

Philosophy of Language (PHIL-170-01)

Tue & Thu 4:15–5:30
Walsh 497
Fall 2003

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Office hours Tue & Thu 3–4 & by appt.

Arguably the most central field of contemporary philosophy is the philosophy of language. On the one hand, many traditional philosophical problems can be recast in terms of language. On the other hand, language itself poses questions that philosophers try to answer.

This class is an introduction to the philosophy of language. In it, we will consider three questions. First, in virtue of what is a linguistic unit (a sentence, word, paragraph, etc.) meaningful? We will spend the most time trying to answer this question, and the first three sets of readings below address it. Second, how might the philosophy of language address traditional philosophical problems? In particular, we will consider how it might address the worry that everything that we think is real is an illusion (call this the “Matrix worry”), and that all knowledge (and maybe morality) is relative (the “cultural relativism worry”). And third, just what is language (or a language) in the first place? This is the topic on which we close.

- Texts**
- (1) Martinich, A.P. 2002. *The Philosophy of Language*. New York: Oxford University Press, 4th ed.
 - (2) Course packet.
- Requirements**
- (1) Four 4–6-page papers – each approximately 20% of course grade, penalized half a letter grade for each day late
 - (a) Paper #1 on Truth & Meaning
 - *Topics announced Thu 25 September*
 - *Paper due Tue 7 October 4:15 pm*
 - (b) Paper #2 on Speech Acts
 - *Topics announced Thu 9 October*
 - *Paper due Tue 21 October 4:15 pm*
 - (c) Paper #3 on Sense & Reference, Reference & Externalism
 - *Topics announced Thu 6 November*
 - *Paper due Tue 18 November 4:15 pm*
 - (d) Paper #4 on Language & Traditional Philosophical Problems, and the Nature of Language
 - *Topics announced Thu 4 December*
 - *Paper due Thu 18 December 4 pm (time of final exam, were there one)*
 - (2) Class participation – approximately 20% of course grade

Honor Code Students are governed by the University Honor Code. Violations of the code are treated very seriously.

Schedule (all in Martinich unless otherwise indicated)

Thu 28 Aug INTRODUCTION

TRUTH & MEANING

Tue 2 Sep Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology" (course packet)

Thu 4 Sep Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"

Tue 9 Sep *continue Quine*

Thu 11 Sep Davidson, "Truth and Meaning"

Tue 16 Sep *continue Davidson*

Thu 18 Sep Strawson, "Meaning and Truth"

SPEECH ACTS

Tue 23 Sep Grice, "Meaning"

Thu 25 Sep Austin, "Performative Utterances"

Tue 30 Sep Searle, "A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts"

Thu 2 Oct *continue Searle*

Tue 7 Oct Grice, "Logic and Convention"

Thu 9 Oct *continue Grice*

SENSE & REFERENCE, REFERENCE & EXTERNALISM

Tue 14 Oct Frege, "On Sense and Nominatum"

Thu 16 Oct *continue Frege*

Tue 21 Oct Russell, "On Denoting"

Thu 23 Oct Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions"

Tue 28 Oct Putnam, "Meaning and Reference"

Thu 30 Oct Burge, "Individualism and the Mental" (course packet)

Tue 4 Nov *continue Burge*

LANGUAGE & TRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS

Thu 6 Nov Putnam, "Brains in a Vat" (course packet)

Tue 11 Nov *continue Putnam*

Thu 13 Nov Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" (course packet)

Tue 18 Nov *continue Davidson*

THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

Thu 20 Nov Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs"

Tue 25 Nov Lewis, "Languages and Language" (Thanksgiving week)

Tue 2 Dec Chomsky, "Language and the Problems of Knowledge"

Thu 4 Dec *continue Chomsky*

Philosophy can be more critical than science and more imaginative than art. It therefore can also be more difficult than either is. Consequently, please feel free to approach me with any questions or concerns as the course progresses.