Topics in Philosophy of Logic and Language

Philosophy 431 — Syllabus
Fall 2015
TR 8:30-9:50

Professor:
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Office hours: 10:30-11:30 T and R, or by appointment

Room:
115 Berkey Hall

Text:

This book should be on sale at the MSU Bookstore soon; you are also welcome to obtain it from Amazon. It’s a relatively new trade monograph, and it likely won’t be the case that you can find too many used copies. (Amazon is probably better than the bookstore for this anyway.) We will use the book during the third part of the course. The readings for the first two parts of the course will be available as pdfs online at my website, http://www.msu.edu/~orourk51/. The syllabus, the handouts, my lecture notes, and pointers to relevant philosophy sites will also be available on this website. I will keep a gradebook active on D2L, but all other materials will be available on my website. If you miss class, you will need to obtain a copy of any lecture notes and handouts you missed off the website.

Laptop/Device Policy:

I do not permit use of laptops, tablets, or other electronic devices in this class. I realize that this may put a crimp in your note-taking style, but I have become convinced by the research that students learn more when they are not distracted by their own screens or the screens of others. (Here is a good review article detailing this research: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1078740.) As you will see, much of this class will involve group work and so laptops will not be required in any case. For those days when I do a lot of talking, you can (a) print out my lecture notes ahead of time, and (b) take additional notes on those the old fashioned way.
Something about the Course:

It’s hard to overestimate the importance of language to human beings. It is the medium of choice for salutation, conversation, adulation, congratulation, solicitation, and communication in most of its forms. You see it in front of you right now, you hear it from me, you look up and you see it in the room, and when you leave the room, you’ll see it and hear it all around you. We use it to mediate our interaction with each other and the world, and we rely on it to make possible the expression of thought. And it does not stop there; in fact, there are those who argue that language is fundamental to thought—that without it, there would be no thought.

Consider what did in your last foreign language class: you were introduced to the structure of sentences in the new language, and you were given words and expressions, along with their translations into your home language, that fit into the structural categories identified. (An assumption behind this approach is that you are already familiar with a language.) Once you had acquired enough vocabulary and structural knowledge, you were asked to start piecing words together into sentences with specific meanings. Your instructor would speak to you in the new language and expect a response; to succeed, you had to interpret what was said and craft an appropriate response in the new language.

The foreign language experience is useful because it exposes many aspects of language that we’ll puzzle over in this class. Among these are the syntactical structure of language and its relation to the significance (or semantics) of language, the relation of the meaning of the word to the meaning of the sentence, and the interpretation of utterances. But we also worry about a number of other topics: truth, reference, the methodology of language study, the difference between language in general and specific languages, what it is to know a language, and non-literal employments of language (e.g., metaphor) just to name a few. And while our focus will be primarily on the language part of the course title, logic will not be forgotten—logic supplies the primary method for analyzing language in all of the materials we’ll read.

It is important to recognize that philosophical inquiry into language is different from, say, psychological or linguistic inquiries. Psychology and linguistics are empirical sciences: practitioners of those disciplines float hypotheses and then design experimental situations in which to test them. Claims stand or fall based on the empirical evidence adduced in their favor. Philosophical approaches involve a different methodology: they are conceptual and not empirical. When a philosopher turns her attention to language, she focuses on the concepts that figure into description of the character and use of language, as well as those that figure into the empirical explanations offered by psychologists and linguists. She is interested in analyzing these concepts so as to make sure that, as used, they are internally coherent and figure into a consistent conceptual network. This analysis involves the use of traditional philosophical machinery, such as the tools of formal logic. But even though the work of a philosopher is not empirical, it had better relate in principled ways to empirical research, especially when the concepts that are analyzed have such an obvious role in empirical studies. Thus, a philosopher of language must evaluate conceptual claims not only on the basis of their relationship with other conceptual claims, but also on the basis of their relationship to the relevant empirical evidence. I like to think of it this way: a philosopher is out to build and maintain the conceptual models that empirical investigators use in their research. (Note that this does not preclude investigators who are not card-carrying philosophers, e.g., linguists, from doing philosophy in the service of their scholarly work.)

We will critically examine several of these models in here. I will teach this as a topics course. The first part of the course will be devoted to broad consideration of four central topics in
the philosophy of language: the nature of language, reference, truth, and meaning. We will rely on several canonical articles to structure our consideration of this topic. The second part of the course will focus on the topic of ambiguity. We will read work on this topic by philosophers, linguistics, and psychologists. Finally, the third part of the course will focus on our book, a critique of the Gricean program in linguistics and the philosophy of language.

The material I will ask you to read will be difficult. I consider this to be an advanced course in philosophy, and so I will expect quite a lot out of each of you.

**Learning Goals:**

As a Michigan State student, you are part of an educational institution that has certain, well-defined leaning goals and objectives. You have a right to expect that these goals and objectives will guide your instructors as they design their courses. Just as a reminder, here are the Michigan State University learning goals and outcomes (from [http://undergrad.msu.edu/learning](http://undergrad.msu.edu/learning)).

**Analytical Thinking (AT)**
The MSU graduate uses ways of knowing from mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and arts to access information and critically analyzes complex material in order to evaluate evidence, construct reasoned arguments, and communicate inferences and conclusions.

- Acquires, analyzes, and evaluates information from multiple sources
- Synthesizes and applies the information within and across disciplines
- Identifies and applies, as appropriate, quantitative methods for defining and responding to problems
- Identifies the credibility, use, and misuse of scientific, humanistic and artistic methods

**Cultural Understanding (CU)**
The MSU graduate comprehends global and cultural diversity within historical, artistic, and societal contexts.

- Reflects on experiences with diversity to demonstrate knowledge and sensitivity
- Demonstrates awareness of how diversity emerges within and across cultures

**Effective Citizenship (ECit)**
The MSU graduate participates as a member of local, national, and global communities and has the capacity to lead in an increasingly interdependent world.

- Understands the structures of local, national, and global governance systems and acts effectively within those structures in both individual and collaborative ways
- Applies knowledge and abilities to solve societal problems in ethical
Effective Communication (ECom)
The MSU graduate uses a variety of media to communicate effectively with diverse audiences.

- Identifies how contexts affect communication strategies and practices
- Engages in effective communication practices in a variety of situations and with a variety of media

Integrated Reasoning (IR)
The MSU graduate integrates discipline-based knowledge to make informed decisions that reflect humane social, ethical, and aesthetic values.

- Critically applies liberal arts knowledge in disciplinary contexts and disciplinary knowledge in liberal arts contexts
- Uses a variety of inquiry strategies incorporating multiple views to make value judgments, solve problems, answer questions, and generate new understandings

This course is related most closely with the first, fourth, and fifth of these goals and outcomes. I have several specific, course-related goals:

- Wonder about the structure and significance of language, and in particular, the language(s) you speak. To this end, I plan to accompany you through several topics fundamental to the investigation of language, among them the nature of language generally, the use of language to communicate, meaningfulness, truth, and reference. By semester’s end, these concepts should be familiar to you, and you should be able to think in systematic ways about them.

- Know a little bit about the relationships among linguistics, logic, and the philosophy of language. These are different—linguistics is an empirical science, logic is a mathematical science, and philosophy is a conceptual science. Their methods are different even when their focus is the same. While this is a philosophy course, our readings will provide us with insight into how linguists handle these issues.

- Know details about the development of contemporary analytic philosophy of language. The readings in the first part of the course will provide us with an understanding of the developmental trajectory of analytic philosophy of language. This will be supplemented by aspects of the Lepore and Stone book.

- Develop critical reading, listening, and writing skills. Good philosophers are charitable readers and listeners, and they are also cogent writers. Philosophical writing is difficult, but clear thinking and clear writing go hand in hand. You will be given the opportunity to exercise these skills in this class.

- Begin developing sustainable views of your own about the conceptual intricacies of
language. To this end, I have sacrificed breadth in favor of depth so as to give you the opportunity to engage in a sophisticated way with current research trends in the philosophy of language. We will carefully work through various texts that explore the issues mentioned above, and in so doing we will develop our own intuitions about these matters. Philosophy isn’t about memorizing the positions of others or about mastering a vernacular. Philosophy isn’t about memorization—it’s about understanding.

**Classroom Dynamic:**

We’ll start by discussing language at a somewhat general level before moving into consideration of core topics in the philosophy of language, guided by canonical papers. We will devote the rest of the semester to consideration of our two topics: ambiguity, and the distinction between semantics and pragmatics.

I am going to try a couple of new things this semester. I’ll lecture some, but primarily in the first part of the course. Most of our class meetings will be devoted to a combination of work in small groups and then general discussion. The goal of these meetings will be to identify the main argument(s) in the reading assigned for that day. You’ll be expected to come into class, break into your groups, and develop a standard form representation of the main argument(s) from the text during the first 30 minutes or so of class. The remainder of class will be devoted to group presentations of the argument(s) and general discussion. You will need to be sure to come to class prepared and be active and engaged while here.

The second new thing is a group exercise designed to motivate and measure sensitivity to the topics we’ll consider in class, modeled on the work of the Toolbox Project (http://toolbox-project.org/). These will take place on the first and last days of each part of the course and will take about 40 minutes of class-time each time. These will not be graded. Since we would like to gather data related to these exercises, including survey data and audio recording, we will be asking for your research permission. You are under no obligation to participate in this study, which is covered by the Toolbox Project IRB# x13-261e. If you choose not to participate, we will not gather your survey data and will redact any contributions you make to the dialogue in the resulting transcripts.

**Requirements:**

**Attendance.** I will take attendance daily. You will be allowed two unexcused absences, and every unexcused absence after that will result in the loss of class participation percentage points (see below). Furthermore, you will be expected to turn your assignments in regularly and on time. The topics we will consider are complex and challenging—if we hope to acquire understanding of them, we must work together.

**Classroom Participation.** Everyone’s duty is to read the assigned text as many times as it takes to understand it and reconstruct the argument offered by the author(s). You need to work together to reconstruct the argument(s) from the text, and this will require everyone to do their part. In my view, you should get to know one another and come to class having already prepared your own reconstruction of the argument. Most of what you will read is difficult, and it will require advance preparation to make it possible for you to come up with a collective argument reconstruction in the first 30 minutes of class.

**Papers.** I am convinced that the best way to learn philosophy is to write, so I will have
you write quite a bit in this class. The most substantial piece of writing will be a research paper on a topic in the philosophy of language. You will be responsible for selecting the topic. The paper should be 2500-3000 words in length, inclusive of notes and references. It will be a research paper, and I will require you to use at least five recent sources (i.e., within the last two years). This will mean that you should spend time in the library exploring current discussions of your topic. You will submit two drafts of this essay to me for evaluation, along with an abstract and outline a week or so ahead of the first draft and a memo describing what you did in revision with the final draft. The first draft must be submitted to me as a Word attachment by class time on November 12 and the final draft is due as a Word attachment by 5 pm on Wednesday, December 16. IMPORTANT: the first paper you submit should not be your first and roughest draft. I would encourage you to think "paper topic" from the get go in this class. I am happy to look at and comment on rough notes, outlines, or early drafts prior to November 12.

In addition to the research paper, you will produce three short essays over the course of the semester, one near the end of each part of the course. These essays will be two pages in length and they will concern some argument or issue in the assigned reading for that part of the course. You will need to select the subject of each essay. (An important part of your philosophical development is learning how to get puzzled by what you read.) You should devote the first half of the essay to reconstruction of the argument or issue you focus on and the second half to your comment. This comment can be critical in nature, but it need not be. For example, if you focus on an argument that you find compelling, you could devote the comment to consideration of the argument’s implications. The first of these is due in class on Thursday, October 1. I will not accept late reading essays, where “late” means submitted after class has started on the day the assignment is due. If you know you will have a conflict, you will need to speak with me in advance and get the paper to me before class. These will be submitted to me electronically as Word attachments.

The first written assignment is due by midnight on Friday, September 11. You will need to compose an e-mail message on the account you use most often and send it to me at orourk51@msu.edu. Please put the course number in the subject line and your name in the message. In this message, I want you to tell me how much philosophy you’ve studied and then explain to me why you took this class and what your expectations are for it. Also, I would like a paragraph in which you give me a definition of ‘language’. This is worth 20 points.

There will also be some in-class writing that will not be graded. This writing will be done in advance of some discussions as well as after some discussions. You learn philosophy by thinking about it, and you learn to think about it through writing.

Grading:

Attendance will be worth 100 points. Every unexcused absence after the second will result in 10 point reduction of the attendance part of this grade, so 10 unexcused absences means you will get a 0 for that part of the grade.

Reading essays will be graded on a 100-point scale. The abstract and outline will need to be submitted to get credit for the first draft of the long essay, which will be graded on a 100-point scale. The final draft will be worth 150 points, where 50 of those points will be associated with the nature and extent of your revision as described in your revision memo and 100 points with the quality of the paper that results. (What counts as “high quality revisions” will be determined relative to the revisions requested on your first draft; the better the first draft, the fewer revisions you’ll need to do to earn 50 revision points.)
Those earning between 90% and 100% overall will earn a 4.0 for the course, 85% and 89% a 3.5, 80% and 84% a 3.0, 75% and 79% a 2.5, 70% and 74% a 2.0, 65% and 69% a 1.5, 60% and 64% a 1.0 and 59% and below a 0.0.

Percentages of the final grade associated with each assignment category:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Draft, Abstract, Outline</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Draft, Revision Memo</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading Essays</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>1000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Policies:

Attendance

Attendance is required in this class. Excused absences are those excused by the university for official activities, those excused by me in advance, or those excused subsequently for documented reasons (e.g., health problem, family emergency). When you attend class, please be respectful of the others in the room—turn all sounds off on your cell phones, refrain from reading the newspaper, etc.

Academic Honesty

Article 2.III.B.2 of the Academic Freedom Report states, "The student shares with the faculty the responsibility for maintaining the integrity of scholarship, grades, and professional standards." In addition, the Department of Philosophy adheres to the policies on academic honesty as specified in General Student Regulations 1.0, Protection of Scholarship and Grades; the all-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades; and Ordinance 17.00, Examinations. (See Spartan Life: Student Handbook and Resource Guide or the MSU Web site: www.msu.edu.) You are expected to complete all course assignments without assistance from any source that I have not authorized. You are expected to develop original work for this course; therefore, you may not submit course work you completed for another course to satisfy the requirements for this course, and you may not pass off the work of others as your own (i.e., plagiarize). Also, you are not authorized to use the http://www.allmsu.com Web site to complete any course work in Philosophy 130. Students who violate MSU academic integrity rules may receive a penalty grade, including a failing grade on the assignment or in the course. If you are unsure about the appropriateness of your course work, please contact me. (See also https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/academic-integrity/student-faq.html.)

Limits to Confidentiality

Materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University’s student record policies. However, students should be aware that University
employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues based on external legal obligations or that relate to the health and safety of MSU community members and others. As your instructor, I must report the following information to other University offices if you share it with me in submitted materials or a conversation:

- Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child
- Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and
- Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual.

If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the MSU Counseling Center.

**MSU Counseling Center: 517-355-8270**

**24 Hour Sexual Assault Crisis Line: 517-372-6666** Counseling Center Sexual Assault Program: 517-355-3551 MSU Safe Place: 517-355-1100

http://www.endrape.msu.edu/

http://safeplace.msu.edu/

**Deadlines**

All assignments must be handed in as you arrive in class on the day they are due. I do not accept late work unless class was missed for a documented emergency that arose without time for you to submit your work in advance. If you know that you will miss a class session prior to that session, you will need to submit your assignment in advance.

**Incompletes**

The MSU policy for incompletes is as follows:

The I-Incomplete may be given only when: the student (a) has completed at least 6/7 of the term of instruction, but is unable to complete the class work and/or take the final examination because of illness or other compelling reason; and (b) has done satisfactory work in the course; and (c) in the instructor’s judgment can complete the required work without repeating the course.
I do not give out incompeltes unless the “compelling reason” mentioned above is documented, and you must discuss this with me in advance of finals week. The only exception is

*Accommodations for Students with Disabilities* (from the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD))

Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services, and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at [http://rcpd.msu.edu](http://rcpd.msu.edu). It is your responsibility to promptly register with RCPD because some arrangements must be done well in advance (e.g. alternative test taking place or time). Once your eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a verified individual services accommodation (“VISA”) form. Please present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks prior to the accommodation date (e.g., paper due date). Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.

*Tentative Schedule:*

This is a rough guide of the course. It will be populated in more detail as we go.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/3</td>
<td>Syllabus</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/8, 9/10, 9/15</td>
<td>The Nature of Language</td>
<td>Augustine, Swift, Carroll, Locke, Chomsky, Evans &amp; Levinson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/17, 9/22, 9/24</td>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Frege, Grice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/29, 10/1, 10/6</td>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Russell, Kripke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/8, 10/13</td>
<td>Truth</td>
<td>Davidson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/15, 10/20, 10/22, 10/27, 10/29, 11/5, (11/6 colloquium), 11/10</td>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Grice, Wasow #1 &amp; #2, Bach, Piantadosi et al., Zwicky &amp; Sadock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/10, 11/12, 11/17, 11/19, 11/24, 12/1, 12/3, 12/8, 12/10</td>
<td>Semantics and Pragmatics</td>
<td>Lepore and Stone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>