

Philosophy of Language

Time: Mondays at 14:05–16:30, and Thursdays at 14:05–16:30

Location: Room A402, The Big Teaching Building in the Engineering Campus (or whatever its official name is)

Peter Finocchiaro

My office: B502

My office hours: Wednesdays, 14:00–18:00, and by appointment

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My QQ: 1983481653

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Scan the QR code to add me on WeChat

Course Description:

Language plays a central role in analytic philosophy. So, too, does the philosophical study of language. In this course, our central goal is to determine the extent to which the philosophy of language's prominence is deserved. In the first half of this course, we will thoroughly explore key works in early analytic philosophy of language, focusing especially on the nature of reference and the semantics-pragmatics distinction. We will then explore some more contemporary (and in my opinion even more exciting) topics in the philosophy of language, including metaphors, linguistic justice, and bullshit. Throughout the entire course, we will strive to be mindful of the differences between Indo-European languages (primarily English) and Sino-Tibetan languages (primarily Mandarin). Students who take this course for credit will be assessed on the following: (1) class participation; (2) short, bi-weekly, questions about the reading material; and (3) two papers, each of which serves as an introductory "survey" to one of the course's topics.

Required Texts: *The Philosophy of Language*, edited by A.P. Martinich and David Sosa (sixth edition); *Naming and Necessity* by Saul Kripke

We will also read several contemporary philosophy articles. I will provide pdf files of all course material, including the texts mentioned above.

Optional Texts: In addition to the above required material, you may also consider acquiring the following supplementary material: *Meaning and Grammar: An Introduction to Semantics* by Gennaro Chierchia and Sally McConnell-Ginet; *Philosophical Investigations* by Ludwig Wittgenstein. I don't plan to cover either of these texts in class. But they can serve as useful background for our class discussions. (I will provide pdf files of these texts if you send me a picture of a cute cat.)

A note about the reading: For each class session, I will come prepared to discuss specific aspects of the reading assigned for that day, guided by your questions. That being said, in each class session we are free to explore whatever issues come to mind. Everyone should, therefore, read *all* of the assigned material.

Letter Grade Distribution: In this course I will use the following scale to convert between numerical and letter grades:

96.00 - 100.00	A+	70.00 - 74.99	B-
90.00 - 95.99	A	67.00 - 69.99	C+
85.00 - 89.99	A-	63.00 - 66.99	C
80.00 - 84.99	B+	60.00 - 62.99	C-
75.00 - 79.99	B	00.00 - 59.99	D

Grade Distribution: The overall grade is determined by the following:

Participation	20%
Questions	20%
Paper #1	25%
Paper #2	35%

Course Goals:

As I said above, our central goal is to determine the extent to which the philosophy of language's prominence in analytic philosophy is deserved. In service to that goal, I offer the following four smaller goals:

- (i) to gain familiarity with the history of analytic philosophy as it relates to the philosophy of language;
- (ii) to gain familiarity with the topics of interest in analytic philosophy of language;
- (iii) to improve your ability to philosophically engage with the issues underlying (i) and (ii), especially when using the English language;
- (iv) to acquire the ability to extend the course material to a different cultural and linguistic context (e.g. to contemporary China)

Assignments

Participation: Philosophy is an activity that we do, and active participation in philosophy is the best way to learn to do philosophy. You are expected to interact with me and with other students inside and outside of class. It's important to note, though, that active participation is more than just being vocal; it requires carefully thinking through issues and engaging with peers, often by listening to, supporting, clarifying, or justifying their comments. Doing philosophy is not just about expressing your own ideas, but is just as much about engaging with the ideas of others. Metaphorically speaking, the ideal philosophical discussion is less like a game of ping pong and more like a soccer ("football") match. You will be graded on the extent to which you follow this model of active participation.

Questions: For each class day, you will submit a short question that you have regarding the reading for that day. **You should submit these questions to the class QQ group by 20:59 the day before class.** (For instance: you should submit questions regarding Frege’s “Sense and Reference” by 20:59 Wednesday, 16/2/2021.)

These questions serve three purposes. Their first purpose is to help me ensure that you are completing the assigned reading and that you are not overwhelmed by it. The second purpose of these questions is to help guide our class discussions. Consequently, I will incorporate some of your questions into my PPTs. The third purpose of these questions is to give you an opportunity to practice asking good questions. Asking good questions is a skill – a skill that all students of philosophy should learn. I will therefore also occasionally discuss what makes a question a good question to ask.

Paper #1: This paper will have a unique style, what I call the “opinionated survey”. Such a paper aims to introduce a topic to an unfamiliar audience by covering its main concepts, positions, and arguments. While the paper should fairly present this material, the paper should also be opinionated about it. For example, the paper may explain why some positions are more influential than others, or it may discuss why certain arguments are bad. For this first paper, you will survey one of the two main topics from Unit 1: (a) the nature of reference; or (b) the semantics-pragmatics distinction.

Paper #2: This paper will also be an “opinionated survey”. You may write it on any topic that we cover in Unit 2. **No matter what topic you choose to write on, you must first get my approval through a face-to-face meeting.** This paper differs from the first primarily in the amount of preparatory work that it requires. My coverage of the topics in Unit 2 will be less comprehensive than my coverage of the topics in Unit 1. Consequently, you will need to do some additional research to discern the main concepts, positions, and arguments of your topic.

Reading List and Schedule:

Below is a tentative schedule of the material that we will cover throughout the semester.

Unit 1: Classics in Analytic Philosophy of Language

Day 1: Introductions

Day 2: Frege’s “Sense and Reference”

Day 3: Russell’s “On Denoting”

Day 4: Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity*

Day 5: Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity*

- Day 6:** Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*
- Day 7:** Putnam's "Meaning and Reference"
- Day 8:** Grice's "Logic and Conversation"
- Day 9:** Donnellan's "Reference and Descriptions"
- Day 10:** Davidson's "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs"
- Day 11:** Austin's "Performative Utterances"
- Day 12:** Reserved for holiday cancellations, delays in lectures, or other unexpected events

Unit 2: Contemporary Work in the Philosophy of Language

- Day 13:** Langton's "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts"
- Day 14:** Sullivan's "Semantics for Blasphemy"
- Day 15:** Haslanger's "Language, Politics, and 'The Folk'"
- Day 16:** Van Parijs's *Linguistic Justice*, Chapter 1
- Day 17:** Lackey's "Lies and Deception"
- Day 18:** Frankfurt's *On Bullshit*
- Day 19:** Williams's "Vagueness"
- Day 20:** Woodward's "Truth in Fiction"
- Day 21:** Reimer's "The Problem of Dead Metaphors"
- Day 22:** Dembroff and Wodak's "He/She/They/Ze"

(NB: if you take a picture of someone fishing at East Lake and send it to me before the end of Unit 1, I will give you 1 extra credit point.)