical Interpretation", in his *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1, pp. ???.
- 18 March Scott Soames, "Semantics and Semantic Competence", in S. Schiffer and S. Steele, eds., *Cognition and Representation* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1988), pp. 185-207
- 20 March James Higginbotham, "Truth and Understanding", *Iyyun* 40 (1991), pp. 271-88
 For a different, but similar, approach, see Richard Larson and Gabriel Segal, *Knowledge of Meaning: An Introduction to Semantic Theory* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995), Chs. 1-2
- 22 March SHORT PAPER DUE (NO CLASS)
- 25, 27 March Spring Break
- 1 April Gareth Evans, "Semantic Theory and Tacit Knowledge", in his *Collected Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 322-42
 Evans is responding to Crispin Wright, "Rule-following, Objectivity, and the Theory of Meaning", in S. Holtzman and C. Leich, eds., *Wittgenstein: To Follow a Rule* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 99-117. Similar worries can be found in other authors. See, for example, W.V.O. Quine, "Methodological Reflections on Current Linguistic Theory", in his ; for a reply, see Noam Chomsky, "Quine's Empirical Assumptions", in D. Davidson and J. Hintikka, eds., *Words and Objections* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1969), pp. ; see also Hilary Putnam, "The Current Status of the Innateness...". There is something of a literature on the Chomsky-Quine debate at this point.
- 3 April Crispin Wright, "Theories of Meaning and Speakers' Knowledge", in his *Realism, Meaning, and Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 204-38; and Martin Davies, "Tacit Knowledge and Semantic Theory: Can a Five per cent Difference Matter?", *Mind* 96 (1987), pp. 441-62
 The subject of tacit knowledge has become a large and important one. For further reading, see Martin Davies, "Tacit Knowledge, and the Structure of Thought and Language", in C. Travis, ed., *Meaning and Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. ???; see also Martin Davies, "Tacit Knowledge and Subdoxastic States", Crispin Wright, "The Rule-following Arguments and the Central Project of Theoretical Linguistics", and Christopher Peacocke, "When is a Grammar Psychologically Real?", all in Alexander George, ed., *Reflections on Chomsky* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
- 8 April James Higginbotham, "Priorities in the Philosophy of Thought", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*
 Gabriel Segal, "Priorities in the Philosophy of Language and the Philosophy of Thought", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, pp. ; Michael Dummett, "Frege's Myth of the Third Realm", in his *Frege and Other Philosophers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. ???, and *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), Ch. 4

Meaning and Truth: The Manifestation Constraint

- 10 April Michael Dummett, "What is a Theory of Meaning? (I)", in *Seas of Language*, pp.
- 15 April John McDowell, "In Defense of Modesty", and Michael Dummett, "Reply to McDowell", both in B. Taylor, ed., *Michael Dummett: Contributions to Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Nijhoff, 1987), pp. ???
Michael Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*, Chs. 3, 5
- 17 April James Higginbotham, "Knowledge of Reference", in A. George, ed., *Reflections on Chomsky*, pp. 153-74
- 22 April Michael Dummett, "The Reality of the Past", in his *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge MA; Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 358-74
The best overview of Dummett's approach to these sorts of questions is probably his valedictory lecture, "Realism and Anti-realism", in *Seas of Language*, pp. 462-78. The texts in which the argument is most fully developed are probably "What is a Theory of Meaning? (II)", in *Seas of Language*, pp. 34-93, and "The Philosophical Basis of Intuitionistic Logic", in *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 215-47. There is a reasonably good exposition of the 'argument' for anti-realism in the Introduction to Crispin Wright's *Realism, Meaning, and Truth*, 1-43, but this must be read with care: Wright's position differs from Dummett's in crucial respects.
- 24 April John McDowell, "Anti-realism and the Epistemology of Understanding", in H. Parret and J. Bourveresse, eds., *Meaning and Understanding* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981), pp. ???
John McDowell, "Truth-Conditions, Bivalence, and Verificationism", in Evans and McDowell, *Truth and Meaning*, pp. . McDowell's interpretation of Dummett's 'argument' has become standard. Little in the way of critical discussion of it has yet appeared. However, there is an excellent discussion in Sanford Shieh's unpublished Ph.D. thesis, which is available in the Harvard Archives.
- 29 April Christopher Peacocke, "What Determines Truth-Conditions?", in , pp. 181-207.
Further development of this entire approach can be found in Peacocke's *Thoughts: An Essay on Content* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), and in his *A Study of Concepts* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1992).
- 1 May Michael Dummett, "The Source of the Concept of Truth", in *Seas of Language*, pp. 188-207