Philosophy Faculty Reading List and Course Outline 2018-2019

PART IA PAPER 03:
MEANING

SYLLABUS

- Analyticity, a priority, and necessity
- Verificationism
- Intention and convention
- Conditionals
- Frege and Russell on names and descriptions
- Causal theories of names

Course Outline

The notion of meaning is central to the philosophy of logic and to the philosophy of language in general. This compulsory course explores meaning from several directions.

We consider whether there is a stable distinction to be drawn between analytic truths, which are true solely in virtue of their meaning (e.g. all vixens are foxes), and synthetic truths, which require the world to be a certain way (e.g. no fox has been to the moon). We also ask how this relates to two other distinctions: between necessary and contingent truths, and between a priori and a posteriori truths.

These distinctions were of central interest to the verificationist program, which tied meaning to the possibility of verification. We explore the successes and failures of their approach. We also consider whether we can think of meaning purely in terms of individual speaker’s intentions, and/or conventions between groups of speakers and listeners.

Finally, we consider several case studies of particular aspects of language. For example: Under what circumstances is a conditional (an “if…, then…” construction) true? Can this come apart from the circumstances under which it might be appropriate to assert a conditional? What is the meaning of a given name? Is there a significant difference between names and descriptions? And how do names refer to their bearers?

Objectives

Students will be expected to:

1. Begin studying philosophical issues in logic and language
2. Explore and critique key ideas and distinctions
3. Develop key skills in writing philosophical essays

Prerequisites

There are no procedural pre-requisites. However, every topic uses elementary notions from formal logic. These notions are fully covered in Part IA Paper 5 (Formal Methods); students who are taking Paper 3 but not taking Paper 5 should either attend the Part IA lectures on Formal Logic, or work through forallx independently (see below).

Preliminary Reading

As mentioned under Prerequisites, familiarity with elementary formal logic is assumed. This will be adequately covered by sitting Paper 5; but those who are not taking Paper 5 will want to work through:


Otherwise, no preliminary reading is expected. Still, students may enjoy:


ANALYTICITY, A PRIORITY, AND NECESSITY

(A) Basic Reading

We need to distinguish three distinctions: analytic / synthetic; a priori / a posteriori; and necessary / contingent. For introductions, see:

JUHL, Cory, and Eric LOOMIS, Analyticity (London: Routledge, 2010), ch. 1 ‘Conceptions of analytic truth’.

PAPINEAU, David, Philosophical Devices: Proofs, Probabilities, Possibilities, and Sets (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chs. 4 & 5. Also available online at: www.dawsonera.com


The classic empiricist view is that necessity, analyticity and a priority come as a single package. For a defense of this view, see:

HUME, David, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, edited by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), sect. 12, part 3. Also available online at: http://pm.nlx.com

Kant, however, argued that there must be synthetic a priori truths:

KANT, Immanuel, Critique of Pure Reason, B-1-B14 (i.e. Introduction, sects. I-IV). Various translations are available, of which the most widely used are those by N. Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), also available online at: http://staffweb.hkbu.edu.hk/ppp/cpr/toc.html and by P. Guyer and A.W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), also available online at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511804649

And Kripke argued that there are contingent a priori and necessary a posteriori truths:

Kripke argued that there are contingent a priori and necessary a posteriori truths:


(2) Further Reading

An excellent response to Kripke is:


For further discussion of Kripke, see:

AHMED, Arif, Saul Kripke (London: Continuum, 2007), ch. 3 ‘Necessity’. Also available online at: http://lib.mylibrary.com/id=327232

PAPINEAU, David, Philosophical Devices: Proofs, Probabilities, Possibilities, and Sets (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), ch. 6 ‘Naming and Necessity’. Also available online at: www.dawsonera.com

Then, for a rich (but very rapid) survey on analyticity, try:


And then move into the Verificationism topic (below), with a particular focus on Quine.

VERIFICATIONISM

(A) Basic reading

Two classic, early defences of verificationism are:


For some quick surveys, look at:

HACKING, Ian, Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy? (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), ch. 9 ‘A.J. Ayer's verification’ (pp. 93-102). Also available online at: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511627873.010

For richer treatments, see:


MISAK, Cheryl, Verificationism: Its History and Prospects (London: Routledge, 1995), especially ch. 2 available on Moodle

(2) Further Reading

These two articles combine philosophical discussion with helpful background:


The most famous attack on logical empiricism comes from Quine. He targets the notion of analyticity, this so will also help with the topic of Analyticity, A Priority, and Necessity:

INTENTION AND CONVENTION

(A) Basic Reading

You must start with the classic:

http://www.jstor.org/stable/2182440

For critical discussion, see:

MILLER, Alexander, Philosophy of Language (London: Routledge, 2018), ch. 7 'Sense, intention, and speech acts'. Also available online at: https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351265522

PLATTS, M., Ways of Meaning. 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), ch. 3 'Shades of meaning'.

And for a development of Grice's view, which shifts from intention to conventions, see:

BLACKBURN, Simon, Spreading the Word (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), ch. 4 'Conventions, Intentions, Thoughts'. Also available on Moodle

(B) Further Reading

The pioneer of convention-based approaches was Lewis; and it might help to read Lewis alongside Rescorla’s survey:


And this article explores some post-Gricean attempts to offer intention- (and possibly convention-) based approaches to semantics:


CONDITIONALS

(A) Basic Reading

For some very brief introductory remarks about the material conditional, read:

PRIEST, Graham, An Introduction to Non-Classical Logic: From If to Is. 2nd rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), sects. 1.6-1.10. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511801174

The absolute must-read article is by Grice, in which he introduces the idea of a controversial implicature:


The readings by and about Grice, in the Intention and Convention topic (above), may help here. For further discussion, try:

SAINSBURY, Mark, Logical Forms: An Introduction to Philosophical Logic. 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), ch. 2, especially sects. 4-8.

(B) Further Reading

Three good discussions are:


Jackson developed his views further here:


After that, look at the following; it is wonderfully rich, and will (at least) convince you of the depth of these issues:


Finally, this (advanced) discussion Grice's notion of conversational implicature helps clarify just how to understand Grice (and helps with the topic *Intention and Convention*):


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**FREGE AND RUSSELL ON NAMES AND DESCRIPTIONS**

For some historical background, you may want to read:


(A) Frege: Basic Reading


(B) Frege: Further Reading


(A) Russell: Basic Reading


(B) Russell: Further Reading

There is a classic debate between Russell and Strawson:


Then look at these two landmark discussions of Russell's approach to descriptions:


CAUSAL THEORIES OF NAMES

(A) Basic Reading

The most famous advocate of the causal theory of names is Kripke:


Around the same time, Putnam also criticised descriptivism, though focussing more on natural kind terms (e.g. "water") than proper names for individuals (e.g. "Aristotle").

PUTNAM, Hilary, Mind, Language, and Reality (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), ch. 12 'The meaning of "meaning"'. Also available online at: http://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511625251

For discussion, try:


MORRIS, Michael, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), ch. 4 'Kripke on proper names'. Also available online at: http://lib.myilibrary.com/?id=239517

(B) Further Reading

It will help you to understand the descriptivist target if you have read some of the material from the section on Frege and Russell. But here are a few more descriptivists, who you might want to look at (at least briefly):

GEACH, Peter, Mental Acts (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957), ch. 16 'Judgments involving identifications'.