

GRADUATE SEMINARS 2015-16

Fall 2015

Phil 275A, E. Reck: First-Year Proseminar in M&E—Varieties of Analysis

As its name suggests, “analytic philosophy” seems to be characterized by analysis as its central method. However, the use of analysis goes back much further in the history of philosophy and of other disciplines, such as mathematics, chemistry, etc. Moreover, it, or methods close to it, have been employed in other philosophical traditions as well. In this class, we will attempt to get clearer about what is, or could be, meant by “analysis” in philosophy. We will approach this topic by reconsidering some classic cases of analysis in early analytic philosophy, concerning the notions of knowledge (Gettier etc.), truth (Tarski), logical truth (Bolzano-Wittgenstein), number (Frege-Russell, Dedekind-Peano), definite description (Russell), explanation (Hempel etc.), and decidability (Gödel-Church-Turing). (This list is open-ended and may be modified depending on the interest of students.) We will then distinguish several conceptions of analysis, including the simple or strong form of searching for necessary and sufficient conditions, the formulation of “implicit definitions” along axiomatic lines, Carnapian explication as a more pragmatic form of analysis, and what Strawson called “connective analysis”, together with criticisms of each of them (Quine etc.). We will also isolate different aspects or moments involved, more or less explicitly, in cases of analysis, such as a regressive moment, a decompositional or resolute moment, and an interpretive or transformational moment. Finally, we will try to dissolve the related “paradox of analysis” (Moore). The upshot will be that, if studied (analyzed!?) carefully, analysis turns out to be a much more subtle, multi-faceted, and varied method than often assumed.

Phil 282, P. Keller: Kant and the Problematic of Being and Time.

My aim is to reconstruct the *Critique* and Kant’s metaphysics as the normative process by which we in reasoning institute the very principles according to which we as self-understanding agents constitute ourselves in our relation to objects. I shall show that logical functions, categories, ideas and the system of metaphysical principles belonging to natural science and to the metaphysics of morals systematically emerge out of the process through which we as individuals cognitively relate to ourselves and to objects in accordance with our interests and ends. My interpretation puts me in line with Kant’s self-interpretation of his systematic ambitions and with the conception that the German idealists developed from Kant. It goes against the criticisms of Kant’s logic, his epistemology, his metaphysics and his ethics that were advanced by Hegel and have come to be the fodder of almost all contemporary interpretations of Kant’s conception of logical functions, categories and principles and of the categorical imperative.

Against the methodologically solipsistic readings of Kant that are almost completely dominant, I argue that the conception of cognition (*Erkenntnis*) and apperception that underlies Kant’s Copernican revolution in metaphysics is systematically practical, social, political and historical. Kant’s philosophy is not built up from isolated representations and propositions and their objects, but is a systematic, internal criticism of semantic and metaphysical atomism. Kant’s philosophy is a systematic defense of a pluralism grounded in

the very intrinsically culturally and linguistically mediated self-understanding of finite self-determining agents.

The object of philosophy is for Kant enlightenment and such enlightenment cannot proceed for Kant independently of a systematic critique of the illusions that our own standpoint within the world and culture and science imposes on us. Kant is in this regard the father of the "continental" tradition in philosophy and of all those aspects of it that are regarded as specific to it (and usually taken to be absent from Kant): the idealisms of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel and of the Marburg and Southwest schools of Neo-Kantianism, and philosophies of practice including Feuerbach, Marx, the later Wittgenstein and the Pittsburgh school, and critical theory including Foucault involve an effort to recapture Kant's insight from the veil of systematic transcendental illusion in which it presents itself to us philosophically from our different historical and cultural vantage-points. I shall show how Kant's critical work sets up the problematic of post-Kantian continental European philosophy and is also a systematic critique of certain anti or even irrationalist tendencies in that philosophical tradition, just as it is a systematic critique of analytic philosophy and its anatomic propositional paradigm of understanding (on my reading there is nothing in Quine's "Two Dogmas" that breaks substantively from the deconstructive account of the analytic synthetic distinction to be found in the Doctrine of Method in the first Critique). I shall show how Kant sets up the problematic of the relationship of being to time as it is central to the problematic of continental philosophy from Hölderlin to Hegel and from Nietzsche and Bergson to Cassirer, Heidegger, Deleuze and, in a negative way, to Meillassoux. How much of this I can get through in a seminar is something that I have yet to work out because it is not based on superficial generalizations, but decades long study of all of the relevant texts and I cannot spare you that.

Phil 282, Adam Harmer: Can Matter Think? The Clarke-Collins Correspondence

John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) raised what was, to many of his contemporaries, the very troubling suggestion that God could have created thinking matter. This began a very prominent, and very public, debate about the relation between thought and matter. Several years later (1707-1708), the freethinker Anthony Collins (1676-1729) and the traditionalist Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) exchanged a very influential series of letters in which Collins argues for the possibility of thinking matter, while Clarke vigorously denies it. The debate about thinking matter has crucial implications for a variety of central philosophical problems: the nature of consciousness, the nature (and immortality) of the soul, personal identity, and the problem of free will, to name a few. Furthermore, the correspondence itself was widely known in the early 18th century and garnered reactions from a host of prominent philosophers. We will focus on the correspondence, but alongside it we will read related texts from René Descartes, Ralph Cudworth, John Locke, George Berkeley, Gottfried Leibniz, and David Hume.

Phil 283, Michael Nelson: Agency in Time

One makes things happen by making a choice that results in an effective intention that results in one's body moving. For example, I think about whether or not to start with Davidson's work for this seminar, mull it over, talk to people, decide to do so, and as a result form an

intention to assign 'Actions, Reasons and Causes' as the first paper to read, which leads me to type this syllabus. There are a host of questions that arise from this little description: Does the thinking that is said to occur before the decision always occur and, if not, is there something defective about cases in which it does not? Is the thinking, when it does occur, really relevant to the decision? Is the decision causally relevant to the bodily movement? What is the connection between acting voluntarily, acting of one's own free will, being morally responsible for what one does, and acting autonomously and acting in the manner described above? These are all excellent questions, none of which we are going to look at in this seminar, either because we are going to simply assume as a starting point causalism and nonepistemologicalism about deliberation, decision, and action, or because we are going to do what I consider the groundwork for issues about freedom of the will, moral responsibility, and autonomy. We are going to ask, instead, the following sort of questions: What is it to act for a reason? What is it to intend to do what one does? Are intentions special kinds of mental attitudes or are they reducible to more familiar attitudes of belief, desire, and value? What is the connection between theoretical and practical reasoning? These are the topics of Part 1.

While we will look at a variety of opinions on the matter and of course dissent is encouraged, I will not be telling a neutral story but will be developing a particular view according to which an action is intentional just in case it is done with an intention (what one does intentionally need not necessarily match the intention with which one acts; one can intentionally knock someone over without acting with the intention to knock that person over but only the intention to, say, be first inside the door where one either foresees or should have foreseen that acting on the intention of being first in the door in one's circumstances will result in knocking someone over and does so anyway), intentions are the conclusions of deliberation, and intentions are beliefs about what one will do on the basis of which one acts. Intentions are thus, I shall argue, reducible to beliefs. Practical reasoning and theoretical reasoning are not, then, distinguished either in terms of their subject matter (although, of course, the scope of practical reasoning is, for us finite agents, much more circumscribed than the scope of theoretical reasoning; we only practically reason about the future and, even there, a very small sliver) or the attitudes that result in a course of theoretical or practical reasoning. There is, of course, a very big difference between deciding what one will do in the evening and forming a prediction based on one's knowledge of one's tendencies and habits, but this difference is not, I argue, to be explained in terms of the first resulting in a radically different kind of attitude, an intention that leads to action, than the other, a belief about how the world will be; the conclusions of each piece of reasoning is a belief. I thus owe a more complicated story about what distinguishes practical reasoning from theoretical reasoning and what makes a belief about what one does an intention and what makes it a mere prediction.

We will then turn, in part 2, to a very brief look at topics in the philosophy of time concerning the reality of tense (being past, present, and future) and the direction of time. We will be interested in the following questions: Is reality, at its most fundamental level, tensed? Is being present an objective, real property of events (or perhaps times) in the world as it is in itself or is it instead a by-product of our consciousness in some manner? Next, we will ask whether or not time is intrinsically directed or is the difference between the past and the future (or earlier and later times) dependent upon some other asymmetry. There is a typical direction in which events unfold in time: People are born, grow older, and, sadly, eventually die; never has anyone's life ever unfolded in the other direction. Rocks drop into the pond and waves ripple outward from the rock's entry point; never have waves coalesced from all banks of the pond

into a rock-sized point as a rock shoots up into the air. The problem of temporal asymmetries is to explain the grounds of these temporal asymmetries given that the familiar laws of fundamental physics are time invariant. Some claim that the fundamental temporal asymmetry is the asymmetry of causation (causes occur earlier than their effects), others the asymmetry of entropy, and others the asymmetry of counterfactual dependence (later events are counterfactually dependent on earlier events to a much more robust extent than earlier events are on later events). I again am not neutral and will be trying to develop my own view, that tense, and in particular the present-tense, is an objective, irreducible feature of fundamental reality --- on the version that I develop, basic, atomic propositions are present tensed

and so are not true or false simpliciter but only relative to a time --- but time is not objectively directed because there is not an intrinsic distinction between being future and being past. The direction of time, I argue, is dependent on the asymmetry of choice: We deliberate about what will happen and only think about what has happened. I argue that some kind of agential asymmetry (whether it be the direction of deliberation or the direction of action, I am unsettled) is the most fundamental asymmetry. An upshot is that the directionality of time is agent-dependent, even though the tensed aspect of time is not agent dependent.

These are very large topics that we cannot hope to do full justice to in the short weeks devoted to the topic.

The third part of the course is where we will apply the material from the earlier weeks directly to the topic of what it is to choose to do something and then, as a result of that choice, do it. We begin by looking at what it means to say that someone is able to do something, mindful of the fact that there is at least one very clear and good sense in which people are able to do all sorts of things that they in fact do not do. We look, then, at an account of agential abilities that, for some reason, is typically ignored in the literature on what we are able to do, especially when the focus is on the compatibility of freedom and determinism: Namely, the very intuitively plausible view that sentences of the form 'A is able to F' should be analyzed in light of the possible worlds semantics of modal operators. Once this is taken seriously, we can easily explain otherwise mysterious data concerning the inconstancy of ability claims in terms of restrictions on the range of situations the modal governs. Kratzer in particular defends this view in her classic paper from the late 70s. We'll then apply that account to respond to accounts that claim that, if an agent is ever able to do something other than she in fact does (and so if there are genuinely accessible alternatives prior to deliberation), then: 1) the future must be open and/or 2) causal determinism must be false.