

Course description

Philosophy of
Language
(PHIL 3250)

Fall 2014

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Content

This course is an introduction to contemporary philosophy of language. One of the driving questions in this field is, How do words connect with things in the world? One early answer to this was given by Bertrand Russell and was based on his view that we can think about a thing only if we are either directly acquainted with it or we can frame a description that picks it out. On his view almost all of what we think about is by description, so he had a theory of how descriptions work, which was the central part of his story about how language in general works. That theory, and its applications, have been behind many of the great controversies in 20th century philosophy of language, and we will pursue several of those debates. In addition we will look at ways in which philosophers have come up with theories about how the strictly literal meaning of a statement is supplemented. Grice's theory of "conversational implicature" is the starting point for that topic. Other questions include whether a word has a "sense" in addition to having a "reference," and the degree to which compositionality—the recombining of words to make new sentences—accords with different accounts of how words and sentences get their meanings.

Work

You will

- submit 7 brief writings, on assigned topics;
- write 2 short (1,500 words or so) essays on topics you come up with.

Textbook

Philosophy of Language: a contemporary introduction, second edition, by William Lycan. All other materials are in PDF form and are linked on the "schedule" page.

Lectures

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:00–2:20 pm in [Graham 2310](#).

Grading

<i>Item</i>	<i>Value</i>
Brief writings (all 7 are graded, best 5 count)	5 × 10 = 50
Essays	2 × 25 = 50

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Class schedule

Please consult the latest version of this web page, since the schedule will probably be revised as the course proceeds.

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<i>Date</i>	<i>Reading (to be done before class)</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Sept 4	[none]	Introduction
Sept 9	Russell 1911	Acquaintance, description and thought
Sept 11	Lycan ch. 2	Russell's Theory of Descriptions Discuss Assignment 1, due 8:00 am Monday
Sept 16	Lycan ch. 3	Putting it all together: the Description Theory of proper names
Sept 18	Kripke 1972, 83-97; Lycan ch. 4	Kripke's "picture" of how names work Extension beyond proper names: natural kinds Discuss Assignment 2, due Sunday evening
Sept 23	Lycan, ch. 9	Go over writing assignment Beyond proper names: introduction to compositionality Davidson's program: built to handle compositionality Examples of systematic derivations
Sept 25	Lycan ch. 6 up to 83	What gives words their meanings? Proposal 1: the Use Theory Discuss Assignment 3, due Sunday evening
Sept 30	Davidson 1974	What gives words their meanings? Proposal 2: Interpretationism
Oct 2	Putnam 1973	What gives words their meanings? Proposal 3: Semantic Externalism Discuss Assignment 4, due Sunday evening
Oct 7	Grice 1957	What gives words their meanings? Proposal 4: Intention-Based Semantics
Oct 9	Lycan ch. 7	Problems for Grice's theory Discuss Essay 1, due October 21
Oct 16 [14th off]	Putnam 1981	Digression: A semantic answer to skepticism
Oct 21	Austin 1956	Doing things with words
Oct 23	Lycan ch. 12; Ginet 1979	Problems and challenges Discuss Assignment 5, due Sunday evening
Oct 28	Geach 1965	Geach on assertion: "Predicates of a philosophically exciting sort have been badly misconstrued because assertoric force has been supposed to inhere in them."
Oct 30	Williamson 2000, ch. 11	Williamson on assertion Discuss Assignment 6, due Sunday evening
Nov 4	Grice 1975	Implicature: Grice's account
Nov 6	Lycan ch. 13	Other implicative phenomena Discuss Essay 2, due November 24
Nov 11	Cappelen & Lepore	Semantic minimalism
Nov 13	Frege 1879 (selection)	Sense and reference
Nov 18	Saul 363-82	Belief ascriptions: Russellian approaches
Nov 20	Saul to end	Belief ascriptions (cont'd)
Nov 25	Black 1954	Metaphor: Black's account Discuss Assignment 7, due November 28 midnight

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