PHIL 60191-001: GRADUATE SEMINAR (FALL 2015, WED. 5:30-8:30PM)

PROFESSOR: David Pereplyotchik
EMAIL: dpereply@kent.edu
OFFICE PHONE: 330.672.0270
OFFICE LOCATION: Bowman Hall, 320, Room N
PRIMARY OFFICE HOURS: Tuesday, 1-6pm (see below for more options)

REQUIRED TEXTS:


OPTIONAL TEXTS:


I will distribute supplementary readings on Blackboard and Dropbox. Make sure your Blackboard account is operational and that this course appears in your list of Blackboard courses. If it doesn’t, then there is probably a registration issue, which you should remedy as soon as humanly possible.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course about intentionality—arguably the most significant feature of speech acts and mental states. This feature has gone by many names: meaning, semantic value, significance, sense, informational content, representational purport, and so on. Our primary aim in this course is to answer one of the central questions in all of philosophy: What is it for something to mean something? This is at once the question of how mind and language “hook onto the world” and of how perception, reasoning, action, communication, knowledge, science, and culture all work. A systematic theory of intentionality would help us to illuminate countless issues in the core areas of philosophy—metaphysics, epistemology, logic, and value theory.

After a conceptual and historical introduction to the main debates surrounding the topic of intentionality, we will explore the work of contemporary philosopher, Robert Brandom, who has set out precisely the sort of systematic theory that makes clear the importance of this topic. Drawing on both historical and contemporary sources, Brandom articulates this theory in his magnum opus, *Making It Explicit*. Whether or not Brandom’s overall picture is ultimately satisfactory, his work illuminates the relationships between various concepts that might otherwise be only dimly appreciated. We will examine his views with the constructive goal of developing them in new directions, but also with a critical eye, aiming to correct them where necessary.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Reading

Readings will be assigned for every class session. (See the course schedule below.) The readings are fairly advanced, so they will require care and effort. Please budget your time accordingly.

Ten Micro Writing Assignments (50% of the final grade)

I will ask you to write 750-1000 words in response to the readings for each week. Please use roughly half of that to present a general summary, in which you demonstrate your familiarity with the texts. Use the other half to pose a critical question, to develop a challenge, or to propose and briefly defend an original idea.

I will return your write-ups to you within two weeks—sometimes with extensive comments, other times with sparse comments, and, in rare cases, with just a grade (0-5). You can incorporate text from them directly into your final paper, but please make sure to make all of the revisions that I suggest in my comments, or to consult me about it in advance.

There will be 10 of these short assignments. Each one is worth 5% of the final grade. They will be due at 11:59pm every Monday night. (This gives me a bit of time to figure out how to work in your comments and questions into the lecture/discussion.) I will accept late submissions until Wednesday mornings (11:59am), but there will be reduction in the grade. I will not accept late submissions after Wednesday 11:59am. Obviously there is no assignment due on Monday of the first week of classes, since we won’t have met yet. And there won’t be one for the last few sessions, which will give you time to work on your final paper for the course.

One Final Seminar Paper (30% of the final grade)

Toward the end of the semester, you will begin working on your final paper for the course. The paper should be between 3000 and 5000 words, including footnotes, but not including references. I choose that range because most conferences and journals require submissions to be roughly this length, and I will be encouraging you to submit your papers from this course to conferences and for publication.

You should be thinking about your topic and thesis statement all throughout the semester, and discussing it with me whenever possible, so that we can collaboratively whip it into shape. Right after Thanksgiving, I will ask you to meet with me to propose a definite topic and to discuss the details. Every week after that, you will be asked to submit a draft of the paper, with a brief explanation of what you’ve added that week and what you plan to work on in the following week. At the very outset of finals week (Mon., 12/14, 11:59am), I will ask you to submit the final draft.

Although I’m sure you already know this, let me be explicit that the grade on a paper is never based on what thesis the author has chosen to defend. You don’t need to agree with me about anything in order to get a good grade. (In fact, if you have a cogent argument for your view, it’s probably better to disagree!) The biggest factor in determining the grade on a paper is the strength of the overall argument, and the author’s ability to anticipate and forestall challenges to his or her inferences. Also important is the author’s care with factual claims, as well as his or her comprehension of the course material. Originality, incisiveness, and clear writing are of course also relevant factors.
Class Participation and Presentations  (20% of the final grade)

Class participation consists in contributing to class discussion by asking questions or making comments that demonstrate a grasp of the course material and an interest in the topics. Although attendance is required, it does not count as class participation. I think of participation as a kind of intellectual investment in the course, which goes beyond simply completing the reading and writing assignments.

Some students will initially find it difficult to speak up in front of others. Nevertheless, public speaking is an essential aspect of the course, and also a requirement; no student can receive an A in the course without engaging actively in class discussion. Limited class participation credit can also be earned by engaging with me by email or at office hours.

To make the class participation grade as objective as possible, you will be asked to write down some keywords from your contribution to the class discussion at the end of each class session. Please make sure to do that.

On occasion, your class participation will consist in a short presentation. I will ask you to give a 15-20 minute synopsis of some core topic, as well as your critical response to the readings that discuss that topic. You will be given ample time to prepare, and an opportunity to meet with me to work out the content and mechanics of your presentation. Afterwards, we will conduct a debriefing, where I’ll comment on the strengths and weaknesses of your presentation.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory; all students are expected to come to class on time and to be engaged for the length of the class session. A sign-in sheet will be passed around at the beginning of each class session. Excessive absences or lateness (more than 2) will negatively impact your final grade in the course. Being absent from class more than 4 times constitutes grounds for failing the course. Students who are absent from class for religious reasons or due to documented medical treatment will not incur any penalty on their final grade, but are responsible for all required reading and writing assignments.

Grading

The following provides a translation from the numerical score to a letter grade:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Numerical Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>96-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>91-95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>86-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>81-85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>76-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>71-75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>66-70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>61-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>56-60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>55 or below</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is no “curve” for the course. This means that you are not in competition with your classmates for high grades. It is conceivable—though exceedingly unlikely—that everyone in the course will receive an A. Or a D. Note that I use the full grade range, even for graduate courses.

When you receive your final grade for the course, please note that it is non-negotiable. I will not change grades under any circumstances, unless I have made a demonstrable clerical error in my calculations.
Office Hours and Availability

As noted above, my primary office hours are on Tuesdays, 1-6pm. However, many other options are available. If you want to meet with me at another time, let me know and we can try to arrange it. If you prefer to meet somewhere on campus other than my office, let me know and we’ll see what we can work out. (It won’t always be possible, of course.) In general, I’m quite flexible; my only hard and fast rule is that I cannot meet with you on the weekends.

Needless to say, I can be reached by email at any time. I will do my best to respond to your emails as quickly as possible. Sometimes I will reply to your message immediately, even at odd hours, like 4am. However, please do not assume that this is always possible; there is great variability. Indeed, occasionally, I will not have access to email or will not be able to answer your query for up to several days. In such cases, please be patient.

There are many other means of contacting me, including Skype, GoogleChat, iChat, and the like. I am open to all of these options, if you prefer to use them.

Plagiarism, Cheating, and other forms of Academic Dishonesty

Please note that I do not tolerate academic dishonesty in any form. I take a strict stance on this. Be aware that I will dole out maximum penalties for violations, including assigning failing grades and pushing for suspension and/or expulsion from Kent State. If you are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, make it your business to learn about this immediately. Ignorance of university policy will not be accepted as an excuse. University policy 3-01.8 deals with the problem of academic dishonesty. The sanctions provided in this policy will be used to deal with any violations. If you have any questions, please read the policy at:

http://www.kent.edu/policyreg/policydetails.cfm?customel_datapageid_1976529=2037779

Information for Students with Documented Disabilities

University policy 3-01.3 requires that students with documented disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact me at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through Student Accessibility Services. Contact 330-672-3391 or visit www.kent.edu/sas for more information on the relevant procedures.

Registration and Withdrawal Deadlines

University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Each student must confirm enrollment by checking his/her class schedule (using Student Tools in FlashLine) prior to the deadline indicated. Registration errors must be corrected prior to the deadline. The official registration deadlines for this course can be found by doing a Detailed Class Search from the Schedule of Classes found at:

COURSE SCHEDULE

Required readings are unmarked. Optional readings are marked with asterisks (*)—the more asterisks, the more optional the reading is. Please treat single-asterisk items as strongly recommended.

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW—INTENTIONALITY AND RULE-FOLLOWING

4. *** Robert Cummins, *Meaning and Mental Representation*

WEEK 2: KRIPKE’S WITTGENSTEIN AND TRADITIONAL FORMAL SEMANTICS

5. ** Irene Heim and Angelika Kratzer, *Semantics in Generative Grammar*, chs. 1-3

WEEK 3: INFERENCE AND NORMATIVITY

3. Lewis Carroll, “What the Tortoise Said to Achilles”
4. * John Haugeland, “Heidegger on Being a Person” (optional, but short and very strongly recommended)
5. * Daniel Dennett, “Intentional Systems” (optional, but accessible and very strongly recommended)
6. *** Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit*, Preface (better to read as a summary after you’ve read the book)

WEEK 4: PRAGMATICS, NORMS, AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

4. * Alexander Miller, *The Philosophy of Language*, ch. 6, pp. 203-245

WEEK 5: INFERENTIALIST SEMANTICS I

5. ** Wilfrid Sellars, “Some Reflections on Language Games”

WEEK 6: INFERENTIALIST SEMANTICS II

5. *** Wilfrid Sellars, “Inference and Meaning”
WEEK 7: SOCIAL SCOREKEEPING AND DEONTOLOGICAL STATUSES

2. David Lewis, “Scorekeeping in a Language Game”
3. Paul Grice, “Meaning”
4. Alexander Miller, *The Philosophy of Language*, ch. 7

WEEK 8: THE NATURE OF ASSERTION

2. John McFarlane, “Pragmatism and Inferentialism”

WEEK 9: THE NATURE OF PERCEPTION

2. Tyler Burge, Origins of Objectivity, ch. 8 (pp. 291-366)
5. ** David Rosenthal, *Consciousness and Mind*, ch. 7

WEEK 10: PRACTICAL REASONING AND RATIONAL ACTION

2. Donald Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes”

WEEK 11: DEFLATIONISM/Minimalism about Truth and Reference


WEEK 12: SUBSENTENTIAL SEMANTICS

3. * W. V. Quine, *Word and Object*, ch. 2

WEEK 13: COMMUNICATION AND REPRESENTATION

1. Robert Brandom, *Articulating Reasons*, ch. 5-6, pp. 157-204

WEEK 14: THE GRAND FINALE—RATIONALITY AND OBJECTIVITY