Philosophical Problems in Logic: Logical Subtraction

Fall 2019, Wednesdays 6-8:50pm, Marx Hall 201
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Office hours: Thursday 10-12, or by appointment

Course Summary
In philosophy, as in life, we often have occasion to take something back. Sherlock Holmes was a clever detective who lived on Baker Street, except that he did not exist. Belief is the same as knowledge, except it need not be true. Lying is wrong, except when you have a good reason. There are infinitely many primes, except that numbers do not exist. In all these cases, one intuitively wants to subtract something from what was said before. Conceptually, logical subtraction is something like the inverse of logical addition or conjunction. This course surveys recent theories of logical subtraction and investigates potential applications.

Assessment
This is an ungraded graduate course without official coursework.

Bracketed readings are optional.

October 23: Introduction
(Stephen Yablo, 2006, “Non-Catastrophic Presupposition Failure.” In: Content and Modality: Themes From the Philosophy of Robert Stalnaker, Thomson and Byrne (eds), 164-190. Oxford University Press.)

October 30th: Halloween Break

November 6th: Subject Matters and Parts

November 13th: Loose Talk and Metaphor
November 20th: Fictionalism about Mathematics
Mark Colyvan, 2010, “There is No Easy Road to Nominalism.” Mind 119(474): 285-306. (Skip §2.)
(Lloyd Humberstone, 2000, “Parts and Partitions.” In: Theoria 66(1): 41-82.)

November 27th: Thanksgiving Break

December 4th: The Limits of Subtraction
Ch. 8, 11 of Stephen Yablo, 2014, Aboutness.
(§2.4-2.5 of Kit Fine 2017, “A Theory of Truthmaker Content.”)

December 11th: Frege’s Puzzle