

Philosophy 147: Meaning and Communication
Fall 2003

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Organization of Course

The course will meet for lecture every Tuesday and Thursday at 11am in Emerson 104. There will be a section for the course, which will meet at a time and place to be determined. The section will most likely be taught by the instructor, unless enrollment should warrant the appointment of a teaching fellow. This section is intended for undergraduates and for graduate students *not* in philosophy. It is open *only* to those enrolled in the class. There will also 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. Auditors will be welcome, as well, unless enrollment is too large.

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. Each of you will be expected to make a copy of the relevant reading materials, for your own personal use. The books and journals in which the various articles appeared, and individual copies of them, are on reserve in Robbins Library. Links to online versions of the papers are also posted on the web site. If you use the materials in Robbins, please make your photocopies *from the copies I put on reserve* to save wear and tear on the books.

Course Requirements

Every student in the course will be required to submit two short (3-4 page) papers, from a list of assigned topics, to be due on 24 October and 26 November. For undergraduates and graduate students from departments other than philosophy, I should be able to offer a choice between (i) writing a longer term paper, of 15-20 pages, and (ii) writing a second short paper (this one 8-10 pages) and also taking a final examination. Graduate students in philosophy will be required to write a term paper of 20-25 pages.

Philosophy is best learned by doing, and that includes, most importantly, discussion. All enrolled students are therefore expected to attend both the lectures and the sections, and to participate in the discussions held there.

Syllabus

Introduction: Literal Meaning

- 16 September Introductory Meeting
- 18 September H.P. Grice, "Meaning", *Philosophical Review* 66 (1957), pp. 377-88 (on JStor)
We will focus on Grice's views in any detail, though we shall return to them from time to time. For those who are interested, most of the important material is collected in *Studies in the Ways of Words*.
- 23 September H.P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation", in *Studies in the Ways of Words* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 22-40
There is a lot more to be said about the sort of issue discussed in this second paper: 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

- 25 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.
- 2 October Alfred Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4 (1944), pp. 341-75 (on JStor)
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 Tarski's Theory of Truth: Handout
- 9 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.
- 14 October John Etchemendy, "Tarski on Truth and Logical Consequence", *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 53 (1988), pp. 51-79 (on JStor)
Hartry Field, "Tarski's Theory of Truth", *Journal of Philosophy* 69 (1972), pp. 347-75.; Donald Davidson, "The Structure and Content of Truth", *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990), pp. 279-328, esp. Part I. Much of my discussion will reprise my own paper "Tarski, Truth, and Semantics", *Philosophical Review* 106 (1997), pp. 533-54. For a discussion focused on Tarski's views on logical consequence, see John Etchemendy, *The Concept of Logical Consequence* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

Understanding, Communication, and Knowledge

- 16 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.
- 21 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.
- 23 October Ian Rumfitt, "Truth Conditions and Communication", *Mind* 104 (1995), pp. 827-62 (on JStor)
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 what it's worth, I disagree.
- 24 October *First Short Paper Due*

The Foster Problem

- 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
- 30 October 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&6 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.
- 11 November *No Class: Veterans' Day Holiday*
- 13 November Richard Heck, "Reason and Language", *manuscript*

Tacit Knowledge

- 18 November Noam Chomsky, extracts from *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*
- 20 November W.V.O. Quine, "Methodological Reflections on Current Linguistic Theory", *Synthese* 21 (1970), pp. 386-98
Noam Chomsky, "Quine's Empirical Assumptions", in D. Davidson and J. Hintikka, eds., *Words and Objections* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1969), pp. 53-68; Alexander George, "Whence and Whither the Debate Between Quine and Chomsky", *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986), pp. 489-99.
- 25 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, 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.

- 26 November *Second Short Paper Due*
- 27 November *No Class: Thanksgiving Holiday*
- 2 December 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.
- 4 December Richard Larson and Gabriel Segal, *Knowledge of Language*, Chapters 1-2

Meaning and Use

- 9 December Michael Dummett, "What is a Theory of Meaning? (I)", in *Seas of Language*, pp. 1-33
- 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".
- 11 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.
- 16 December David Lewis, "Language and Languages", in his *Philosophical Papers*, vol.1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 163-88