College of Arts – Online Course Outline

Course Code:	Section:	Semester:
PHIL*3250	01	F16

Course Title:
Philosophy of Language

Instructor:
M. McCullagh

Brief Course Synopsis:
This course is an introduction to contemporary philosophy of language. We'll start by tracing a central controversy over the simplest words: proper names (e.g. "Aristotle," "Guelph"). Gottlob Frege argued that each name has a "sense" as well as a "reference". Bertrand Russell thought that names were abbreviated descriptions. (He had a theory of descriptions to go with this claim). Much later Saul Kripke influentially criticized Russell's entire picture, replacing it with another. Moving beyond names we can ask more generally, how do words get their meanings? There are several answers that have been proposed. Some of them are even alleged to have exciting consequences, e.g. that scepticism is false. Another topic is what we do with words: the actions we perform with them. J. L. Austin's work on speech acts is a starting point; Paul Grice's theory of "conversational implicature" is another major development. Finally there is the topic of context-dependence: how words like "here" and "I" refer not just because of what they mean but because of where, and by whom, they're being used. We'll read some contemporary essays showing how these concepts are applied in contemporary debates.