

Course: Philosophy of Language

Instructor: Brandon Ashby

## 2. Textbooks and reading materials

Required:

All required reading will be available as PDFs on the course website.

## 2. About the course

This course will survey a range of classical issues in the philosophy of language. For instance, What exactly is the meaning of a person's name? The person him/her/themselves? But then what about names that don't refer, like 'Santa Clause'? Surely 'Santa Clause' doesn't mean nothing. So what does it mean? Or, another example, we shall investigate the role of presupposition in language. And we'll investigate the rather fascinating phenomenon where we can create facts through language, such as when the officiant at a wedding makes it the case that a couple is married by saying that the couple is married. While language can seem straightforward, as we shall see, it is truly bizarre on closer inspection. And, for those of you majoring in philosophy and even thinking about going to graduate school in philosophy, many of the issues covered in this course are absolutely foundational to analytic philosophy and studying them will serve you well in most any branch of philosophy you wish to pursue.

## 3. Assignments

- Micro-exams, worth 40% of your final grade.
- Essays, worth 50% of your final grade.
- Syllabus quiz, worth 2.5% of your final grade.
- Discussion forum questions, worth 7.5% of your final grade.

### 3.1 Micro-exams:

You will have a micro-exam every week. Micro-exams can cover any course material (lectures, readings, in-class discussions) presented in the last four weeks of the course. You will have two attempts to take each micro-exam. You will receive the highest score of your two attempts. I drop your two lowest micro-exam scores. Micro-exams will be worth 40% of your final grade. Micro-exams will be administered online via the course website. You will be able to see what questions you got wrong on a micro-exam, but you will not be told the answers to the questions.

### 3.2 Essays:

You will have three essays over the course of the term. Each will be 2500 words in length. You will have the option of submitting a draft of each paper before you submit it for a final grade. The essays are worth 50% of your final grade and are evenly weighted.

I do not drop any essay scores. However, if you are satisfied with the grade that you receive on your first two essays, then you have the option of applying your combined

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score on your first two essays to your third essay. In other words, do well-enough on your first two essays and you don't have to do the third. I do this to encourage you to work hard on your first two essays and polish them. You are better off spending time on developing two essays than you are rushing through three.

### 3.3 Syllabus quiz:

You will have a quiz on the syllabus and the structure of the course at the end of your first week of term. It is worth 2.5% of your final grade.

### 3.4 Discussion forum questions:

The class will be divided into two groups. You'll get your group number on the first day of class. For every reading, one of the two groups will be required to post or upvote three questions about that reading on the course website. Discussion forum questions will be worth 7.5% of your final grade. Your questions must be uploaded before 11:59PM the day before we discuss that reading in class; I need time to read them before class so I can prepare accordingly. Your questions will be listed anonymously. Only I will be able to see your names attached to the questions. So, do not worry about asking "dumb" questions in front of the other students. In general, if you have a question about the material, there is almost certainly at least one other student with that same question.

## 4. Course Schedule

### Week 1: Frege and Names

- Gottlob Frege (1892) 'On sense and reference', in M. Beaney (ed.) *The Frege Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 151-171
- Gottlob Frege (1918) 'Thought', in M. Beaney (ed.) *The Frege Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 325-345
- [First micro-exam](#)
- [Syllabus quiz](#)

### Week 2: Russel and Definite Descriptions

- Bertrand Russell, (1905) 'On denoting', *Mind* 14(56): 479-493
- Excerpts from Bertrand Russell, (1919) *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, London: George Allen and Unwin.
- P.F. Strawson, (1950) 'On referring', *Mind* 58(235): 320-344.
- [Second micro-exam](#)

### Week 3: Definite Descriptions (continued)

- Kieth Donnellan 'Reference and Definite Descriptions' *The Philosophical Review*, 77: 281-304
- Saul Kripke, (1977) 'Speaker's reference and semantic reference' in French, Uehling, and Wettstein (eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 6-27.
- [Third micro-exam](#)

### Weeks 4-5: Kripke and Semantic Externalism

- John Searle, (1958) 'Proper Names' *Mind* 67: 166-173

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- Saul Kripke, (1980) Lectures I-II of *Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- [Fourth micro-exam](#)
- Excerpts from Tyler Burge, (1979) 'Individualism and the Mental', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 4: 73-121
- [Fifth micro-exam](#)
- [Optional draft of first essay is due](#)

### Week 6: Demonstratives, Indexicals, and Two-Dimensional Semantics

- Excerpts from David Kaplan, (1977) 'On Demonstratives: An Essay on the Semantics, Logic, Metaphysics, and Epistemology of Demonstratives and Other Indexicals' in J. Almog, J. Perry, & H. Wettstein (eds.) *Themes from Kaplan*, New York: Oxford University Press: pp. 481-563.
- John Perry, (1979) 'The Problem of the Essential Indexical' *Noûs* 13(1): 3-21
- David Chalmers, (1996) excerpts from *The Nature of Consciousness*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- [Sixth micro-exam](#)
- [Graded draft of first essay is due](#)

### Week 7: Attributing Beliefs, Desires, and other Propositional Attitudes

- W.V.O. Quine, (1956) 'Quantifiers and Propositional attitudes', *Journal of Philosophy* 53(5): 177-187
- David Kaplan, (1968) 'Quantifying in' *Synthese* 19(1-2): 178-214
- Robert Stalnaker, (1987) 'Semantics for Beliefs', *Philosophical Topics* 15(1): 177-190
- [Seventh micro-exam](#)

### Weeks 8-9: Meaning & Analyticity

- H.P. Grice, (1957) 'Meaning' *The Philosophical Review* 66: 377-388.
- Carl Hempel, 'Empiricist Criteria of Cognitive Significance: Problems and Challenges'
- [Eighth micro-exam](#)
- W.V.O. Quine, (1951) 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' *Philosophical Review* 60(1): 20-43
- H.P. Grice and P.F. Strawson, (1956) 'In Defense of a Dogma' *Philosophical Review* 65(2): 141-158
- [Ninth micro-exam](#)

### Week 10: Conventions, Information, and signals

- Excerpts from David Lewis, (1969) *Convention: A Philosophical Study*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Excerpts from Fred Dretske, (1981) *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Excerpts from Brian Skryms, (2010) *Signals: Evolution, Learning, and Information*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- [Tenth micro-exam](#)
- [Optional draft of second essay is due](#)

### Week 11: Truth

- Alfred Tarski, (1943) 'The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4(3): 341-376
- Donald Davidson, (1967) 'Truth and Meaning' *Synthese* 17(1): 304-323

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- [Eleventh micro-exam](#)
- [Graded draft of final essay is due](#)

### Week 12: Rule Following

- Excerpts from Saul Kripke, (1982) *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language: An Elementary Exposition*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Ruth Garrett Millikan, (1990) 'Truth Rules, Hoverflies, and the Kripke-Wittgenstein Paradox', *Philosophical Review*, 99(3): 323-53.
- [Twelfth micro-exam](#)

### Week 13: Speech acts

- J.L. Austin, (1961) 'Performative Utterances', in J.O. Urmson & G.J. Warnock (eds.), *Philosophical Papers*, Oxford: Clarendon.
- John Searle, (1975) 'A Taxonomy of Illocutionary Acts', in K. Gunderson (ed.), *Language, Mind, & Knowledge*, Minneapolis: MN: University of Minneapolis Press, pp. 344-369.
- John Searle, (1989) 'How Performatives Work' *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 12: 535-558.
- [Thirteenth micro-exam](#)

### Week 14: Pragmatics

- H.P. Grice, (1975) 'Logic and conversation', in D. Davidson & G. Harman (eds.), *The Logic of Grammar*, pp. 64-75.
- Robert Stalnaker, (1974) 'Pragmatic presupposition' in his *Context and Content*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 47-62
- David Lewis, (1979) 'Scorekeeping in a Language Game' *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 8(3): 339-359
- [Fourteenth micro-exam](#)
- [Optional draft of final essay is due](#)

### Week 15: Testimonial injustice

- Miranda Fricker, (2007) Chs. 1-2 of *Epistemic Injustice*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 30-59
- Dotson, Kristie, (2011) 'Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing', *Hypatia*, 26(2): 236-257.
- [Fifteenth micro-exam](#)
- [Graded draft of final essay is due](#)