PROSEMINAR

Ted Sider, Fall 2014
Goldwin Smith 164, Tuesdays 2:30–4:25

Description

Philosophy proseminar, restricted to first-year Ph.D. students in philosophy at Cornell. We will study some twentieth century classics, centered on questions about language.

Requirements

Weekly reading responses; one expanded reading response; two class presentations; participation in classroom discussion. No late assignments; no incompletes!

Each week I will distribute reading questions, but you needn’t be bound to them in your presentations and reading responses.

Reading responses should be emailed to me by Mondays at 7am. They should be a paragraph or two (100–300 words), and should raise a single question or make a single point about the reading to be discussed that Tuesday. You may miss two.

The expanded reading response should be 1000–1500 words, and is due at 7am on the Monday after the original reading response was due. You may expand any reading response you like except for the one due 12/2.

The presentations should be around 15 minutes long. Don’t try to do too much; just present some of the main issues clearly, and perhaps raise a question or two. The goal is to prepare the group for a fruitful discussion. A visual aid, such as a short handout, might be useful.

Readings

Course readings will be made available online. In addition to the course readings, I also highly recommend Bennett and Gorovitz’s article “Improving Academic Writing”.

Tentative schedule

Reference and modality


9/9 Quine, “Reference and Modality”; Kripke, Naming and Necessity, lecture 1. (Optional: Quine, “Three Grades of Modal Involvement”; Marcus, “Modalities and Intensional Languages”)


9/23 Putnam, “Meaning and Reference”

Meaning and epistemology

9/30 Russell, The Philosophy of Logical Atomism

10/7 Ayer, Language, Truth, and Logic, preface to the first edition, and chapters 1 and 4; Hempel, “Problems and Changes in the Empiricist Criterion of Meaning”


10/28 Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”; Quine, “Posits and Reality”

11/4 Ramsey, “Truth and Probability”


Grounds of meaning

11/18 Quine, “Ontological Relativity” (Optional: Field, “Quine and the Correspondence Theory”)

11/25 Kripke, Wittgenstein on Private Language, chapter 2, chapter 3 pp. 70–78 and 86–93
References


