Fall 2020 Seminar in Philosophy  
PHI535: Conversable Minds  
Sam Berstler and Philip Pettit

Tuesdays 7:00-9:00 pm online (Princeton time)

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Office hours to be arranged

Format  
This course is primarily an online seminar. However, each week students must also watch a 45 minute long lecture sometime prior to attending seminar.

Website  
samberstlerteaching.wordpress.com/conversable-minds/

Students interested in enrolling in the course must contact Sam in order to receive password access to the website and in order to receive email updates about the course. Please note that we will not be using blackboard.

About

This seminar will explore the relationship between the ability to converse in a language and some distinct capacities, not themselves presupposed by language, that are characteristic of human beings. Those capacities include the capacity to make judgments, practice reasoning, and recruit perception in reasoned judgment; to make commitments, assume and ascribe responsibility, form value judgments, perform as persons, and uncover an ideal of mutual respect. Some of the sessions will track topics in Pettit’s The Birth of Ethics and an incomplete manuscript Minds that Speak. They will also include some of Berstler’s work-in-progress on the relationship among conversation, selfhood, and social and moral norms.

Each week Philip Pettit will post a pre-recorded presentation (approx. 45-60 minutes in length), which attendees must watch prior to attending seminar. The session will open with comments on Philip’s presentation from Sam Berstler (approx. 15-20 minutes in length).

All texts will be made available on the website prior to our first meeting in September.

The following is a provisional outline of topics to be covered. We have also listed background readings, which we encourage students to engage with prior to class. From week to week, we will also indicate the “highlights” in the background reading, which can be read as “reader’s digest” version of the syllabus. The text listed as “provocations” were picked by Sam and are intended as wines paired to Philip’s meals: sometimes they present contrasting views, but other times they are intended to complicate the discussion in unexpected ways.
All readings are currently provisional.

Session 1 Hypothesis
Seven distinctive human capacities; the hypothesis of an origin in linguistic communication; the idea of a counterfactual genealogy; the abilities presupposed in the genealogy.

Background
Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, Ch 2: Genealogy
Bratman, *Valuing and the Will*
Lewis, *On Convention*
Pettit, *Made with Words*, Ch 2

Provocation
Heck, *Idiolects*

Session 2 Judgment
The functional conception of agency; various levels of representational ability; communication and language; revealing and ratifying beliefs; affirmation and judgment; the motive for judgment; belief and credence

Background
Dennett, *Intentional Systems and How to Change your Mind*
Camp, *Putting Thoughts to Work*
McDowell, *Meaning, Communication and Knowledge*
Goldberg, *Recent Work on Assertion*
Eriksson and Hajek, *What are Degrees of Belief?*

Provocation
Bar-On, *Expressive Communication and Continuity Skepticism*

Session 3 Reasoning
Rationality and agency; reasoning; the capacities required; the motives for reasoning;

Background
Broome, *Reasoning to be Rational*
Boghossian, *What is Inference?*
Pettit, *Broome on Reasoning and Rule-Following*
Vogler, *Anscombe on Practical Inference*
Mercier, H. and D. Sperber *Why do humans reason?*
Carroll, *What the Tortoise Said to Achilles*

Provocation
Saka, *The Art of Quotation*
Session 4 Rule-following
The problem in Wittgenstein and Kripke; the applicational model; the inferential-deferential model.

Background
- Wittgenstein Philosophical Investigations Selections
- Kripke Wittgenstein on Rule-following
- Boghossian Epistemic Rules
- Miller Scepticism about Sense (Ch 5, Philosophy of Language)
- Miller Saving Sense (Ch 6, ibid)

Provocation
TBD

Session 5 Subjectivity-plus
Cognizance of attitude and experience; three features of perception; the effect of judgment and reasoning on these; the issue of consciousness

Background
- Dretske, Experience as Representation
- Silins, Perception and justification
- Johnston, The Obscure Object of Hallucination
- Mole, Attention
- Block, Concepts of Consciousness
- McGeer, The Trouble with Mary

Provocation
TBD

Session 6 Commitment I
The need to convey attitudes; the problems with reporting them; the solution via commitment; the means and the motive for commitment; the application to avowal; pledging and intention.

Background
- Elster, Ulysses and the Sirens
- Talbot, Two Kinds of Self-Knowledge
- Setiya, Intention

Provocation
Pagin, Is Assertion Social?

Session 7 Commitment II
Committing with others; the means and the motive; conversation and common grounds; corporate agency

Background
- Hobbes, Leviathan Ch 16
- Pettit, Made with Words Ch 5
Lewis, Scorekeeping in a Language Game  
Stalnaker, Assertion  
Bratman, Modest Sociality

**Provocation**  
Kukla and Lance, selection from *Yo and Lo: the Pragmatic Topography of the Space of Reasons*

**Session 8. Value and responsibility**  
Social and moral norms; the elements in evaluating; evaluating and desire; the different evaluative perspectives; towards a moral perspective

**Background**  
Pettit, Social Norms and the Internal Point of View  
Joshi, What’s the Matter with Huck Finn?  
Smith, Moral Realism  
Sayre-McCord, On Hume’s ‘General Point of View’

**Provocation**  
Brown and Levinson, selections from *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*

**Session 9 Holding Responsible**  
The assumption of norms; criticism and censure, intellectual and practical; the could-have-done-otherwise problem; towards a solution

**Background**  
Strawson Freedom and Resentment  
Smith Rational Capacities  
McGeer and Pettit The Hard Problem of Responsibility  
Rosen The Alethic Conception of Moral Responsibility

**Provocation**  
Lazare, selection from *On Apologies*

**Session 10 Persons**  
Ideas about personhood; the Hobbesian approach; the notion of a self; the connection of person and self.

**Background**  
Hobbes Leviathan Ch 16  
Pettit Made with Words Ch 4  
Pettit My Three Selves  
Boyle Mirror Self-recognition and Self-identification  
Perry The Essential Indexical  
Strawson Against Narrativity

**Provocation**  
Sussman, What’s Wrong with Torture?
Session 11 Publicity and Social Life

Background
Nagel, Concealment and Exposure
Sorenson, Knowledge-Lies
Berstler, Implausible Denials and Social Unreality

Provocation
Lederman, Uncommon Knowledge (or MS, to be determined)

Session 12 Respect
Respect and esteem; the assumptions about respect; the problem of explaining the universal demands of respect; respect and personhood

Background:
Darwall Two Concepts of Respect
Carter Respect and the Basis of Equality
Pettit The Conversive Theory of Respect

Provocation:
Berstler, Bad Faith Interpretation