

PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM

Laurence Goldstein

University of Kent

"Wittgenstein & Situation Comedy"

Friday, April 17, 2009

Paper: 3:30 P.M.; Memorial Building, Room 100

Refreshments: 5:30 P.M.; Ashe Building, Room 735

Professor Laurence Goldstein works mainly in the area of paradoxes, the philosophy of logic and language and the philosophy of Wittgenstein. The most recent of his publications on paradox is 'Fibonacci, Yablo and the Cassationist Approach to Paradox' (*Mind*, October 2006). His work on Wittgenstein includes a book, *Clear and Queer Thinking: Wittgenstein's Development and His Relevance to Modern Thought*, and a play (1999) that mischievously re-creates Wittgenstein's Ph.D. viva. More recent pieces investigating the originality of Wittgenstein's work include 'Wittgenstein as Soil', in M. Kölbel and B. Weiss (eds), *Wittgenstein's Lasting Significance*. Goldstein co-authored a text, *Logic*, on the philosophy of logic (2006) and is currently writing a book, *The Liar, the Bald Man and the Hangman*. He was advisory editor for the 2005 *Monist* issue on the Philosophy of Humor and generally enjoys working at the intersection of philosophy and various other disciplines. He is Professor of Philosophy and Head of the School of European Culture and Languages at the University of Kent.

ABSTRACT

Early in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein introduces the notion of a language-game as 'the language and the activities into which it is woven'. Sentences, he says elsewhere, have no sense outside the language-game. Although the term 'language-game' is widely bandied about, little attempt has been made by philosophers to understand this *weaving* metaphor. Wittgenstein discusses speakers exploiting context to inject meaning into the sentences that they use. One facet of situation comedy is context-injected ambiguity, where scriptwriters artfully construct situations such that, because of conflicting contextual clues, a character, though uttering a sentence that contains neither ambiguous words nor amphibolous construction may plausibly be interpreted in at least two distinct ways. This highlights an important distinction between the (concise) sentence that a speaker uses and what the speaker means, the disclosure of which may require considerable spelling out. Understanding this phenomenon of pragmatic enrichment is the key to solving, *inter alia*, a variety of problems where, puzzlingly, exchanging a singular term in a statement with a co-referential one fails to preserve truth-value. This is a rare case where there is a huge debate in the recent literature that is decisively settled by Wittgenstein's approach.

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