PHILOSOPHY 425: Philosophy of Language

Course Syllabus – Winter 2012

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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 latter 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.

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 from The Copy Shop on 13th St. The readings in the packet are arranged according to the schedule of readings given below.

Week I

Jan. 10 Introduction, Survey of approaches to philosophy of language

Jan. 12 Objectivism: Frege
G. Frege, "On Sense and Reference" (read pp. 56-66 only)
R. Stainton, "Mediated Reference"

Week II

Jan. 17 Reference, Ideational, and Use Theories of Meaning
W. Lycan, *Philosophy of Language* (1-8, 76-99)

Jan. 19 Speech Act Theory
J.L. Austin, "Performative Utterances"

Week III

Jan. 24 J. Searle, "What is a Speech Act?"
Jan. 26 J. Searle, "Indirect Speech Acts"

Week IV

Jan. 31 Category Structure
G. Lakoff, "Importance of Categorization" (L, 5-11)
G. Lakoff, "From Wittgenstein to Rosch" (L, 12-57): Basic-level categories and prototypes [e.g., *Cup]*
[**First essay due**]

Feb. 2 G. Lakoff, "Idealized Cognitive Models" (L, 68-90): [e.g., *mother*]
Radial Categories: [e.g.,*Bed*] (handout on types of categories)

Week V

Feb. 7 Spatial Relations and Action Concepts:
L. Barsalou, "Perceptual Symbol Systems" (577-587)

Feb. 9 L. Barsalou, "Perceptual Symbol Systems" (587-609)
[Second essay due]

Week VI

Feb. 14 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)

Feb. 16 Image Schemas: Bodily structures of meaning
M. Johnson, "The Emergence of Meaning Through Schematic Structure" (Johnson, Ch. 2, pp. 18-40)

Week VII

Feb. 21 Metaphor (The Traditional View)
J. Searle, "Metaphor"
Introduction to Conceptual Metaphor [e.g., LOVE IS A JOURNEY]

Feb. 23 Primary Metaphor
Lakoff & Johnson, "Primary Metaphor" (L&J, Ch. 4)
Conceptual Metaphor [e.g., metaphors for time]

Week VIII

Feb. 28 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].

Mar. 1 Conceptual Metaphor: Event Structure Metaphor, Pt. 1
Lakoff & Johnson, "Events and Causes" (L&J, Ch. 11, pp. 170-201)
[**Third essay due**]

Week IX

Mar. 6 Event Structure Metaphors, Pt. 2
Lakoff & Johnson, "Events and Causes" (L&J, Ch. 11, pp. 201-234)
Types of Evidence for Conceptual Metaphor

Mar. 8 R. Gibbs & T. Matlock, "Metaphor, Imagination, and Simulation."

Week X

Mar. 13 Conceptual Blending Theory
G. Fauconnier & M. Turner. *The Way We Think* (39-73)

Mar. 15 G. Fauconnier & M. Turner, "Rethinking Metaphor."

Week XI

Mar. 19-23 Finals Week
[**Fourth essay due Tuesday, Mar. 20, by 5:00 p.m.**]

Assignments and Grades:
Each student is required to write 4 short (maximum of 5 double-spaced typewritten pages) analyses of speech acts, concepts, and expressions. The first three are on topics assigned by the instructor, and the last one is on a topic of your choice that is approved by the instructor. Papers must be turned in on time to receive full credit. The course grade will be based on the four essays, each one counting 25% of your grade.

Plagiarism/Cheating:
The essays you write for this course must be your own work. Plagiarism, cheating, and various forms of academic dishonesty are defined on the University of Oregon website under Academic Dishonesty. Any incident of academic dishonesty may result in severe penalties, as specified by UO guidelines.