HUM 2054 Reading Philosophers

UCM course
(Spring 2018)

I N T R O D U C T I O N

1. Topic

Reading classical texts from the history of philosophy.

2. Objectives

- To acquaint students with pivotal philosophical texts; to help students read primary texts of important philosophers.
- To teach students how texts from different fields and contexts are philosophically relevant.
- To provide students with the relevant contextual historical and political information.
- To introduce some classical philosophical problems.

3. Course coordination

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4. Course period

5 February to 29 March 2018

5. **Literature**

Literature will be available in the Reading Room, the UM Library and / or on the Internet. Students are strongly advised to *buy at least* two books; most texts can be ordered easily and rather cheap by internet (bol.com., amazon.com etc. or bought at the local bookshop (e.g. De Tribune, Kapoenstraat).

6. Instructional format

12 tutorial group meetings including 6 lectures. The Monday meetings start with an introductory lecture, followed by a discussion of some pages from the work of the philosopher of the week. The Thursday meetings are practical meetings and they are all mandatory.

7. Assessment

a. Examination

Apart from the active participation in the tutorial group two papers: a small midterm essay (800 words) and a more substantial final essay (2000 words) at the end. In the final grading the second paper counts twice.

b. Resit.

If a student earns a 5.5 or higher for the assessment and meets his or her attendance requirement, he or she passes the course. A student who passes a course (grade ≥ 5.5) will NOT be allowed to take a resit to improve his or her grade. In order to be eligible for a resit exam, a student must have a) met the attendance requirement of the course, or be allowed to make up for it by means of an additional assignment and b) made a fair attempt to fulfil all requirements of the assessment.

c. Additional assignments.

UCM expects a minimal attendance of 85%. To qualify for an additional assignment a student may not have missed more than 30% of the group meetings and must submit a completed request form 'additional assignment because of insufficient attendance' to the Office of Student Affairs, within 10 working days after completion of the course. In the meanwhile, such students will be given a provisional overall grade, but will not receive credits for the course, skills or project until they have successfully completed an additional assignment. The nature and volume of the additional assignment will be proportional to the number of tutorial group meetings missed, and the assignment must be completed and submitted to the coordinator concerned within 20 working days.

8. Time schedule

- Monday 5 February: Plato. Lecture by Sjaak Koenis and meeting.

- Thursday 8 February: Meeting for text reading (Plato).

- Monday 19 February: Spinoza. Lecture by Sjaak Koenis and meeting.

- Thursday 22 February: Meeting for text reading (Spinoza).

- Monday 26 February: Voltaire. Lecture by Maarten Doorman and meeting.

- Thursday 1 March: Meeting for text reading (Voltaire).

- Monday 5 March: Schopenhauer. Lecture by Maarten Doorman and meeting.

- Thursday 8 March: Meeting for text reading (Schopenhauer). ***Hand in test 1 (midterm essay 800 words)***

- Monday 12 March: Wittgenstein. Lecture by Maarten Doorman and meeting.

- Thursday 15 March: Meeting for text reading (Wittgenstein).

- Monday 19 March: Margalit. Lecture by Sjaak Koenis and meeting.

- Thursday 22 March: Meeting for text reading (Margalit).

- Thursday 29 March 4 PM; ***Hand in test 2 (final essay, 2000 words).***

9. Introduction

In this course well known philosophical texts will be read and analyzed in detail. Reading philosophers, that is, the reading of some of their primary texts, is not just a pleasure in itself: some of the more interesting philosophers are also famous stylists offering intellectual pleasure as well as different forms of argument.

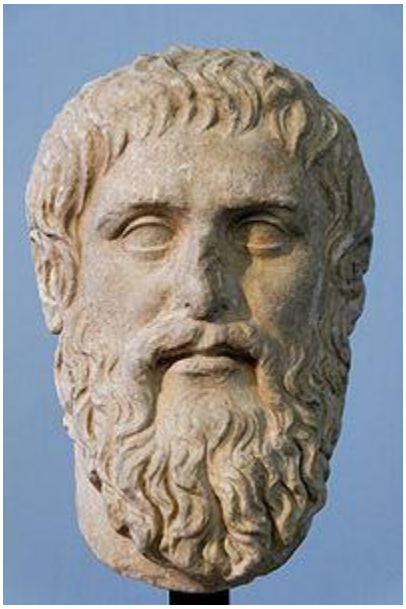
But it is also important to read the original texts instead of always relying on handbooks or (internet) encyclopedia to acquaint oneself with the central ideas of philosophers and to get used to the original language of a text. There is a lot to learn from reading philosophers themselves, to see how they position themselves in the tradition of philosophy and in the contemporary intellectual debate, to determine what interesting problems are, and how one could go about searching for some answers or even solutions.

Reading philosophers themselves also has merit for another reason: it turns out that philosophers use a variety of writing styles and publication media like a scientific treatise, a monograph, an essay, a collection of aphorisms or even a novel. And last but not least: they provide the best introduction into some of the classical philosophical problems like: What can we know? What is justice? Is there something like moral sense?

In this course we choose six philosophers as an introduction to different philosophical problems, but above all to show how philosophical arguments can be presented in several styles and forms. The philosophers of this year are Plato, Spinoza, Voltaire, Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein and Margalit. They are responsible for some of the best philosophical work that has been produced in the western tradition.

Every week starts with an introductory lecture, followed by an analysis of a few paragraphs or a page from the text that will be read during the week (Mondays). On Thursday the complete text will be analyzed and discussed in group meetings.

Assignment 1: Plato


Plato (ca. 428 BC – ca. 348 BC); copy of a portrait bust by Silanion.

Text: Plato, The Republic, Book VII 514a-520a (The allegory of the cave) and Book VIII.

Available on the internet and in the reading room.

http://www.inp.uw.edu.pl/mdsie/Political_Thought/Plato-Republic.pdf or

or https://archive.org/details/PlatosRepublictrans.BloomText

The best should rule – that Plato's political theory in a nutshell. In the famous allegory of the cave he sums up his views in an image of ignorant humanity, trapped in the depths and not even aware of its own limited perspective. The rare individual escapes the limitations of that cave and, through a long, tortuous intellectual journey, discovers a higher realm, a true reality, with a final, almost mystical awareness of Goodness as the origin of everything that exists. It is this rare individual, the philosopher-king, who is best placed to rule in an aristocracy. Such a person has a knowledge of what is ultimately most worthwhile in life. That person will frequently be misunderstood by those ordinary folks back in the cave who haven't shared in the intellectual insight.

Whereas in the past six books of The Republic Plato discusses the aristocracy, in Book VIII he describes the four unjust constitutions of city and man. There is a timocracy, and the honor-driven man who resembles and rules that sort of government; there is oligarchy, which resembles and is ruled by a

man driven by his necessary appetites; there is democracy, which resembles and is ruled by a man driven by his unnecessary appetites; and there is tyranny, which resembles and is ruled by a man driven by his unlawful appetites. It is this book that plays a pivotal role in discussions about democracy, till this day.

This is the part in Book VIII (556a-558c) where Plato talks about democracy:

"Then democracy, I suppose, comes into being when the poor win, killing some of the others and casting out some, and share the regime and the ruling offices with those who are left on an equal basis; and, for the most part, the offices in it are given by lot."

"Yes," he said, "this is the establishment of democracy, whether it comes into being by arms or by the others' withdrawing due to fear."

"In what way do these men live?" I said. "And what is the character of such a regime? For it's plain that the man who is like it will turn out to be democratic."

"Yes, it is plain," he said.

"In the first place, then, aren't they free? And isn't the city full of freedom and free speech? And isn't there license in it to do whatever one wants?"

"That is what is said, certainly," he said.

"And where there's license, it's plain that each man would organize his life in it privately just as it pleases him."

"Yes, it is plain."

"Then I suppose that in this regime especially, all sorts of human beings, come to be."

"How could they fail to?"

"It is probably the fairest of the regimes," I said. "Just like a many-colored cloak decorated in all hues, this regime, decorated with all dispositions, would also look fairest, and many perhaps," I said, "like boys and women looking at many-colored things, would judge this to be the fairest regime."

"Quite so," he said.

"And, what's more, you blessed man," I said, "it's a convenient place to look for a regime."

"Why is that?"

"Because, thanks to its license, it contains all species of regimes, and it is probably necessary for the man who wishes to organize a city, as we were just doing, to go to a city under a democracy. He would choose the sort that pleases him, like a man going into a general store of regimes, and, once having chosen, he would thus establish his regime."

"Perhaps," he said, "he wouldn't be at a loss for patterns at least"

"And the absence of any compulsion to rule in this city," I said "even if you are competent to rule, or again to be ruled if you don't

want to be, or to make war when the others are making war, or to keep peace when the others are keeping it, if you don't desire peace; and if some law prevents you from ruling or being a judge, the absence of any a compulsion keeping you from ruling and being a judge anyhow, if you long to do so—isn't such a way of passing the time divinely sweet for the moment?"

"Perhaps," he said, "for the moment."

"And what about this? Isn't the gentleness toward some of the condemned exquisite? Or in such a regime haven't you yet seen men who have been sentenced to death or exile, nonetheless staying and carrying on right in the middle of things; and, as though no one cared or saw, stalking the land like a hero?"

"Yes, many," he said.

"And this regime's sympathy and total lack of pettiness in despising what we were saying so solemnly when we were founding the city—that unless a man has a transcendent nature he would never become good if from earliest childhood his play isn't noble and all his practices aren't such—how magnificently it tramples all this underfoot and doesn't care at all from what kinds of practices a man goes to c political action, but honors him if only he says he's well disposed toward the multitude?"

"It's a very noble regime," he said.

"Then, democracy," I said, "would have all this and other things akin to it and would be, as it seems, a sweet regime, without rulers and many-colored, dispensing a certain equality to equals and unequals alike."

Assignment 2: Spinoza


Spinoza (1632 – 1677); portrait by anonymous artist.

Text: Benedict de Spinoza, *A Theologico-Political Treatise (and A Political Treatise)*. Translation and Introduction by R.H.M. Elwes. Dover Publications, New York 2004. *Preface* pp. 1-11; Chapter 6 pp. 81-97; Chapters 13-15 pp. 175-199.

Available on the internet and in the reading room.

http://www.constitution.org/bs/theo_pol0.htm

The Dutch philosopher Spinoza laid the groundwork for the Enlightenment and modern biblical criticism. One reason for his notoriety at the time and his current fame is his historical critique of transcendent religion. Between the rise of Christianity and the mid-eighteenth century Spinoza is the first and the only thinker who radically denies the possibility of miracles and supernatural occurrences wrought by magic. The uncompromising formulations of the soon notorious chapter VI 'On Miracles' of his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* of 1670 were to reverberate for decades through every land in Europe.

In the Preface of his Tractatus Theologico-Politicus (p. 6/7) Spinoza wonders why those who profess the Christian religion quarrel so much and hate each other so intensely.

I have often wondered, that persons who make a boast of professing the Christian religion, namely, love, joy, peace, temperance, and charity to all men, should quarrel with such rancorous animosity, and display daily towards one another such bitter hatred, that this, rather than the virtues they claim, is the readiest criterion of their faith. Matters have long since come to such a pass, that one can only pronounce a man Christian, Turk, Jew, or Heathen, by his general appearance and attire, by his frequenting this or that place of worship, or employing the phraseology of a particular sect - as for manner of life, it is in all cases the same. Inquiry into the cause of this anomaly leads me unhesitatingly to ascribe it to the fact, that the ministries of the Church are regarded by the masses merely as dignities, her offices as posts of emolument - in short, popular religion may be summed up as respect for ecclesiastics. The spread of this misconception inflamed every worthless fellow with an intense desire to enter holy orders, and thus the love of diffusing God's religion degenerated into sordid avarice and ambition. Every church became a theatre, where orators, instead of church teachers, harangued, caring not to instruct the people, but striving to attract admiration, to bring opponents to public scorn, and to preach only novelties and paradoxes, such as would tickle the ears of their congregation. This state of things necessarily stirred up an amount of controversy, envy, and hatred, which no lapse of time could appease; so that we can scarcely wonder that of the old religion nothing survives but its outward forms (even these, in the mouth of the multitude, seem rather adulation than adoration of the Deity), and that faith has become a mere compound of credulity and prejudices - aye, prejudices too, which degrade man from rational being to beast, which completely stifle the power of judgment between true and false, which seem, in fact, carefully fostered for the purpose of extinguishing the last spark of reason! Piety, great God! and religion are become a tissue of ridiculous mysteries; men, who flatly despise reason, who reject and turn away from understanding as naturally corrupt, these, I say, these of all men, are thought, 0 lie most horrible! to possess light from on High. Verily, if they had but one spark of light from on High, they would not insolently rave, but would learn to worship God more wisely, and would be as

marked among their fellows for mercy as they now are for malice; if they were concerned for their opponents' souls, instead of for their own reputations, they would no longer fiercely persecute, but rather be filled with pity and compassion.

Assignment 3: Voltaire


Voltaire (1694 – 1778) at 24, by Catherine Lusurier after Nicolas de Largillière's painting.

Text: Voltaire, *Candide,: or, Optimism.* Orig. *Candide ou l'Optimisme*. Several editions available. Also on the internet (Gutenberg Project).

Available on internet and in the reading room.

http://www.gutenberg.org/files/19942/19942-h/19942-h.htm

- *Candide: Or Optimism.* Translation Theo Cuffe. Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth 1950 / 2006.
- *Candide, or, Optimism.* Translation Robert M. Adams. Norton, London / New York 1990.
- *Candide or Optimism.* Translation Burton Raffel. Yale University Press, London 2005.

Candide (1759) is the story of a friendly man who, though slapped in every direction by fate, clings desperately to the belief that he lives in 'the best of all possible worlds'. On the surface a witty, bantering tale, this eighteenth-century classic is actually a savage, satiric thrust at the philosophical optimism of Leibniz, that proclaims that all human suffering is part of a benevolent cosmic plan. The French philosopher's immortal narrative takes Candide around the world to discover that - contrary to the teachings of his distringuished tutor Dr. Pangloss - all is not always for the best. Alive with wit and graceful storytelling, *Candide* has become Voltaire's most celebrated work.

The stage of the following text from Candide *(Chapter 16) is South America. After having killed the brother of his beloved Cunégonde Candide escapes in the victim's Jesuit dress, together with his valet Cacambo. He vainly tries to rescue two naked ladies who appear to be lovers of two monkeys and eventually enters the land of the Oreillons (literally: big Ears), members of the Inca nobility.*

These sound reflections induced Candide to leave the meadow and to plunge into a wood. He supped there with Cacambo; and after cursing the Portuguese inquisitor, the Governor of Buenos Ayres, and the Baron, they fell asleep[Pg 71] on moss. On awaking they felt that they could not move; for during the night the Oreillons, who inhabited that country, and to whom the ladies had denounced them, had bound them with cords made of the bark of trees. They were encompassed by fifty naked Oreillons, armed with bows and arrows, with clubs and flint hatchets. Some were making a large cauldron boil, others were preparing spits, and all cried:

"A Jesuit! a Jesuit! we shall be revenged, we shall have excellent cheer, let us eat the Jesuit, let us eat him up!"

"I told you, my dear master," cried Cacambo sadly, "that those two girls would play us some ugly trick."

Candide seeing the cauldron and the spits, cried:

"We are certainly going to be either roasted or boiled. Ah! what would Master Pangloss say, were he to see how pure nature is formed? Everything is right, may be, but I declare it is very hard to have lost Miss Cunegonde and to be put upon a spit by Oreillons."

Cacambo never lost his head.

"Do not despair," said he to the disconsolate Candide, "I understand a little of the jargon of these people, I will speak to them."

"Be sure," said Candide, "to represent to them[Pg 72] how frightfully inhuman it is to cook men, and how very un-Christian."

"Gentlemen," said Cacambo, "you reckon you are to-day going to feast upon a Jesuit. It is all very well, nothing is more unjust than thus to treat your enemies. Indeed, the law of nature teaches us to kill our neighbour, and such is the practice all over the world. If we do not accustom ourselves to eating them, it is because we have better fare. But you have not the same resources as we; certainly it is much better to devour your enemies than to resign to the crows and rooks the fruits of your victory. But, gentlemen, surely you would not choose to eat your friends. You believe that you are going to spit a Jesuit, and he is your defender. It is the enemy of your enemies that you are going to roast. As for myself, I was born in your country; this gentleman is my master, and, far from being a Jesuit, he has just killed one, whose spoils he wears; and thence comes your mistake. To convince you of the truth of what I say, take his habit and carry it to the first barrier of the Jesuit kingdom, and inform yourselves whether my master did not kill a Jesuit officer. It will

not take you long, and you can always eat us if you find that I have lied to you. But I have told you the truth. You are too well acquainted[Pg 73] with the principles of public law, humanity, and justice not to pardon us."

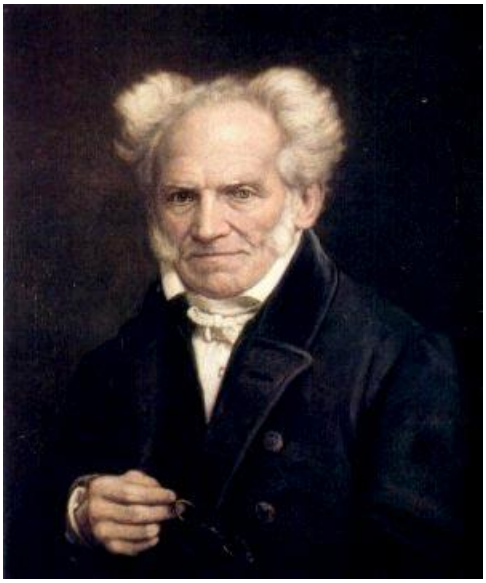
The Oreillons found this speech very reasonable. They deputed two of their principal people with all expedition to inquire into the truth of the matter; these executed their commission like men of sense, and soon returned with good news. The Oreillons untied their prisoners, showed them all sorts of civilities, offered them girls, gave them refreshment, and reconducted them to the confines of their territories, proclaiming with great joy:

"He is no Jesuit! He is no Jesuit!"

Candide could not help being surprised at the cause of his deliverance.

"What people!" said he; "what men! what manners! If I had not been so lucky as to run Miss Cunegonde's brother through the body, I should have been devoured without redemption. But, after all, pure nature is good, since these people, instead of feasting upon my flesh, have shown me a thousand civilities, when then I was not a Jesuit."

Assignment 4: Schopenhauer


Arthur Schopenhauer (1788 – 1860), picture Johann Schäfer, 1859.

Text: Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Freedom of the Will* (except the fourth chapter). Orig. *Preisschrift über die Freiheit des Willens*, 1839, Several editions available. Available in the reading room.

- *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will*. Translation Eric F.J. Payne, ed. Günther Zöller, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999.
- *On the Freedom of the Will*, (2), Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 1995.
- *Essay on the Freedom of the Will.* Translation Konstantin Kolenda. Dover Publications, New York 2005.

And see: http://bookzz.org/book/895701/817ae1

Chosen as the winning entry in a competition held by the Royal Norwegian Society of Sciences, Schopenhauer's *Prize Essay on the Freedom of the Will* marked the beginning of its author's public recognition and is widely regarded as one of the most brilliant treatments of free will and determinism. Schopenhauer portrays human action as thoroughly determined but also argues that the freedom which cannot be established in the sphere of human action is preserved at the level of our innermost being as individuated will, whose reality transcends all dependency on outside factors.

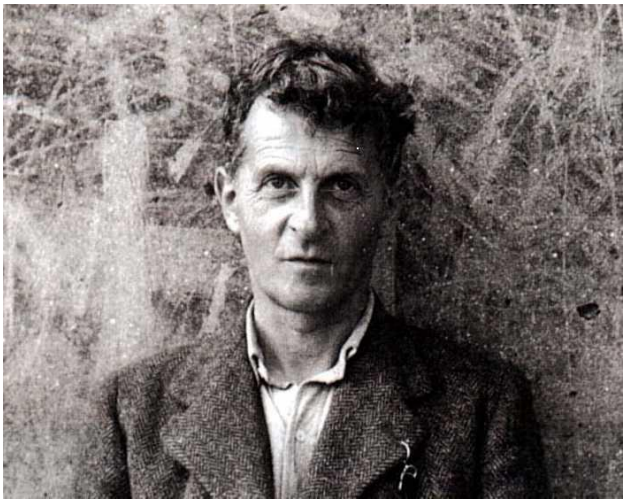
In the first chapter of his essay Schopenhauer presents three forms of freedom: physical freedom, intellectual freedom and moral freedom. The following two pages introduce moral freedom.

c) So I turn directly to the third kind, namely to *moral freedom*. This is really the *liberum arbitrium* cited in the question of the Royal Society. This concept connects with that of physical freedom in a way which makes its necessarily much later origination understandable. Physical freedom, as noted above, has to do only with material obstacles; it is at once present when they are absent. But in some cases it has been observed that a man, without being hindered by material obstacles, was restrained by mere motives—such as threats, promises, dangers, and the like—from acting in a way which, if these motives were absent, would have certainly expressed his will. Consequently, the question was raised whether such a man was still free, or whether the actions which express his actual will could really be checked and prevented just as effectively by a strong countermotive as by a physical obstacle. A sound mind would find no difficulty in arriving at the answer: a motive can never act in the same ways as a physical obstacle. Undoubtedly the latter easily transcends human bodily powers unconditionally, while a motive can never be irresistible in itself and has no absolute power but can be always offset by a stronger countermotive, provided that such a countermotive is present and that the particular man can be determined by it. We often observe that even the strongest of all motives—to preserve one's life—is outweighed by other motives, for example, in suicide or in sacrificing one's life for others, for one's convictions, and for various causes. Conversely, all degrees of the most refined tortures on the rack have now and again been overcome by the mere thought that otherwise life would be lost. But even though it were evident from this that the motives bring with them no purely objec-

tive and absolute compulsion, still one could ascribe to them a subjective and relative compulsion, namely, relative to the person involved. In either case the result is the same. Hence the question remains: is the will itself free?

The concept of freedom, until now conceived only in respect to *ability,* was thus put in a relation to *willing,* and so the problem arose whether the willing itself is free. But on close inspection, the original, purely empirical, and hence popular concept of freedom shows itself incapable of becoming thus related to willing. For according to it "free" means "in accordance with one's own will." Consequently, to ask whether the will itself is free, is to ask whether the will is in accordance with itself. This, of course, is self-evident, but says also nothing at all. The empirical concept of freedom signifies: "I am free when I can *do what I will.*" Here in the phrase "what I will" the freedom is already affirmed. But when we now inquire about the freedom of willing itself, the question would then take this form: "Can you also will your volitions?", as if a volition depended on another volition which lay behind it. Suppose that this question is answered in the affirmative, what then? Another question would arise: "Can you also will that which you will to will?" Thus we would be pushed back indefinitely, since we would think that a volition depended on a previous, deeper lying volition. In vain would we try to arrive in this way finally at a volition which we must think of and accept as dependent on nothing else. But

Assignment 5: Wittgenstein


Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 – 1951)

Text: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations.* §§ 1-108.
Translation G.E.M. Anscombe. Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 1953, 1967, 1998. (pp. vii-viii, 1-47).

Available in the reading room.

Philosophical Investigations was published posthumously in 1953. Part I, consisting of 693 numbered paragraphs, was ready for printing in 1946, but rescinded from the publisher by Wittgenstein. Part II was added on by the editors, trustees of his *Nachlass*.

In the Preface Wittgenstein states that his new thoughts would be better understood by contrast with his old thoughts, those in the *Tractatus*; and indeed, most of Part I of the book is essentially critical. Its new insights can be understood as primarily exposing fallacies in the traditional way of thinking about language, truth, thought, intentionality, and, perhaps mainly, philosophy. In this sense, it is conceived of as a therapeutical work, conceiving of philosophy itself as it should be - as therapy. Part II, focusing on philosophical psychology, perception etc., is not as critical. Rather, it points to new perspectives in addressing specific philosophical issues. It is, therefore, more easily read alongside Wittgenstein's other writings of the later period.

Here follow the first pages of the Philosophical Investigations*:*

"Cum ipsi (majores homines) appellabant rem aliquam, et cum secundum eam vocem corpus ad aliquid movebant, videbam, et tenebam hoc ab eis vocari rem illam, quod sonabant, cum eam vellent ostendere. Hoc autem eos velle ex motu corporis aperiebatur: tamquam verbis naturalibus omnium gentium, quae fiunt vultu et nutu oculorum, ceterorumque membrorum actu, et sonitu vocis indicante affectionem animi in petendis, habendis, rejiciendis, fugiendisve rebus. Ita verba in variis sententiis locis suis posita, et crebro audita, quarum rerum signa essent, paulatim colligebam, measque jam voluntates, edomito in eis signis ore, per haec enuntiabam." (Augustine, *Confessions*, I. 8.)

"When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shewn by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires." (Augustine, *Confessions*, I. 8.)

These words, it seems to me, give us a particular picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the individual words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names.——In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands.

Augustine does not speak of there being any difference between kinds of word. If you describe the learning of language in this way you are, I believe, thinking primarily of nouns like "table", "chair", "bread", and of people's names, and only secondarily of the names of certain actions and properties; and of the remaining kinds of word as something that will take care of itself.

Now think of the following use of language: I send someone shopping. I give him a slip marked "five red apples". He takes the slip to the shopkeeper, who opens the drawer marked "apples"; then he looks up the word "red" in a table and finds a colour sample opposite it; then he says the series of cardinal numbers—I assume that he knows them by heart—up to the word "five" and for each number he takes an apple of the same colour as the sample out of the drawer.——It is in this and similar ways that one operates with words.——"But how does he know where and how he is to look up the word 'red' and what he is to do with the word 'five'?"——Well, I assume that he acts as I have described. Explanations come to an end somewhere.—But what is the meaning of the word "five"?—No such thing was in question here, only how the word "five" is used.

2. That philosophical concept of meaning has its place in a primitive idea of the way language functions. But one can also say that it is the idea of a language more primitive than ours.
Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. The language is meant to serve for communication between a builder A and an assistant B. A is building with building stones: there are blocks, pillars, slabs and beams. B has to pass the stones, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words "block", "pillar", "slab", "beam". A calls them out;—B brings the stone which he has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call.——Conceive this as a complete primitive language.

3. Augustine, we might say, does describe a system of communication; only not everything that we call language is this system. And one has to say this in many cases where the question arises "Is this an appropriate description or not?" The answer is: "Yes, it is appropriate, but only for this narrowly circumscribed region, not for the whole of what you were claiming to describe."
It is as if someone were to say: "A game consists in moving objects about on a surface according to certain rules . . ."—and we replied: You seem to be thinking of board games, but there are others. You can make your definition correct by expressly restricting it to those games.

4. Imagine a script in which the letters were used to stand for sounds, and also as signs of emphasis and punctuation. (A script can be conceived as a language for describing sound-patterns.) Now imagine someone interpreting that script as if there were simply a correspondence of letters to sounds and as if the letters had not also completely different functions. Augustine's conception of language is like such an over-simple conception of the script.

5. If we look at the example in §i, we may perhaps get an inkling how much this general notion of the meaning of a word surrounds the working of language with a haze which makes clear vision impossible. It disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of the words.
A child uses such primitive forms of language when it learns to talk. Here the teaching of language is not explanation, but training.

6. We could imagine that the language of §2 was the whole language of A and B; even the whole language of a tribe. The children are brought up to perform these actions, to use these words as they do so, and

to react in this way to the words of others.

An important part of the training will consist in the teacher's pointing to the objects, directing the child's attention to them, and at the same time uttering a word; for instance, the word "slab" as he points to that shape. (I do not want to call this "ostensive definition", because the child cannot as yet ask what the name is. I will call it "ostensive teaching of words".——I say that it will form an important part of the training, because it is so with human beings; not because it could not be imagined otherwise.) This ostensive teaching of words can be said to establish an association between the word and the thing. But what does this mean? Well, it may mean various things; but one very likely thinks first of all that a picture of the object comes before the child's mind when it hears the word. But now, if this does happen—is it the purpose of the word?—Yes, it may be the purpose.—I can imagine such a use of words (of series of sounds). (Uttering a word is like striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination.) But in the language of §2 it is not the purpose of the words to evoke images. (It may, of course, be discovered that that helps to attain the actual purpose.)

But if the ostensive teaching has this effect,—am I to say that it effects an understanding of the word? Don't you understand the call "Slab!" if you act upon it in such-and-such a way?—Doubtless the ostensive teaching helped to bring this about; but only together with a particular training. With different training the same ostensive teaching of these words would have effected a quite different understanding.

"I set the brake up by connecting up rod and lever."—Yes, given the whole of the rest of the mechanism. Only in conjunction with that is it a brake-lever, and separated from its support it is not even a lever; it may be anything, or nothing.

Assignment 6: Margalit

 Avishai Margalit (1939)

Text: Avishai Margalit *The Decent Society*, Part III. Decency as a social concept. Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 1996, pp. 115-186.

Available in the reading room.

From Plato till John Rawls political philosophy has dealt with the question of the just society, but not with the question of the decent society. In *The Decent Society* Margalit argues that the pursuit of decency, understood primarily in terms of the absence of humiliation, takes precedence over the pursuit of the ideal of justice. A decent society, in Margalit's view, is a society whose institutions do not humiliate its members. In the tradition of Karl Popper, and taking position against Rawls, he presents the reasons for choosing the avoidance of evil rather than the pursuit of the good. It is not justice that brings us to politics but injustice and humiliation.

In his Introduction to The Decent Society (pp. 4/5) Margalit writes:

I began with a rough characterization of a decent society as a nonhumiliating one. Why characterize the decent society negatively, as nonhumiliating, rather than positively, as one that, for example, respects its members? There are three reasons for this: one moral, one logical, one cognitive. The moral reason sterns from my conviction that there is a weighty asymmetry between eradicating evil and promoting good.' It is much more urgent to
remove painful evils than to create enjoyable benefits. Humiliation is a painful evil, while respect is a benefit. Therefore eliminating humiliation should be given priority over paying respect.

The logical reason is based on the distinction between goals which can be achieved directly and intelligently and those which are essentially by-products and cannot be achieved directly. People who want to be spontaneous, for example, cannot do so directly by deciding to. The most they can do is pretend to be acting spontaneously. Spontaneity is essentially a by-product rather than a primary goal. According people respect may also be essentially a by-product of one's general behavior toward people, while this is not true of nonhumiliation. Perhaps there isn't any behavior that we can identify as extending respect (in the sense that there are specific acts that we identify as bestowing military honor, such as saluting). Perhaps we simply grant respect through acts intended for other purposes, so that the respect granted is only a by-product. In contrast, there are specific acts, such as spitting in someone's face, that are humiliating without being by-products of other acts.

The third, cognitive, reason is that it is easier to identify humiliating than respectful behavior, just as it is easier to identify illness than health. Health and honor are both concepts involving defense. We defend our honor and protect our health. Disease and humiliation are concepts involving attack. It is easier to identify attack situations than defense situations, since the former are based on a clear contrast between the attacker and the attacked, while the latter can exist even without an identifiable attacker.

All these are reasons for choosing to characterize the decent society negatively rather than positively. In a positive characterization, a decent society is one that accords respect through its institutions to the people under its authority. As we shall see, it will sometimes be necessary to use this positive characterization of the decent society as well as the negative one we began with.