

PHILOSOPHY 625: Philosophy of Language

Course Syllabus – Spring 2016

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Course Description:

Although the philosophy of language has its roots in the work of Frege in the latter half of the nineteenth century, it did not emerge as a distinct field of study until the 1950's and 1960's. Like most young disciplines, it is suffering an identity crisis. There is heated debate over what the proper topics of study ought to be and over what an adequate account of meaning, truth, reference, etc. should consist in. As a result of this unsettled state of the field, today is a particularly exciting time to explore issues in the philosophy of language, and this is also an excellent way to get involved with fundamental questions about meaning, knowledge, truth, concepts, objectivity, rationality, logic, values, communication, and understanding.

In this course I do not intend to focus on contemporary debates about meaning, truth, and reference that evolved from Frege. I call this the "objectivist" tradition, and I will begin by trying to set out its fundamental assumptions and describing its program. We will focus on several recent criticisms of these fundamental assumptions, such as those raised earlier by speech-act theory and more recently by research coming from the cognitive sciences. These criticisms challenge objectivist theories of meaning and underscore the need for a radically different approach to language, meaning, and concepts.

This opens up what will become our primary focus, namely, an exploration of new research that reveals two fundamental aspects of human understanding and language. First, we will look at studies that show the pivotal role of our bodies in shaping our concepts and patterns of thought. Second, we will explore the ways this embodied understanding is extended via structures of imagination to define our abstract concepts. This second part of the course will emphasize the importance of conceptual metaphor in all of our abstract concepts, including time, causation, mind, self-identity, and morality. In short, our central focus will be on the embodied and imaginative nature of meaning, language, and all forms of symbolic expression. In the second half of the course we will take a very brief look at some of the new neural accounts of selected aspects of conceptualization and language processing.

Schedule of Topics/Readings:

Below is a tentative schedule of topics and readings for the appropriate dates. We may need to make some changes as we assess our progress and interests, so minor revision of this plan may occur. The readings are available at The Copy Shop on 13th. The readings in the packet are in the order listed in the schedule of readings below.

Week I

March 29 Introduction, Survey of approaches to philosophy of language
Objectivism: Frege
G. Frege, "On Sense and Reference"
R. Stainton, "Mediated Reference"
W. Lycan, *Philosophy of Language* (1-8, 76-99)

Week II

April 5 Speech Act Theory

J. Austin, "Performative Utterances"
J. Searle, "What is a Speech Act?"
J. Searle, "Indirect Speech Acts"

Week III

April 12 Category Structure and Prototypes
G. Lakoff, "Importance of Categorization" (L, 5-11)
G. Lakoff, "From Wittgenstein to Rosch" (L, 12-57)

Week IV

April 19 G. Lakoff, "Idealized Cognitive Models" (L, 68-90): [e.g., *mother*]
Radial Categories: [e.g., *Bed*] (handout on types of categories)

Embodied Meaning: Spatial Relations Concepts and Image Schemas
Lakoff and Johnson, "The Cognitive Unconscious" (Ch. 2, pp. 9-15);
"The Embodied Mind" (Ch. 3, pp. 16-44)

Week V

April 26 Spatial Relations and Action Concepts:
L. Barsalou, "Perceptual Symbol Systems" (577-609)

Image Schemas: Bodily structures of meaning
M. Johnson, "The Emergence of Meaning Through Schematic Structure"
(Johnson, Ch. 2, 18-40)

Week VI

May 3 Neural Models of Schemas, Frames, and Actions
J. Feldman. *From Molecule to Metaphor* (134-182)
E. Dodge and G. Lakoff, "Image Schemas: From Linguistic Analysis to
Neural Grounding" (57-91)

Week VII

May 10 Metaphor: The Traditional View versus Conceptual Metaphor Theory
M. Johnson, "Introduction: Metaphor in the Philosophical Tradition"
J. Searle, "Metaphor"
Primary Metaphor
Lakoff and Johnson, "Primary Metaphor" (L&J, Ch. 4)
Conceptual Metaphor [e.g., metaphors for time]

Week VIII

May 17 Complex Metaphors
Lakoff & Johnson, "The Anatomy of Complex Metaphor" (L & J, Ch. 5)
M. Johnson, "Metaphorical Projections of Image Schemata" (J, Ch. 4)
[e.g., metaphors for mind]
Lakoff & Johnson, "Events and Causes" (Ch. 11)

Week IX

May 24 Conceptual Science as a Basis for a Theory of Language
G. Lakoff & S. Narayanan, *Conceptual Science*, pp. 1-74.

Week X

May 31 Lakoff & Narayanan, *Conceptual Science*, pp. 75-147.

Week XI

[Term paper due Tuesday, June 7]

Assignments and Grades:

Grades will be based on one short essay, one seminar presentation, and a term paper. The short essay and the seminar presentation will each count 25% and the term paper will count for 50% of your grade. The short essay (maximum of 5 double-spaced typewritten pages) will be an analysis of a speech act. The term paper (of approximately 12-15 pages in length) is on a topic selected by the student but approved by the instructor. The term paper is due Tuesday of finals week. In the seminar presentation you will be responsible for the first half of the class, during which you should select key ideas from the reading to present to the seminar participants, developing and illustrating those ideas and raising any concerns or criticisms you might have. Your presentation should NOT be a summarizing of the reading.