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
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
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. ???


4 March

6 March

Meaning, Understanding, and Knowledge

11 March

13 March
Donald Davidson, “Reply to Foster” and “Radical Interpretation”, in Inquiries, pp. 171-9 and 125-39

18 March

20 March
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

3 April

8 April
James Higginbotham, “Priorities in the Philosophy of Thought”, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society

Meaning and Truth: The Manifestation Constraint


17 April James Higginbotham, “Knowledge of Reference”, in A. George, ed., Reflections on Chomsky, pp. 153-74


1 May Michael Dummett, “The Source of the Concept of Truth”, in Seas of Language, pp. 188-207