

PHILOSOPHY 543
SEMANTIC NATURALISM
University of Chicago, spring 2002

Course Instructor: Jason Bridges

Office hours: Tuesday, 10am-12pm, Harper Memorial E589
(Office hours are cancelled for March 26th and April 2nd.)

DESCRIPTION

Semantic naturalism, the doctrine that facts about the contents of our thoughts and beliefs reduce to physical facts about our brains, is the guiding principle of much current work on mental content. In the first half of this course, we will examine in detail the three most thoroughgoing and influential versions of semantic naturalism, due respectively to Fodor, Dretske and Millikan. In the second half, we will address questions about the semantic naturalist's project more generally, taking it as a test case for the 'naturalism' that dominates contemporary American philosophy of mind. What motivates the project, and is that motivation one we should endorse? What is the notion of reduction at stake, and can it be differentiated from traditional ideas of 'conceptual analysis'? Some critics, notably McDowell and Davidson, suggest we have reason for doubting that the semantic naturalist's project—indeed, that any project in the philosophy of mind with comparable reductive ambitions—will be possible to execute. Is their pessimism well founded?

TOPICS AND READINGS

Copies of the readings will be made available, but if you want to own some relevant texts in full (not a bad idea), the most pertinent are:

- Dretske, Fred. *Explaining Behavior* (MIT Press, 1988).
- Dretske, Fred. *Perception, Knowledge and Belief* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- Fodor, Jerry. *A Theory of Content and Other Essays* (MIT Press, 1992).
- Millikan, Ruth. *White Queen Psychology and Other Essays for Alice* (MIT Press, 1993).

The following list is tentative: readings may be added or subtracted as the course progresses.

Introduction: naturalism

The idea of mental content

Selections from Frege, Brentano, Chisholm, Quine and Haugeland.

Informational semantics

- Fodor, "Meaning and the World Order," in his *Psychosemantics* (1987).
- Fodor, "A Theory of Content, II" in his *A Theory of Content and Other Essays* (1990).
- Fodor, "The Demise of Definitions, part II: The Philosopher's Tale," in his *Concepts: Where Cognitive Science Went Wrong* (1998).
- Bridges, "Informational Semantics and Psychological Holism," manuscript.

Dretske's teleofunctionalism

- Dretske, Chapters 3 and 4 of *Explaining Behavior* (1988).
- Dretske, "Does Meaning Matter?" in Enrique Villanueva (ed.), *Information, Semantics and Epistemology* (1990).
- Dretske, "Minds, Machines and Money: What Really Explains Behavior," in his *Perception, Knowledge and Belief* (2000).

Biosemanantics

Millikan, "Thoughts Without Laws," "Biosemantics," and "Compare and Contrast Dretske, Fodor, and Millikan on Teleosemanantics," all collected in her *White Queen Psychology and Other Essays for Alice* (1993).
Millikan, "Explanation in Biopsychology" in Heil and Mele (eds.), *Mental Causation* (1993).
Fodor, "A Theory of Content, I" in *A Theory of Content and Other Essays*.

Is there really such a thing as original intentionality?

Dennett, "Evolution, Error and Intentionality" and "True Believers," both in his *The Intentional Stance* (1987).

The constitutive ideal of rationality

Davidson, "Mental Events" and "Psychology as Philosophy," both in his *Essays on Actions and Events* (1980).
Davidson, "Three Varieties of Knowledge," in his *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (2001).
McDowell, "Functionalism and Anomalous Monism," in his *Mind, Value and Reality* (1998).
Rorty, "McDowell, Davidson and Spontaneity," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* v. 58 (1998).
McDowell, "Reply to Commentators" (section on Rorty), *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* v. 58.

Reasoning, reasons, and normativity

Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, pp. 22-37.
Dretske, "Norms, History and the Constitution of the Mental," in *Perception, Knowledge and Belief*.
Peacocke, "Concepts and Norms in a Natural World," Chapter five of *A Study of Concepts* (1992).
Stroud, "Inference, Belief and Understanding," in his *Understanding Human Knowledge* (2000).

What is it to 'naturalize' something, anyway?

Stich, "Intentionality and Naturalism," in his *Deconstructing the Mind* (1996).