Institute of Philosophy
Doctoral Program "Philosophy – Language, Mind and Practice"

Master Class

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Inferentialism

2nd – 3rd December, 2016

Synopsis

The term "inferentialism", coined by Robert Brandom, has become a trademark of a certain position in the philosophy of language which claims that meanings are basically inferential roles. This is a radical departure from more traditional semantic approaches, which are mostly representationalitic – they assume that semantics rests on a relation such as representing, standing for or designating. Brandom is convinced that this approach to meaning is able to enlighten not only the nature of language and of linguistic meaning, but meaning as a crucial feature of the whole human world, *viz.* world as it appears from within our human societies. Independently of this, the term is now cropping up in logic, in connection with positions prioritizing proof-theory over model theory and approaching meaning in logical, especially proof-theoretical terms. We try to bring these two strands together: to clarify the relationship of Brandomian inferentialism to inferentialism in logic.

Programme

Friday, 2nd December, 2016

9:30 – 12:30	What is meaning and what it has to do with inference
14:30 – 18:30	The nature of rules and rule following

Saturday, 3rd December, 2016

9:30 – 12:30	Logical inferentialism & proof-theoretical semantics
14:30 – 18:30	Brandom's inferentialism and its criticism

Registration: phd@philos.uzh.ch

Details: http://www.philosophie.uzh.ch/doktorat/meisterkurse.html

Venue: Philosophisches Seminar, Zürichbergstrasse 43, 8044 Zürich

Room: ZUP-U-8

No fees apply, but please note that participants are expected to have done the reading of the texts. PhD students at the UZH are required to book the module in order to get credit points.

Schedule and Readings

Friday, 2nd December, 2016

Session 1: What is meaning & what it has to do with inference

We will start from the concept of *meaning* and we will ask what makes expressions of human languages meaningful to the extent that they are able to afford us such useful and nuanced services as they do. We will show that *prima facie* plausible explanations in terms of representation (expressions are meaningful in that they *stand for* certain entities) or intention (expressions are meaningful in that they express thoughts that *aim at* certain entities) may not be so plausible as they look at first sight; and we explain the reasons for accounting for meanings in terms of inferential rules.

Brandom, R. (2007): Inferentialism and some of its challenges. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74, 651–676. *

Peregrin, J. (2008): An Inferentialist Approach to Semantics. *Philosophy Compass* 3, 1208–1223. *

Peregrin, J. (2012): Semantics without meaning? In R. Schantz (ed.): *Prospects of Meaning*, Berlin, 479–502.

Peregrin, J. (2012): The Normative Dimension of Discourse. In K. Allan and K. Jasczolt (eds.): *Cambridge Handbook of Pragmatics*, Cambridge, 209–225.

Sellars, W. (1953): Inference and Meaning. *Mind* 62(247), 313–338.

Sellars, W. (1974): Meaning as Functional Classification. *Synthese* 27, 417–437.

Session 2: The nature of rules and rule following

Inferentialism (of the Brandomian variety) is distinctive in that it is not about inferences as acts of drawing conclusions from premises, but about *inferential rules*. (This makes it an enterprise deeply different from other seemingly similar enterprises, which are often subsumed under the heading of "inferential role semantics".) As such it is based on the assumption that meaning arises from certain rule-governed practices; and from this viewpoint it is essential to understand what rules are and how can one follow them. In this seminar we will discuss two ways in which recent philosophy has homed in on the concepts of rules and normativity. One originates with Wittgenstein and it was brought to the centerstage of philosophical discussions especially by Kripke, the other originates with Wilfrid Sellars and it is the one that directly influenced Brandom.

Kripke, S. (1982): *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, Cambridge (Mass.). *

Sellars, W. (1949): Language, Rules and Behavior. In S. Hook (ed.): *John Dewey: Philosopher of Science and Freedom*, New York., 289–315. *

Baker, G. P. & Hacker, P. M. S. (1984): *Scepticism, Rules and Language*, Oxford.

Sellars, W. (1962): Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man. In Colodny, R. (ed.): *Frontiers of Science and Philosophy*, Pittsburgh, 35–78.

Wittgenstein, L. (1953): *Philosophische Untersuchungen*, Oxford.

Saturday, 3rd December, 2016

Session 3: Logical inferentialism & proof-theoretical semantics

Logic has been traditionally dealing with inferences, deductions and proofs, but it was *model-theory* as developed in the second half of the twentieth century by Tarski and his followers, which has come to be seen as the means of getting a direct grip on *meaning*. However, in recent decades, the more traditional *proof-theory* has come to strike back: the view that logic should rest on the concept of inference has come to be called inferentialism (largely independently of Brandom's coining of the term) and there even appeared the term *proof-theoretical semantics*, covering attempts at accounts for meaning in purely proof-theoretic (*viz.* inferentialistic) terms. The aim of this seminar is to outline this logical variety of inferentialism and to investigate into its relationships with the Brandomian variety.

Belnap, N. (1962): Tonk, Plonk and Plink. *Analysis* 22, 130–134.
Francez, N. (forthcoming): Views of proof-theoretic semantics: Reified proof-theoretic meanings.
    Journal of Logic and Computation.
Peregrin, J. (2009): Inferentialism and the Compositionality of Meaning. *International Review of
    Pragmatics* 1, 154–181. *
Prawitz, D. (2006): Meaning approached via proofs. *Synthese* 148, 507–524. *
Prior, A. N. (1960): Runabout Inference Ticket. *Analysis* 21, 38–39.
Prior, A. N. (1964): Conjunction and Contonktion Revisited. *Analysis* 24, 191–195.
Troelstra, A. (1991): History of Constructivism in the Twentieth Century, online.
Wansing, H. (2000): The Idea of a Proof-theoretic Semantics. *Studia Logica*, 64: 3–20.

Session 4: Brandom's inferentialism and its criticism

Brandom's own version of inferentialism builds esecially on the concepts of commitment and entitlement, which are, according to him, more basic than the concept of inference. (Indeed, inference can be construed as the relation of preservation of commitments or entitlements.) Brandom's idea is that living in a human society amounts to steering within a rich network of normative social relationships and enjoying many kinds of normative statuses, which reach into many dimensions. Linguistic communication institutes an important stratum of such statuses (commitments and entitlements) and to understand language means being able to keep track of the statuses of one's fellow speakers – to keep score of them, as Brandom puts it. And the social distribution is essential because it provides for the multiplicity of perspectives the intersections of which make the objectivity of linguistic content possible.

Brandom, R. (1994): *Making it explicit*, Cambridge (Mass.). * Chapters 1-3.
Fodor, J. A./LePore, E. (2001): Brandom's Burdens. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 465–482. *
Fodor, J. A./LePore, E. (2007): Brandom Beleaguered. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74, 677–
    691. *
Hattiangadi, A. (2003): Making it Implicit: Brandom on Rule Following. *Philosophy and Phenomenological
    Research* 66, 419–431.
Lance, M. N. (1998): Some Reflections on the Sport of Language. *Philosophical Perspectives* 12, 219–240.
Wanderer, J. (2008): *Robert Brandom*, New York.