General Outline

Reference to events—things that happen or occur, such as Brutus’s stabbing of Caesar or Alf’s falling in love with Beth—is a pervasive feature of human thought and language. Moreover, the event concept plays a dominant role in the formulation and analysis of a wide variety of philosophical issues, such as causation, the mind-body problem, or the nature of time. The aim of this seminar is to set up the main coordinates for an understanding of this concept and for a critical assessment of its philosophical implications and applications.

Topics to be discussed: the role of events in the logical and semantic analysis of natural language; their metaphysical status; their identity and individuation criteria; the distinction and classification of various types of events and event-like entities (such as processes and states, and perhaps facts); their role in the philosophy of action and causation; their role in the philosophy of space and time.

Requirements

The course will be run as a seminar. Requirements for E-credit: active participation, a short seminar presentation (20%) and a final paper (80%). Requirement for R-credit: active participation and short seminar presentation.

Readings

Recommended book: J. Bennett, Events and their Names, Hackett 1988. Other readings will be made available in electronic form. In addition, the following volumes are available at Butler Library and contain useful additional readings:

- D. Davidson, Essays on Actions and Events, 1980
- J. Heil and A. Mele (eds.), Mental Causation, 1995
- J. Kim, Supervenience and Mind. Selected Philosophical Essays, 1993
- E. LePore and B. McLaughlin (eds.), Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of D. Davidson, 1985
- K. Pfeifer, Actions and Other Events, 1989
- B. Schein, Plurals and Events, 1993
- B. Taylor, Modes of Occurrence: Verbs, Adverbs and Events, 1985
- C. Tenny and J. Pustejovsky (eds.), Events as Grammatical Objects, 2000
- J. J. Thomson, Acts and Other Events, 1977
- J. E. Tiles, Things That Happen, 1981
- B. Vermazen and M. Hintikka (eds.), Essays on Davidson: Actions and Events, 1985
- S. Zucchi, The Language of Propositions and Events, 1993

An extensive bibliography on the topic can be found in the following volume (a copy of which will be made available in electronic form):

Tentative Schedule

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW (WEEK 1)
- R. Casati and A. C. Varzi [1995], ‘Events – Introduction’

EVENTS AND LOGICAL FORM (WEEKS 2–4)
- A. Kenny [1963], Action, Emotion and Will, Chapter 7
- D. Davidson [1967], ‘The Logical Form of Action Sentences’
- T. Parsons [1985], ‘Underlying Events in the Logical Analysis of English’
- T. Parsons [2000], ‘Underlying States and Time Travel’
- J. Bennett [1988], Events and their Names, Chapter 11
- T. Horgan [1978], ‘The Case Against Events’
- P. M. S. Hacker [1982], ‘Events, Ontology, and Grammar’

THE NATURE OF EVENTS (WEEKS 5–6)
- P. F. Strawson [1959], Individuals, Sections 1.6–1.7
- R. M. Chisholm [1970], ‘Events and Propositions’
- D. Davidson [1970], ‘Events as Particulars’
- J. L. Brandl [2000], ‘Do Events Recur?’
- J. Kim [1976], ‘Events as Property Exemplifications’
- M. Brand [1989], ‘Events as Spatiotemporal Particulars: A Defense’
- W. V. O. Quine [1985], ‘Events and Reification’
- J. Bennett [1996], ‘What Events Are’
- L. Lombard [1986], Events, Chapters 8–9
- A. Quinton [1979], ‘Objects and Events’

EVENT IDENTITIES AND INDIVIDUATION (WEEKS 7–9)
- G. E. M. Anscombe [1957], Intention §§23–26
- D. Davidson [1969], ‘The Individuation of Events’
- J. J. Thomson [1971], ‘The Time of a Killing’
- A. Goldman [1971], ‘The Individuation of Actions’
- J. Bennett [1973], ‘Shooting, Killing, and Dying’
- D. Davidson [1985], ‘Adverbs of Action’
- K. Pfeifer [1989], Actions and Other Events: The Unifier-Multiplier Controversy, Chapter 5
- N. Unwin [1996], ‘The Individuation of Events’
- A. Varzi [2002], ‘Events, Truth, and Indeterminacy’

THE STRUCTURE OF EVENTS (WEEKS 10–11)
- A. P. D. Mourelatos [1978], ‘Events, Processes, and States’
- J. J. Thomson [1977], Acts and Other Events, Chapter 4
- J. Bennett [1988], Events and their Names, Chapter 10
- F. Pianesi and A. C. Varzi [1996], ‘Events, Topology, and Temporal Relations’

EVENTS, CAUSES, AND ACTIONS (WEEKS 12–13)
- D. Davidson [1967], ‘Causal Relations’
- Z. Vendler [1967], ‘Causal Relations’
- D. Davidson [1970], ‘Mental Events’
- D. Davidson [1993], ‘Thinking Causes’
- J. Hornsby [1993], ‘Agency and Causal Explanation’