

Philosophy 308: The Language Revolution
Fall 2015
Tuesdays, Thursdays, 9am–10:15am

Hamilton College
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Syllabus

Course Description and Overview

If there is one unifying theme for twentieth-century philosophy, it is the study of language. Some philosophers believed that all philosophical questions arise from misuses of language. Others believed that clarifying our uses of language can lead us to solutions to perennial philosophical questions, like the mind-body problem or whether God exists. Still others explored the nature of language and its uses for its own sake. The profound developments in logic in the twentieth century were concomitant with this focus on language.

We will start by looking briefly at some pre-twentieth-century views of language and Gottlob Frege's seminal work on language in the late nineteenth century, especially his distinction between sense and reference. The second part of the course, roughly the first half of the term, will focus on the nature of reference: How do words hook on to the world? The third part of the course, roughly the second half of the term, will focus on the nature of meaning: How does language get its content? For the final two weeks of the term, after the Thanksgiving break, we will look at aspects of language which are generally called pragmatics and which concern how language connects with action. As a case study, we will read two recent papers on the semantics of racial epithets.

Along the way, we will read some of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, including Russell, Wittgenstein, Strawson, Grice, Quine, Putnam, and Kripke.

Texts

Required readings are listed below and available on the course website, as will be my class notes. There are many good secondary sources in philosophy of language. See the course bibliography, also available on the website.

On-Line Resources

The website for this course is:

http://www.thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Course_Websites/Language_F15/Course_Home.html

The course website includes the syllabus and schedule, readings, class notes, handouts, and links to websites specifically selected for this course. I ordinarily use Blackboard only to post grades.

Accessibility

We learn in different ways and the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. Some people process information best by speaking and listening, others by reading. Some folks learn best in groups; others focus best in solitude. Your success in this class is important to me, so please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. If there are circumstances that adversely affect your performance in this class, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can work together to develop strategies for adapting assignments to meet your needs and the course requirements. Hamilton College and I will make reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. If you are eligible to receive an accommodation and would like to make a request for this course, please discuss it with me during the first two weeks of class and provide Allen Harrison, Associate Dean of Students (Elihu Root House; 315-859-4021) with appropriate documentation.

Assignments and Grading

Your responsibilities this course include the following, with their contributions to your grade calculation in parentheses:

- Attendance and participation
- Readings
- Group Text Annotations (10%)
- In-Class Presentation (20%)
- Two papers (45%; 20% for the first and 25% for the second)
- Final Exam (25%)

Attendance and Readings: While there is no direct reward or penalty for attendance, I expect students to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned reading.

Group Text Annotations: For selected readings, indicated by asterisks in the schedule below, I will provide excerpts as shared documents in Google Drive. Each student should make at least two comments on each shared document before the class in which the reading is to be discussed. Your comments may be directed at either the reading itself or other, prior comments. Some of the selections are much longer than the excerpts I will provide; you are responsible for both the excerpt and the entire reading.

Presentation: Each student is required to participate in one in-class presentation. Presentations may be done individually or in pairs. You should prepare a ten-to-fifteen minute presentation. Given discussion, your time leading the class may vary from half a class period to a full class period. I will distribute more specific guidelines, as well as a sign-up sheet, in class. I welcome, indeed encourage, you to use your presentation topic as the theme for either your first or second paper.

Papers: Each student will write two short papers. The first paper, 4-6 pages on any theme from Part II of the course (Reference) is due on Tuesday, October 13. The second paper, 5-8 pages on any topic in the material from Part III of the course (Meaning) is due on Tuesday, December 3. I will distribute more details about each paper in class.

Final Exam: The final exam will be given on Tuesday, December 15, 7pm–10pm. Preparatory questions will be posted and distributed.

On Grades: Grades on assignments will be posted on Blackboard, along with a running total, which I call your grade calculation. Your grade calculation is a guide for me to use in assigning you a final grade. There are no rules binding how I translate your grade calculation, which will appear in Blackboard as a percentage, into a letter grade. In particular, the Hamilton College key for translating your letter grades into percentages, used for graduate school admissions, is not a tool for calculating your final grade. I welcome further discussion of the purposes and methods of grading, as well as my own grading policies.

Both the [Writing Center](#) and the [Oral Communications Center](#) have astoundingly wonderful sets of resources to help you write and speak more effectively.

The Hamilton College Honor Code will be enforced.

Office Hours

My office hours for the Fall 2015, term are 11am - noon, Monday through Friday. My office is 202 College Hill Road, Room 210.

Topics and Readings

Note: Readings marked with asterisks contain excerpts for group annotation. You are responsible for both the excerpt and the entire reading.

Part I: Before the Revolution

Class	Date	Topic	Readings for Class
1	August 27	Introduction: Plato and the Moderns	Lewis Carroll, <i>Through the Looking Glass</i> , Chapter 6 Selections from Plato's "Sophist", Hume's <i>Inquiry</i> , Berkeley's <i>Principles</i> , and Locke's <i>Essay</i> Swift, "Getting Rid of Words"
2	September 1	Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Responses to the Ontological Argument	Selections from Anselm, Gaunilo, Descartes, Caterus, Hume and Kant
3	September 3	Introduction: Two Nineteenth-Century Views	*Meinong, "The Theory of Objects," §1-§6 Mill, "Of Names"

Part II: Reference

Class	Date	Topic	Readings for Class
4	September 8	Frege's Projects	Martinich, Introduction to <i>The Philosophy of Language</i> *Frege, from Preface to <i>Begriffsschrift</i> Frege, from Preface to <i>Grundlagen</i>
5	September 10	Fregean Intensionalism	Frege, "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry"
6	September 15	The Sense/Reference Distinction	*Frege, "On Sense and Reference"
7	September 17	The Description Theory	Russell, "Descriptions"
8	September 22	Presupposition	Strawson, "On Referring"
9	September 24	The Attributive/Referential Distinction	*Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions"
10	September 29	Direct Reference I	Wittgenstein, "On 'Moses'" Kripke, from <i>Naming and Necessity</i>
11	October 1	Direct Reference II	*Kripke, from <i>Naming and Necessity</i>
12	October 6	Natural Kinds and Externalism	Kripke, "On Gold" *Putnam, "Meaning and Reference"
13	October 8	Midterm or Reference Wrap Up	Catch Up!

Part III: Meaning

Class	Date	Topic	Readings for Class
14	October 13 Paper #1 due	Logical Empiricism	Wittgenstein, from <i>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</i> Ayer, "The Principle of Verification"
15	October 20	The Verification Theory	Hempel, "Empiricist Criteria of Cognitive Significance: Problems and Changes"
16	October 22	Meaning Holism I	*Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"
17	October 27	Meaning Holism II	Quine, "Ontological Relativity"
18	October 29	Meaning Holism III	*Quine, "Ontological Relativity"
19	November 3	Meanings Skepticism I	*Wittgenstein, "Meaning as Use" Wittgenstein, "On Private Language"
20	November 5	Meanings Skepticism II	Wittgenstein, from <i>Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics</i> *Kripke, "On Rules and Private Languages"
21	November 10	Meanings Skepticism III	Kripke, "On Rules and Private Languages"
22	November 12	Intention-Based Semantics I	*Grice, "Meaning"
23	November 17	Intention-Based Semantics II	Schiffer, "Toward an Account of S-Meaning"
24	November 19	Meaning Wrap Up	Catch Up!

Part IV: Pragmatics

Class	Date	Topic	Readings for Class
25	December 1	Speech Acts	*Austin, "Performative Utterances"
26	December 3 Paper #2 due	Conversational Implicature	Grice, "Logic and Conversation"
27	December 8	Semantics of Surs	Hom, "The Semantics of Racial Epithets"
28	December 10	Perspectivalism	*Anderson and Lepore, "What Did You Call Me? Slurs as Prohibited Words"

Final exam: Tuesday, December 15, 7pm–10pm