

## Phil 6014: Intro Philosophy of Language

CRN: 94921; Major Williams Hall 225

Fall 2010: Mondays, 3:15pm-6pm

Instructor: Ted Parent

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Office Hours: Mon. 2-3pm, Tues. 11:20-12:20, and by appointment.

This is a historical introduction to the **philosophy of language**, the subdiscipline of philosophy concerned with the nature of language, and (on a broader construal) the nature of representation. Many times, philosophy of language is oriented toward the question “What is *meaning*?” and related questions like “What is *reference*?” Yet it also takes up certain explanatory tasks, such as “How do we *acquire* a language?,” “What does *knowledge* of a language consist in?,” and “How is *communication* possible?”

In addition, I am interested in how we use representations to *understand* things: Does language “limit” the ways we think about the world? Are there limits to talking about a language in that very language?

In this course, we will study theories in the philosophy of language that attempt to address these issues and more. We will start with Frege in the late 19th century, and trace the historical development of phil language up through the externalists in the 70s and 80s.

### Required Texts:

- Martinich, A. P. *Philosophy of Language*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.  
All readings will be from this book unless otherwise noted.
- Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, revised 4<sup>th</sup> edition, trans. Anscombe, Hacker, and Schulte, West Sussex: Blackwell, 2009. (Note: This is the same edition of PI that Klagge will be using for his Spring Wittgenstein seminar.)
- Additional readings posted on Scholar, marked below with an ‘\*’.

### Recommended Texts:

- Blackburn, S. *Spreading the Word: Groundings in the Philosophy of Language* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. Chapter 1 is available at:  
<http://www.philoscience.unibe.ch/documents/kursarchiv/SS02/blackburn1.pdf>
- Lycan, W. G. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Routledge, 2008.

### Course Assignments:

- (1) At each meeting (with a few exceptions; see below), there will be a paragraph due on the reading for that week. The task will be to “sketch what you think is the most compelling objection to a view presented in *x*,” where *x* is the relevant reading. Satisfactory performance on these assignments more of a requirement for the course than a constituent of the final grade. This means that unsatisfactory performance on these assignments can lower your final grade. However, exemplary performance can also act as “extra credit” to boost your final grade.

- (2) Two Argument Reconstructions (no min length; max length is 3 pages) due **Aug 30** and **Oct 11**; each is worth 25% of the final grade.
- (3) Term Paper (min. length 15 pages) is due on **Dec 10**, worth 35% of the final grade. You can choose any topic that bears on the course material, and you should feel free to consult me in choosing your topic.
- (4) Participation is worth 15% of the final grade.

I do not accept late assignments, unless I have hard evidence of a legitimate emergency. That means **THERE WILL BE NO INCOMPLETES**, barring such an emergency.

Philosophy readings are difficult. That's why I recommend reading the weekly material *twice*. However, it is sufficient only to skim the texts first, just to get a sense of the main ideas. After that, read the material again *carefully*. Your earlier skimming should provide a basic "framework" which enables you to process better what you read.

You should come to each class ready to discuss. To this end, you should *read with a pen and note the points of interest*. Indeed, it is best to read the text as if you were *engaged in a conversation* with the author: Raise questions, ask for clarification, and levy criticisms in the margins. Besides preparing you for discussion, these annotations help you rediscover the most relevant/fruitful passages for the writing assignments.

Be forewarned that the clear majority of my comments on your writing will be critical. Of course I strive to be courteous nonetheless. Yet *please* do not take any of my criticisms personally. Loads of critical feedback is simply how academic philosophy operates. And in this class, the purpose of this is not to belittle or discourage you, but to hone your writing/thinking skills.

Speaking of courtesy, I insist that discussions proceed in a respectful and well-mannered fashion. Philosophy is hard, and no one should be made to feel stupid. Also, taking an aggressive tone is inappropriate. It usually signals that the goal has become to win a dispute, rather than to co-operate in a mutual endeavor to "seek the truth."

### **Tentative Schedule**

† indicates a session where no paragraph is due  
[Readings in square brackets are optional]

#### **PART ONE: NAMING AND DESCRIBING**

- †Aug 23      Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Nominatum;" E.E. Constance Jones, "A New 'Law of Thought' and its Implications." [Frege, "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry"]
- †Aug 30      \*Alexis Meinong, "Theory of Objects;" Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting" [J.S. Mill, "Of Names"] **Arg Reconstruction due Aug 30**

## PART TWO: EMPIRICISM ABOUT MEANING

- Sept 6            \*Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, §1–§3.1, §4.1–4.1212, §5.5561–§6, and §6.37–§7. [\*G.E.M. Anscombe, selections from *An Introduction to Wittgenstein's Tractatus*; Locke, "Of Words"]
- Sept 13           \*Rudolph Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language;" Carl Hempel, "Empiricist Criteria of Cognitive Significance: Problems and Changes"
- Sept 20           \*Susan Stebbing, "Logical Positivism and Analysis;" \*Susanne Langer, *Philosophy in a New Key*, ch. 1
- Sept 27           W.V.O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" and "Translation and Meaning" [\*H.P. Grice & P.F. Strawson, "In Defense of a Dogma"]

## PART THREE: MEANING AS (OPPOSED TO?) USE

- Oct 4            Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§138-242. [\*Alice Ambrose, "Linguistic Approaches to Philosophical Problems"]
- †Oct 11           Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§243-315. [Saul Kripke, *On Rules & Private Language* (selections)] **Arg Reconstruction due Oct 11**
- Oct 18           J.L. Austin, "Performative Utterances;" Grice, "Meaning" [Searle, "The Structure of Illocutionary Acts"]
- Oct 25           Grice, "Logic and Conversation;" Keith Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions" [Strawson, "On Referring"]

## PART FOUR: EXTERNALISM RISING

- Nov 1            Alfred Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics;" Donald Davidson, "Truth and Meaning"
- †Nov 8           Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture I [\*Searle, "Proper Names"]
- Nov 15           **NO CLASS. Thanksgiving Break.**
- Nov 22           Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture II and Appendix
- Nov 29           Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'"
- \*Dec 6           Ruth Millikan, "Truth-Rules, Hoverflies, and the Kripke-Wittgenstein Paradox"

**Term Paper due on Friday, December 10<sup>th</sup> at 10am in my office.**