Phil 133: Philosophy of Language

Berkeley, Fall 2020, TTh 630-8pm. Syllabus 1.0

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Zoom office hours: Thursday 3-4pm

Course abstract

An advanced introduction to the philosophy of language. We will consider questions like: What is distinctive of language as a system of representation and communication? In virtue of what can pieces of language be true or false? How do we model the way the meaning of a whole sentence depends on the meanings of its parts? What is information? How can we model its transfer in conversation? How does language-specific knowledge interact with general reasoning in communication and action? How do meaning and communication depend on context? What is it, in general, to know a language? What kind of limits, if any, does language place on our conception of reality?

Prerequisites

None, technically. But it's best to take this course with a few philosophy courses under your belt already. 12A in particular is strongly recommended.

Readings

Almost all of the readings for the course will appear on bCourses. But you'll need to get hold of these two: (1) Wittgenstein's *The Blue and Brown Books*; (2) Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*.

This course requires a *lot* of reading. Some of the readings are difficult, and many will require re-reading. Read actively: take notes, frame questions as you go, restate the theses your encounter in your own way. Be sure not to postpone the reading—give yourself adequate time to work through it. You won't always come away from the reading understanding everything. That's perfectly okay—but that is why it is crucial to come to lecture and section and engage.

Course requirements and grading

Besides meeting a very basic baseline of behavior (see below), the course requirements are to:

1. **Post comments.** (30% of your grade) We will make use of the "discussion" feature of our bCourses site. A thread will open on each reading. Over the course of the semester, you'll be expected to post a minimum of **10 substantive comments, across ten separate readings**, in the discussion section of bCourses. These are opportunities to engage the readings with some reasonably well-thought-out question, comment, objection, etc. It should be a solid paragraph or two (or more). It should be clear and focused. These won't be individually graded. If you do all ten, you get full credit. You lose 3% for each one you miss. To count, your post on a reading has to appear **before** that reading has been discussed in lecture.

2. Do the **two short papers**. (40%) 5-6 pages. Due dates below. We will provide prompts and further instructions as the dates approach.

3. Take the **four quizzes**. (20%) These will be open book, and take place on bCourses.

4. **Participation.** (10%) Show up at lecture and section and participate: make comments, raise questions, offer answers to questions raised. This is calculated based on your recorded Zoom attendance numbers, together with the subjective evaluation of the instructors (meaning: we'll take notice of those who actually participates and who never talks, and factor this in).

   If for reasons out of your control you have limited ability to interact with the course synchronously, please explain the details of your situation to the course GSI, Sarah Vernallis. We'll figure it out.

The mapping into letter grades is as follows (n.b.: I may rescale in order to raise grades):

90-100	A-/A/A+
80-89	B-/B/B+
70-79	C-/C/C+
60-69	D
0-59	F

Late work is not accepted. If you anticipate that you *just might* have a problem getting a particular assignment in on time due to factors beyond your control, **get in touch with us in advance**.

The baseline

To be above the baseline is easy. Just: (1) complete your work with integrity, (2) act with respect towards everyone connected to the course, and (3) not miss a lot of class. Here's what that means:

- **All work that you submit must be your own—the result of your own thinking and writing.** Here are Berkeley's guidelines: "Any test, paper or report submitted by you and that bears your name is presumed to be your own original work that has not previously been submitted for credit in another course unless you obtain prior written approval to do so from your instructor. In all of your assignments, including your homework or drafts of papers, you may use words or ideas written by other individuals in publications, web sites, or other sources, but only with proper attribution. "Proper attribution" means that you have fully identified the original source and extent of your use of the words or ideas of others that you reproduce in your work for this course, usually in the form of a footnote or parenthesis. As a general rule, if you are citing from a published source or from a web site and the quotation is short (up to a sentence or two) place it in quotation marks; if you employ a longer passage from a publication or web site, please indent it and use single spacing. In both cases, be sure to cite the original source in a footnote or in parentheses. If you are not clear about the expectations for completing an assignment or taking a test or examination, be sure to seek clarification from your instructor or GSI beforehand."

- It is a requirement of the course that you **interact respectfully with faculty, GSIs, and other students in any forum, online or offline, related to the course**: this includes lecture, section, office hours, Piazza, problem sets, emails, texts, online posts, etc. Examples of disrespectful interaction include, but are not limited to: hostility, derision, insults, and trolling, especially (but not only) when directed at specific people; and any obviously disruptive behavior which undermines the learning environment of the course. Criticism of/disagreement about **ideas** is welcome, indeed essential. Fortunately it is easy to engage in criticism of ideas without crossing the line into disrespectful interaction. ("I strongly disagree because..." is fine; "Steve's comment is stupid because..." is not.)

- If you miss 1/4 of the lectures and sections (or more), you are below the baseline.

Dropping below the baseline of behavior lowers your grade, and may result in failure. (Example: insulting another student on the discussion forum. Result: final grade lowered one letter. Example: plagiarizing your first paper. Result: failure of the course. Example: missing half of the lectures/sections. Result: failure of the course.) Instructors reserve the right to exclude students who have fallen below the baseline from the online discussion forums.

Tentative schedule

Introduction: the specialness of language

Week 1 (8/31)	Descartes, selection from *Discourse on Method*, 55-60 Marcus and Davis, 'If Computers are So Smart, Why Can't They Read?'

Early analytics on meaning, analysis, knowledge, intentionality, use

Week 1 (9/2)	Frege, 'On Sense and Reference'
Week 2 (9/9)	Frege, 'Thought'
Week 3 (9/14, 9/16)	Russell, 'On Denoting' Russell, 'Knowledge by Acquaintance and by Description' **Quiz 1: Friday 9/18**
Week 4 (9/21, 9/23)	Strawson, 'On Referring' Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 2.1-3, 4-4.1212 + Russell's intro
Week 5 (9/21, 9/23)	Discussion of Wittgenstein's *TLP* continued Wittgenstein, *Blue Book*

Empiricist struggles with meaning

Week 6 (10/5, 10/7)	Ayer, selection from *Language, Truth, and Logic* Quine, selection from *Word and Object* (optional) Chomsky, 'Recent Contributions to the Theory of Innate Ideas'
Week 7 (10/12, 10/14)	Ayer, selection from *Language, Truth, and Logic* Thomson, 'Emotivism' **Quiz 2: Friday 10/16**

Compositionality, truth-conditions, and knowledge of meaning

Week 8 (10/19, 10/21)	Dowty, Wall, and Peters, *Introduction to Montague Semantics* chapter 1 Stalnaker, 'Propositions' **Paper 1 due Friday 10/23**
Week 9 (10/26, 10/28)	Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* lectures 1 and 2 Kaplan, 'Demonstratives'
Week 10 (11/2, 11/4)	Partee, 'Changing Notions of Linguistic Competence in the History of Formal Semantics' Lewis, 'Languages and Language'

Pragmatics: presupposition and implicature

Week 11 (11/9, 11/11)	Stalnaker, 'Pragmatic presupposition' Grice, 'Logic and Conversation' **Quiz 3: Friday 11/13**

Ethical and political dimensions

Week 12 (11/16, 11/18)	Camp, 'Insinuation, Common Ground, and the Conversational Record' Anderson, 'Calling, Addressing, and Appropriation'
Week 13 (11/23)	TBD

Linguistic relativity

Week 14 (11/30, 12/2)	Whorf, selection from *Language, Thought, and Reality* Deutscher, selection from *Through the Language Glass* **Paper 2 due Friday 12/4** **Quiz 4: Friday 12/18 (final exam time)**