

Philosophy of Language
Phil 4(6)300
T/Th 2:00 – 3:15
Peabody Hall 220

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Office Hours: Th 3:30-5:00, or by appointment

1. Course Description

“Unbeknownst to most people, a secret Chinese program to land a human being on the planet Guban succeeded in January 2008.” This sentence is probably false. Presumably there is no secret Chinese space program and no planet with the name ‘Guban.’ Nevertheless, this sentence is proper English, and everyone who speaks this language sufficiently well will be able to understand its meaning. In this course, we will investigate how linguistic expressions acquire meaning.

The course will fall broadly into two parts. The first part focuses on the question what kind of meaning linguistic expressions have. It is natural to assume that the meanings of proper names (e.g. ‘Plato’) and definite descriptions (e.g. ‘the cat that lives next door’) are simply the things referred to by these expressions. We will discuss the plausibility of this claim by considering the views of Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, P.F. Strawson, Keith Donnellan, John Searle, Saul Kripke, and others. In this part of the course, we will also consider the meaning of natural kind terms (e.g. “water”) and various issues related to propositional attitudes.

In the second part, we will inquire more broadly into the nature of linguistic meaning. In order to do so, we will look at different theories of meaning, including Donald Davidson’s truth-condition theory, Paul Grice’s psychological theory of meaning, and J.L. Austin’s speech act theory of meaning. We will also consider questions concerning the use of language for communication, as they were discussed by Austin, Quine, and Davidson. We will conclude the course with some skeptical questions concerning the traditional picture of language raised by Ludwig Wittgenstein.

2. Assignments

Undergraduate Students:

i. Weekly Reading Assignments and Participation:

In this course, we will read important philosophical texts. Please read the assigned texts carefully *before* each session so that you are prepared to contribute to the class discussion with comments and questions. Your participation and attendance will be reflected in your **participation grade**.

ii. Two Critical Reports (Due Feb. 05 and April 01):

You are required to write two critical reports of approximately 3 pages (double-spaced, 12pt font). In these reports, I would like you to explicate and evaluate one argument of your choice from one of the texts covered in class. I am particularly interested in a clear and concise explication of the argument and a short discussion of its plausibility.

iii. Take Home Exam (To be handed out Feb. 26 and due March 06):

I will hand out a take home exam at midterm, containing a number of questions concerning the texts read in the first half of the course.

iv. Final Essay (Due on the last day of classes):

You are required to write a final essay of approximately 10 pages (double-spaced, 12pt font). In this essay, you should compare and discuss the views of two authors covered in the course. I will not assign a topic. But I encourage you to confirm your topic with me before you start working on it.

Graduate Students:

- i. Small essay, approximately 10 pages (Due March 01).
- ii. Final essay, approximately 15 pages (Due on the last day of classes).

3. Grade

Undergraduate Students:

Your grade will consist of the following four components:

- i. Participation: 10% of your final grade
- ii. Critical Reports: each 15% of your final grade
- iii. Take Home Exam: 25% of your final grade
- iv. Final Essay: 35% of your final grade

Graduate Students:

Your grade will consist of the following three components:

- i. Participation: 15% of you final grade
- ii. Small Essay: 35% of your final grade
- iii. Final Essay: 50% of your final grade

4. Readings

Michael Morris. *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

A.P. Martinich, (ed.). *The Philosophy of Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. All additional texts will be made available on the course website.

5. Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

All your work submitted in this class must be your own. As you know, plagiarism is a serious violation of the Academic Honesty Policy and will be reported to the university.

Please familiarize yourself with the University of Georgia's Academic Honesty Policy, located at: www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/acadhon.htm

6. Syllabus (Subject to Change):

0. Introduction:

T 01/08 Course Contents and Formalities

1. Background: Locke on the Nature of Language

Th 01/10 Morris, Ch. 1
John Locke, Of Words (Martinich, pp. 509-513)

2. Reference and Referring

Frege on Sense and Reference

T 01/15 Morris, Ch. 2 (sections 2.1-2.5)
Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Nominatum" (Martinich, pp. 199-207)

Th 01/17 Morris, Ch. 2 (sections 2.6-2.8)
Frege, cont'd

Russell on Definite Descriptions

T 01/22 Morris, Ch. 3 (sections 3.1-3.4)
Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting" (Martinich, pp. 212-220)

Th 01/24 Morris, Ch. 3 (section 3.5)
P.F. Strawson, "On Referring" (Martinich, pp. 228-242)

T 01/29 Morris, Ch. 3 (section 3.6)
Keith Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions" (Martinich, 247-258)

Kripke on Proper Names

Th 01/31 Morris, Ch. 4 (sections 4.1– 4.4)
Saul Kripke, "Naming and Necessity" (Martinich, pp. 272-287)

T 02/05 Morris, Ch. 4 (sections 4.5 – 4.7)
Critical Report #1

Natural-kind Terms

Th 02/07 Morris, Ch. 5 (sections 5.1-5.4)
Hilary Putnam, "Meaning and Reference" (Martinich, pp. 288-295)

T 02/12 Morris, Ch. 5 (section 5.5)

Gareth Evans, "The Causal Theory of Names" (Martinich, pp. 296-307)

Reference and Propositional Attitudes

- Th 02/14 Morris, Ch. 7 (sections 7.1-7.3)
W.V. Quine, "Quantifiers and Propositional Attitudes" (Martinich, pp. 355-360)
- T 02/19 Morris, Ch. 7 (sections 7.4-7.5)
John Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical" (Martinich, pp. 339-348)

The Semantics of Propositional Attitudes

- Th 02/21 Morris, Ch. 8 (sections 8.1-8.5)
Saul Kripke, "A Puzzle about Belief" (Martinich, pp. 405-431)
- T 02/26 Morris, Ch. 8 (sections 8.6-8.7)
Donald Davidson, "On Saying That" (Martinich, pp. 361-370)

3. The Nature of Linguistic Meaning

Davidson on Truth and Meaning

- Th 02/28 Morris, Ch. 9 (sections 9.1-9.4)
Donald Davidson, "Truth and Meaning" (Martinich, pp. 98-109)
- T 03/04 Morris, Ch. 9 (sections 9.5-9.7)**
Take Home Exam

Quine and Davidson on Translation and Interpretation

- Th 03/06 Morris, Ch. 10 (sections 10.1-10.2)
W.V. Quine, "Word and Object," Ch. 2
- T 03/18 Morris, Ch. 10 (sections 10.3-10.6)
Donald Davidson, "Radical Interpretation"

Quine on the Indeterminacy of Translation

- Th 03/20 Morris, Ch. 11 (sections 11.1-11.2)
W.V. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (Martinich, pp. 47-60)
- T 03/25 Morris, Ch. 11 (sections 11.3-11.4)
W.V. Quine, "On the Reasons for Indeterminacy of Translation"

Austin on Speech Acts

- Th 03/27 Morris, Ch. 12 (sections 12.1-12.3)
J.L. Austin, "Performative Utterances" (Martinich, 130-139)

T **04/01** Morris, Ch. 12 (sections 12.4-12.5)
 John Searle, "The Structure of Illocutionary Acts"
Critical Report #2

Grice on Meaning

Th 04/03 Morris, Ch. 13 (sections 13.1-13.2)
 H.P. Grice, "Meaning" (Martinich, 92-97)

T 04/08 Morris, Ch. 13 (sections 13.4-13.7)

Kripke on the Rule-Following Paradox

Th 04/10 Morris, Ch. 14 (sections 14.1-14.3)
 Saul Kripke, "On Rules and Private Language" (Martinich, pp.
 531-544)

T 04/15 Morris, Ch. 14 (sections 14.4-14.6)

Wittgenstein on the Augustinian Picture

Th 04/17 Morris, Ch. 15 (sections 15.1-15.3)
 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§ 1-32

T 04/22 Morris, Ch. 15 (sections 15.4-15.5)

Th 04/24 Wrap up session
Final Essay