

Philosophy of Language

Mondays at 14:05–15:40, and Wednesdays at 9:50–11:25

Room 305 Teaching Building 6 (on Monday)

and Room 307 Teaching Building 6 (on Wednesday)

Peter Finocchiaro

My office: B502

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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 more exciting) topics in the philosophy of language, including metaphors, slurs, and memes. 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) short, bi-weekly, questions about the reading material, (2) one in-class presentation on that day's topic, (3) one term paper that either (a) argumentatively advances one of the course topics, or (b) critically extends the course material to a Chinese cultural and linguistic context.

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, students 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 explicitly discuss either of these texts in class. But they can serve as useful background for our class discussions. (I can also provide pdf files of these texts upon request.)

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	15%
Questions	15%
Presentation	30%
Paper	40%

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:

- (a) to gain familiarity with the history of analytic philosophy as it relates to the philosophy of language;
- (b) to gain familiarity with the topics of interest in analytic philosophy of language;
- (c) to improve our ability to philosophically engage with the issues underlying (a) and (b) – especially when using the English language;
- (d) 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. Each student is 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. Each student will be graded on the extent to which they follow this model of active participation.

Questions: For each class day, students will submit a short question that they have regarding the reading for that day. **Students should submit these questions to the class QQ group by 20:59 the day before class.** (For example: students should submit questions regarding Frege’s “Sense and Reference” by 20:59 Tuesday, 17/2/2020.)

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

Presentation: Students will collaborate in small groups (2–3 students per group) and select one topic for which they will lead that day’s class session. The student group has three main responsibilities as leaders. First, they should decide which concepts, theses, and arguments need to be covered in class. Second, the group should choose the questions submitted by other students that they think are most worth addressing in class. Third, the group should attempt to extend the material to a new cultural and linguistic context (e.g. their own Chinese context). Each group is free to prepare for their presentation entirely on their own. However, I heavily encourage you to meet with me to discuss what you plan to do.

Paper: Each student will write one paper for this course. This paper may have one of two “styles”. First, the paper may argumentatively advance one of the course topics. Such a paper might, for example, present a new argument for or against an important thesis discussed in class, or it might raise an objection to an important argument discussed in class. The paper may instead critically extend the course material to a Chinese cultural and linguistic context. A paper in this second style might, for example, discuss the extent to which Grice’s conversational norms apply to conversations between students at 武大, or it might explore how the use of memes on America-centric websites like Reddit differs from the use of memes on China-centric 哔哩哔哩. **No matter what style or topic students choose to write on, they must first get my approval through an email or a face-to-face meeting.**

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 (no reading)
- Day 2: Frege's "Sense and Reference"
- Day 3: Russell's "On Denoting"
- Day 4: Searle's "Proper Names"
- Day 5: Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*
- Day 6: Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*
- Day 7: Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*
- Day 8: Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*
- Day 9: Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*
- Day 10: Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*
- Day 11: Putnam's "Meaning and Reference"
- Day 12: Kaplan's "Demonstratives"
- Day 13: Donnellan's "Reference and Definite Descriptions"
- Day 14: Grice's "Logic and Conversation"
- Day 15: Bach's "Conversational Implicature"
- Day 16: Davidson's "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs"
- Day 17: Stalnaker's "Presuppositions"
- Day 18: Austin's "Performative Utterances"

Unit 2: Contemporary Work in Philosophy of Language

- Day 19: Langton's "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts"
- Day 20: Sullivan's "Semantics for Blasphemy"
- Day 21: Haslanger's "The Semantics and Politics of Social Kinds"
- Day 22: Williamson's "Knowing and Asserting"
- Day 23: Lackey's "Lies and Deception"
- Day 24: Frankfurt's *On Bullshit*
- Day 25: Davidson's "What Metaphors Mean"
- Day 26: Woodward's "Truth in Fiction"
- Day 27: Chomsky's review of Skinner's *Verbal Behavior*
- Day 28: Quine's *Word and Object*, Chapter 2
- Day 29: Anderson and Lapore's "A Brief Essay on Slurs"
- Day 30: Dembroff and Wodak's "He/She/They/Ze"
- Day 31: Doughertys's "Yes Means Yes"
- Day 32: Evnine's "The Anonymity of a Murmur: Internet (and Other) Memes"