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Philosophy 147: Meaning and Communication
Fall 1999

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Organization of Course

The course will meet for lecture every Tuesday and Thursday at 10am in Emerson 104. There will be a section for the course, which will meet at a time and place to be determined. This section will be taught be a teaching fellow, should enrollment warrant the assignment of one; otherwise, the instructor will teach it himself. The section is intended for undergraduates and graduate students *not* in philosophy and is open *only* to those enrolled in the class. There will be a graduate section, the meeting-time for which will be arranged during the second week of the course, and which is 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 collection of articles on the philosophy of language which suits our purpose. 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 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. But to do so, one has to obtain permission from the various copyright holders, and then pay them a 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 you 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. Please make your photocopies *from the copies I put on reserve* to save wear and tear on the books. If any of 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 9 November. For undergraduates and graduate students from departments other than Philosophy, I should be able to offer a choice 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. Graduate students, on the other hand, will be required to write a term paper of 20-25 pages.

Syllabus

Introduction: Literal Meaning

21 September   Introductory Meeting

23 September   H.P. Grice,"Logic and Conversation", in *Studies in the Ways of Words* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 22-40

> We unfortunately will not have time to discuss Grice's broader views on language, except briefly, when we read Strawson's "Meaning and Truth". But there is a lot more to be said about these questions—and they could form a course in themselves. A number of 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, is metaphor: For papers on that subject, see Robert Harnish, ed., *Basic Topics in the Philosophy of Language* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994).

Meaning and Truth-Theory: Davidson's Proposal

28 September   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), and elsewhere.

30 September   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. 189-229.

5 October   Alfred Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4 (1944), pp. 341-75

> For further material on Tarski's theory of truth, see Alfred Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages", in his *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), pp. 152-278. For a simplified account of Tarski's theory, see W.V.O. Quine, *Philosophy of Logic*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), Ch. 3, and material on the instructor's web site.

7 October   Donald Davidson, "The Logical Form of Action Sentences", in his *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 105-22

> There is now a large literature on Davidson's analysis of adverbs. For a survey, see Terrence Parsons, *Events in the Semantics of English* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1990).

> Two of the hardest unsolved such problems concerning logical form have to do with 'propositional attitude' ascriptions, such as "John believes that dogs are furry", and with mass terms, such as 'water' or 'gold'. For some papers on the former, see Nathan Salmon and Scott Soames, eds., *Propositions and Attitudes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). Unfortunately, I know of no collection of papers on the latter problem.

12 October   Tyler Burge, "Demonstrative Constructions, Reference, and Truth", *Journal of Philosophy* 71 (1974), pp. 205-23.

> There has been much research on context-dependence in the past couple decades. For some relevant papers, see Steven Davis, *Pragmatics: A Reader*, cited above. Perhaps the most important paper, though it is very difficult, is David Kaplan, "Demonstratives", in J.Almog, *et al.*, eds., *Themes From Kaplan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.)

14 October   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. 347-75. For a discussion which goes well beyond the present bounds, see John Etchemendy, *The Concept of Logical Consequence* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

19 October	Richard G. Heck, Jr., "Tarski, Truth, and Semantics", *Philosophical Review* 106 (1997), pp. 533-54
	Donald Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth", *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990), pp. 279-328, esp. Part I.

Understanding, Communication, and Knowledge

21 October	P.F. Strawson, "Meaning and Truth", in his *Logico-Linguistic Papers* (London: Methuen, 1971), pp. 170-89
	The approach Strawson is defending is originally due to H.P. Grice. See his William James Lectures, in *Studies in the Ways of Words*, pp. 1-143, esp. the paper "Utterer's Meaning and Intentions", and "Meaning", in the same volume, pp. 213-23.
26 October	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. 117-39
	Michael Dummett, "Language and Communication", in his *The Seas of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 166-87.
28 October	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. 1-32
2 November	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. 108-18.
4-9 November	Scott Soames, "Truth, Meaning, and Understanding", *Philosophical Studies* 65 (1992), pp. 17-35, and James Higginbotham, "Truth and Understanding", *Iyyun* 40 (1991), pp. 271-88
	Scott Soames, "Semantics and Semantic Competence", in S. Schiffer and S. Steele, eds., *Cognition and Representation* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1988), pp. 185-207. For an approach that is different from, but similar to Higginbotham's, see Richard Larson and Gabriel Segal, *Knowledge of Meaning: An Introduction to Semantic Theory* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995), Chs. 1-2.
9 November	*Short Paper Due*
11 November	*No Class: Veterans' Day Holiday*
16 November	Ian Rumfitt, "Truth Conditions and Communication", *Mind* 104 (1995), pp. 827-62
	Some philosophers hold that the communicative aspect of language-use is partly responsible for what they allege is the 'social' character of language. See, for example, Michael Dummett, "The Social Character of Language", in his *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 420-30, and Tyler Burge, "Wherein is Language Social?", in A. George, ed., *Reflections on Chomsky* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 175-91.
	For a specific application of this sort of idea, see Richard G. Heck, Jr., "The Sense of Communication", *Mind* 104 (1995), pp. 79-106.

Tacit Knowledge: An Introduction to the Problems

18 November	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", *Synthese* 21 (1970), pp. 386-98; for an opposing view, see Noam Chomsky, "Quine's Empirical Assumptions", in D. Davidson and J. Hin-

tikka, eds., *Words and Objections* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1969), pp. 53-68; see also Hilary Putnam, "The 'Innateness Hypothesis' and Explanatory Models in Linguistics", in his *Mind, Language, and Reality: Philosophical Papers, v. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 107-16. There is something of a literature on the Chomsky-Quine debate at this point.

23 November   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. 127-58; 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*, cited above.

25 November   *No Class: Thanksgiving Holiday*

Meaning and Truth

30 November-   Michael Dummett, "What is a Theory of Meaning? (I)", in *Seas of Language*, pp. 1-33
2 December   Michael Dummett, "What is a Theory of Meaning? (II)", in *Seas of Language*, pp. 34-93. Themes in both of these papers are further developed in other papers in *The Seas of Language*, esp. "What Do I Know When I Know a Language?", "Language and Truth", and "Truth and Meaning".

7 December   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. 59-79 and 253-68

Michael Dummett, *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*, Chs. 3, 5; James Higginbotham, "Knowledge of Reference", in A. George, ed., *Reflections on Chomsky*, pp. 153-74.

9 December   Richard G. Heck, Jr., "Use and Meaning", *draft*.

A draft of this paper is available on the instructors web site, but he hopes to have a revised version ready by the time it is needed.

14-16 December Michael Dummett, "What is a Theory of Meaning? (II)", in *Seas of Language*, pp. 34-93, esp. pp. 34-62.

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 text in which the argument is most fully developed is the *very* difficult paper, "The Philosophical Basis of Intuitionistic Logic", in *Truth and Other Enigmas*, pp. 215-47. See also "The Source of the Concept of Truth", in *Seas of Language*, pp. 188-207. For a specific application of the 'argument', see "The Reality of the Past", in his *Truth and Other Enigmas*, pp. 358-74 There is a 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.

For a view in the philosophy of mind, with some similarities to Dummett's (specifically, in the acceptance of something like the manifestation constraint), see the work of Christopher Peacocke, e.g., his *A Study of Concepts* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1992).

21 December   John McDowell, "Anti-realism and the Epistemology of Understanding", in H. Parret and J. Bourveresse, eds., *Meaning and Understanding* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1981), pp. 225-48

John McDowell, "Truth-Conditions, Bivalence, and Verificationism", in Evans and McDowell, *Truth and Meaning*, pp. 42-66; "On 'The Reality of the Past'", in C. Hookway and P. Pettit, *Action and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 127-44. McDowell's interpretation of Dummett's 'argument' has become standard. Little in the way of critical discussion of it has appeared. However, there is an excellent discussion in Sanford Shieh's unpublished Ph.D. thesis, which is available in the Harvard Archives. (Some of it has since been published.)