

Fall 2020 Seminar in Philosophy

PHI535: Conversable Minds

Sam Berstler and Philip Pettit

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

Contact

berstler@princeton.edu

ppetit@princeton.edu

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