

# INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

PHIL129.001 • Spring 2012 • MWF 10.10–11 • 216 Boucke

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

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Although philosophical considerations about language have occurred throughout the history of philosophy (e.g. Plato's *Cratylus* or Aristotle's *On Interpretation*), from around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, philosophy of language has become one of the central fields of philosophy (alongside epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of mind, ethics, and philosophy of science). In the early to middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, philosophy of language was occupied primarily with questions about meaning and whether a proper analysis of language would dissolve traditional philosophical questions. Two traditions emerged. IDEAL LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHERS claimed that philosophical problems could be eliminated by constructing a more purified and logical form of language. The working assumption was that philosophical problems were really the result of various ambiguities or violations operating in the semantics of natural language. Removing these problems by constructing a non-ambiguous and precise semantics allowed for dissolving philosophy entirely (i.e. speculative metaphysics). ORDINARY LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHERS claimed that philosophical problems could be eliminated by greater attention to how language is *commonly or ordinarily used*. Philosophical problems were the result of using common expressions in an uncommon, perverse, or jargon-laden fashion. By attending to the normal use of language, the ordinary language tradition claimed to furnish dissolutions to the mind-body problem (Ryle), eradicate arguments supporting the sense-data theory (Austin), and undermine essentialism (Wittgenstein).

But during the latter part of the 1950s and into the 1960s and 1970s, both traditions began to pay more attention to language in its own right and less on its use to dissolve traditional philosophical problems or philosophy altogether. The two major tradition became more complementary insofar as those ideal language philosophers no longer believed that the meaning of a word/sentence can be explained in complete abstraction from context, while many ordinary language philosophers came to appreciate the contribution of syntax to meaning. In this course, we will investigate some basic philosophical questions having to do with language: (1) how does language refer to reality (theories of reference), (2) what (if any) is the nature of meaning (theories of meaning), (3) how much do contextual factors bear upon what is said (theories of the semantic / pragmatic interface).

## COURSE OVERVIEW

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### REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Lycan, William G. 2008. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*. New York: Routledge. ISBN: 9780415957526.

2. Additional Readings available via ANGEL.

### COURSE WORK

- **Participation (20%):** Since the course is a combination of lecture and seminar format, regular and active participation is required. Although it is not essential that you have mastered the text, you are expected to have read the assignment before attending class and have made notes for which passages, terms, or arguments you think are important. In addition, you will be required to post *one* podcast (audio/visual) that provides a quick summary of the week's reading and classroom discussion. A rubric will be provided in class.
- **Three Quizzes (20%):** Assignments in the form of an examination (online or in-class) will be assigned periodically throughout the course. These quizzes will test a very rudimentary understanding of the philosophical texts. In preparation for quizzes, it is necessary that you have done the reading and have a general idea of its major claim(s), along with the mainline of its supporting argument. Some quizzes will allow you to make use of the text in question (and your notes), so it is to your advantage if you (1) bring the relevant texts to class and (2) mark or highlight the major claims/arguments of the text.
- **Three Short Summary Papers (30%):** You will be asked to write two, short (500–1000 words) papers for this course. Each paper is geared around a writing workshop which is designed to develop your ability in summarize

a text, argue for a particular thesis, or organize your thoughts. The assignments are *developmental*, so you will be regularly asked to employ skills that you have learned earlier in the course. In addition, you will be required to attend a peer-review session before you turn in your paper.

- **Final Paper & Proposal (30%):** The ultimate goal of this course is a final paper (roughly 3000 words) which organizes and synthesizes your previous work around a *thesis* supported by a coherent, concise, and well-reasoned argument. This paper should include at least the following five components:

- (1) the use of metadiscourse,
- (2) a bibliography,
- (3) at least one clearly identifiable argument,
- (4) the effective use of quotations, and
- (5) some additional research (see optional articles on ANGEL).

While the exact claim and theme of the paper is subject to your discretion, your paper must relate to one of the principal topics of the course and you will be required to submit a paper proposal in advance.

### THREE TIPS FOR SUCCESS

I have a couple suggestions to help you do well in this course:

**1. Interact with the Text!** I can't stress how important it is to set aside some time to do the readings *on a regular basis* and to *interact with the text*. Reading philosophy is different than reading a novel. When you read, it is helpful to have a pencil and highlighters handy. Use a pencil to mark key passage and to jot notes in the margin, use highlighters to highlight key terms, definitions, and passages that you think are crucial the understanding of the text.

**2. Working Hard Early in the Course Pays Off Later.** Learning to think philosophy and read philosophical texts takes time and so the more quickly you immerse yourself in a philosophical thinking, the easier reading philosophy will be. What you learn from reading one philosopher can often help you learn another. And so, think of the beginning of the course as an investment: the harder you work at the outset, the less difficulty you will have later in the course.

**3. Collaborate as Much as Possible:** Studying with a friend or classmate can enhance your learning. A classmate can provide a different perspective on material and their explanation of a certain concept, definition, or argument might be what makes the material click for you.

### COURSE SCHEDULE

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A *Weekly Agenda Handout* will be provided via ANGEL. This handout gives detailed information about what pages to read and what exercises to complete on each day of class. Readings available through ANGEL are marked with an asterisk \*

Jan 10–Feb 11	<p><b>Part I: Singular Reference</b></p> <p>Lycan, <i>Chapter 1</i></p> <p>Lycan, <i>Chapter 2</i> (Definitive Descriptions)</p> <p>*Russell, Bertrand (Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description)</p> <p>Lycan, <i>Chapter 3</i> (Proper Names: The Description Theory)</p> <p>*Frege, Gottlob (On Sense and Reference)</p> <p>Lycan, <i>Chapter 4</i> (Proper Names: the DR and Causal Theory)</p> <p>*Mill, John Stuart (1906. Book I, Chapters 1 and 2. In <i>A System of Logic</i>).</p> <p><i>Writing Workshop #1: Effective Summaries &amp; How To Use Metadiscourse</i></p> <p><b>Due: Quiz #1, Short Summary Paper #1</b></p>
Feb 14–April 4	<p><b>Part II – Meaning &amp; Truth</b></p> <p>Lycan, <i>Chapter 5</i> (Traditional Theories of Meaning)</p> <p>Lycan, <i>Chapter 6</i> (Use Theories of Meaning)</p>

	<p>Lycan, <i>Chapter 7</i> (Grice's Program)  *Grice, Paul (Meaning)</p> <p>Lycan, <i>Chapter 8</i> (Verificationism)  *Ayer, A.J. (Selection from <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i>)</p> <p>Lycan, <i>Chapter 9</i> (Truth-Conditional Theories)  *Davidson, Donald (Truth and Meaning)</p> <p><i>Writing Workshop #2: Quoting Effectively &amp; How To Provide an Argument</i>  <b>Due: Quiz #2, Short Summary Paper #2</b></p>
Apr 6 – Apr 29	<p><b>Part III – Semantics &amp; Pragmatics</b></p> <p>Lycan, <i>Chapter 11</i> (Semantic Pragmatics)  *Borg, Emma (Selection from <i>Minimal Semantics</i>)</p> <p>Lycan, <i>Chapter 12</i> (Speech Acts)  *Searle, John (What is a Speech Act?)</p> <p>Lycan, <i>Chapter 13</i> (Implicative Relations)  *Grice, H.P. (Logic and Conversation)</p> <p><i>Writing Workshop #2: Quoting Effectively &amp; How To Provide an Argument</i>  <b>Due: Quiz #3, Short Summary Paper #3, Final Paper &amp; Proposal</b></p>

## COURSE POLICIES

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### ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

The general principles and policy relating to cheating and plagiarism, which are enforced in this class, can be found in the Penn State policy on academic misconduct. *Academic Integrity*: Academic dishonesty encompasses a wide range of activities, whether intentional or unintentional, that includes, but is not limited to: all forms of fraud, plagiarism, and any failure to cite explicitly all materials and sources used in one's work. Sanctions for these activities include, but are not limited to, failure in a course, removal from the degree program, failure in a course with an explanation in the permanent transcript of the cause for failure, suspension, and expulsion. If you are unclear about whether you or someone you know is engaging in academic misconduct, read the following: [University Statement on Academic Integrity](#). For more information, see [PSU Academic Integrity](#), [PSU ITS](#), [Plagiarism Tutor](#), [Turnitin](#), [PSU Teaching & Learning with Technology](#)

### GRADE ROUNDING

Grades will be rounded up from the *second* decimal point, e.g. 90.95 rounds up to 91.0 while 90.94 rounds down to 90.90. In the event that eLION does not allow for a particular grade (e.g. D+), you will simply be given the letter grade (e.g. if you have a D+ then you will receive a D, and if you have a C-, you will receive a C).

A: 91–100%;	C+: 79.0–79.9	F: 0–59.9
A–: 90.0–90.9	C: 71.0–78.9	<a href="#">INCOMPLETE</a>
B+: 89.0–89.9	C–: 70–70.9	<a href="#">DROP</a>
B: 81.0–88.9	D+: 69.0–69.9	
B–: 80–80.9	D: 60.0–68.9	

### LATE WORK

If you are planning on taking a **Test/Notebook** late, you will need to clear this with the instructor *before* the day and time of the test. If the instructor is not informed that you will be taking the test late, a grade reduction of one letter grade is incurred for every day the test is late. So if the due date is Tuesday at 3PM and you email me on Tuesday at 3.01PM you will lose a letter grade. You will not lose an additional letter grade until 3.01PM the next day (i.e. Wednesday).

## **ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT & FURTHER STUDENT GUIDANCE**

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at 814-863-1807 (V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit the Office for Disability Services Web site at: <http://equity.psu.edu/ods/>.

In order to receive consideration for course accommodations, you must contact ODS and provide documentation (see the documentation guidelines at <http://equity.psu.edu/ods/guidelines/documentation-guidelines>). If the documentation supports the need for academic adjustments, ODS will provide a letter identifying appropriate academic adjustments. Please share this letter and discuss the adjustments with your instructor as early in the course as possible. You must contact ODS and request academic adjustment letters at the beginning of each semester.

If you are in need of psychological counseling, please do not hesitate to contact Penn State's [Counseling & Psychological Services](#) (phone: 814-863-0395). For any problem related to your studies, university policies and procedures, do not hesitate to seek the help of the [Student Affairs Services](#), your Academic Advisor, or arrange a meeting with your instructor who will help you obtain assistance through one of the above, or another, agency.

## **USE OF ANGEL AND EMAIL COMMUNICATION**

Please check the webpage on the [ANGEL](#) website regularly. An online version of the syllabus is available there, and you will be notified of any cancellation of a course meeting there. If you need to contact me, send a well-constructed email to my email address with an appropriate subject line (e.g. P120 Question) and with an appropriate address (e.g. "Dear David"). Failure to do either, or emailing me with multiple links attached ("check this youtube link") will result in your instructor deleting your email. Students are responsible for activity on their computer accounts so only send emails pertinent to the course. Also, please do not send correspondence from cellular telephones (e.g. Blackberries, etc.).

## **DROP PROCEDURES AND INCOMPLETES**

Students who simply stop attending class, for whatever reason, without officially withdrawing from the course, will receive the grade of F. If you expect a refund, be aware that the date the withdrawal form is processed by Penn State registrar's office determines the amount of refund. Consult the Register site for [drop procedures](#). Consult the Handbook for taking an [Incomplete \(D/F\)](#). Before considering dropping the course or taking an incomplete, you might consider getting additional help: [Information Literacy Tutorial](#), [University Learning Center](#), [Writing Center](#)

## **CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT**

A number of factors figure into creating a healthy classroom environment. In order to facilitate such an environment, I ask you to obey the following: (1) the use of cell phones in any capacity is prohibited (please turn ringers/buzzers off, no text-messaging during class), (2) please do not begin to 'pack up' your belongings before your instructor has *explicitly* dismissed you, (3) please come to class rested, sleeping in class is strictly prohibited, (4) please do not do other work in class. If you are incapable of performing (1)–(4) or are disruptive in class, you will kindly be asked to leave the classroom.

## **CHALLENGE EXAMINATION**

For some courses, students may request a [challenge examination](#) as a substitute for completing the usual requirements of a course. If the examination is successfully completed the credits received are described as "credits by examination" ([policy 42-50](#)).

First Update: 1/1/2011;