Foundations of Analytic Philosophy

Foundations of Analytic Philosophy (2016-7)

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Lecture Plan:

We will look at the ideas of Frege, Russell and Wittgenstein and the relations between them. Frege and Russell exchanged letters in which they explain their idea and criticize each other. Russell’s *Principles of Mathematics* (1902) contains an Appendix in which he discusses Frege’s doctrines and explains where and why he differs from Frege. Russell’s ‘On Denoting’ (1905) develops an argument that the distinction between sense and reference is deeply mysterious. In the first 7 weeks we will follow the debate between Russell and Frege. Then we will use our understanding of Frege and Russell to get a grip of the basic ideas of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. If time permits, we will consider Wittgenstein’s influence on the Vienna Circle.

Primary Readings:

G. Frege:

- *Conceptual Notation*. Section 8.


B. Russell:


**L. Wittgenstein:**


- Gottlob Frege: Letters to Ludwig Wittgenstein.

  (online: http://www.bu.edu/philo/people/faculty/full-time/juliet-floyd/)


**Secondary Texts:**

**Frege:**


**Russell:**


**Wittgenstein:**


**Vienna Circle:**

**Provisional Seminar Program**

Please note that I am happy to modify and adapt the seminar program in the light of the seminar discussions. We will cover the topics listed, but might look in more detail at some points than at others.

**Week 1:** Frege on Sense and reference


**Week 2:** Frege on Thoughts and Truth.


**Week 3:** Russell’s Arguments against Frege


**Week 4:** Russell’s Gray’s Elegy Argument


**Week 5:** How Russell tries to make do without Sense and Reference


**Week 6:** How Russell tries to make do without Thoughts

Week 7: The World according to Wittgenstein


Week 8: Wittgenstein’s Picture Theory.

Reading: TLP, Sentence 2ff.

Week 9: Is the Tractatus Non-Sense?

Reading: TLP, Sentences 6.53, 6.54, 7.

Week 10: Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle.


Sample Questions Foundations of Analytic Philosophy

1. What is Frege’s argument for the sense-reference distinction? Is it convincing?

2. Is the application of the sense-reference distinction to sentences and/or concept-words defensible?

3. Has Frege a good argument for the conclusion that ‘true’ does no signify a property?

4. Explain and assess Russell’s theory of definite descriptions.

5. What is Russell’s Gray’s Elegy argument?


7. Is it true that there must be simple objects?

8. Is there an exegesis of TLP 6.54 that allows us to acquire philosophical knowledge from the TLP?

9. What is Verificationism? Is it defensible?