

Syllabus for *The Philosophy of Language*

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Introduction

Welcome to Philosophy XXX, The Philosophy of Language. In this class, we'll examine what language is and how it works (and how it doesn't).

Course Goals

Students will acquire proficiency in some of the basic issues in the philosophy of language with special attention to what words mean and how we use them. Students will be encouraged to try out their own answers to central questions in the field, and to think creatively while appreciating influential answers that have come before. Students will gain confidence participating in conversations with grace and sensitivity on the one hand, with clarity and rigor on the other.

Students will continue to develop the general philosophical skill of writing arguments clearly and concisely. Students in this course should already be familiar with the art of raising objections and counterexamples. By the end of the course, they should have made progress in thinking two or three moves ahead—not simply, “what’s an objection to this view?” but “how could this view handle this objection?” “What modifications would preserve as much insight as possible from the original view?”

A related goal is to learn to build a research paper in stages. Writing the paper in stages makes it easier to develop an appropriate, back-and-forth dialectic by making it easier to incorporate various positions in the literature and feedback and objections from peers.

Prerequisites

This course has no prerequisites but you may find it easier if you have already taken logic.

Required Materials

You should bring a writing utensil and the day's text to class each day.¹ All of the readings can be found in one of these sources:

¹ Get in touch with me or Disability Services as appropriate if you need an alternative way to interact with the text during class.

Morris, Michael (2006). *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge University Press.

Kripke, Saul (1980). *Naming and Necessity*, 2nd Ed., Oxford: Blackwell.

Austin, J.L. (1973). *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd Ed., Oxford University Press.

Our Course Reader

Course Themes

Our course is built around two questions: (1) What do words mean? (2) What do we *do* with words? Morris's *Introduction* will be the guide to our first question: we'll examine some of the most influential answers from the past 300 years, including Locke, Mill, Frege, Russell, Kripke, Putnam, and Quine. We won't just read secondary literature about these the philosophers: we'll read some of the landmark papers they wrote themselves.

We will adjust course a bit in the second half when we address the question of what we do with words. We will slow down to read Austin's readable classic, *How to Do Things with Words*. In addition to following that up with Grice, who will allow us to explore the semantics/pragmatics distinction, we will also read Camp on non-literal, metaphoric speech and Kukla on how language can be dangerously used for unjust ends. We'll conclude with a polarizing figure, Wittgenstein, who challenges us to consider whether these two questions should really be answered independently.

Course Schedule

Unit One: Reference and Meaning

Week 1: Locke

1. Morris: "Locke and the nature of language" (chapter 1)
2. Locke: *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, chapters 1-2

Week 2: Mill

1. Mill: "Of Names"
2. Lycan: "Introduction" in his *Philosophy of Language*

Week 3: Frege

1. Morris: "Frege on sense and reference" (chapter 2)
2. Frege: "On Sense and Meaning"

Week 4: Russell

1. Morris: "Russell on definite descriptions" (chapter 3)
2. Russell: "On Denoting"

Week 5: Kripke

1. Morris: "Kripke on proper names" (chapter 4)
2. Kripke: *Naming and Necessity*, lectures I and II
Question for Research Paper Due

Week 6: Putnam

1. Morris: "Natural-kind terms" (chapter 5)
2. Putnam: "Meaning and Reference"
3. Kripke: *Naming and Necessity*, lecture III [time-permitting]
Revised Question Due
Initial Bibliography Due

Week 7: Quine

1. Morris: "Quine on the indeterminacy of translation" (chapter 11)
2. Quine: "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"
3. Quine: "On the Reason for Indeterminacy of Translation" pp: 178-83
Précis Due

Week 8: Exam

[No additional reading]

Unit Two: Using Your Words

Week 9: Austin

1. Morris: "Austin and Speech Acts" (chapter 12)
2. Austin: *How to Do Things with Words*, chapters 1-2
Abstract Due

Week 10: Austin (continued)

1. Austin: *How to Do Things with Words*, chapters 3-7

Week 11: Austin (continued)

1. Austin: *How to Do Things with Words*, chapters 8-12
Draft Due

Week 12: Grice

1. Morris: "Grice on meaning" (chapter 13)
2. Grice: "Meaning"
Peer Review Due

Week 13: Camp

1. Camp: "Metaphor in the Mind: The Cognition of Metaphor"
2. Camp: "Metaphor and that certain '*je ne sais quoi*'"

Week 14: Kukla

1. Kukla: "Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice"
2. Kukla: "Slurs, Interpellation, and Ideology"
Final Paper Due

Week 15: Wittgenstein

1. Wittgenstein: Philosophical Investigations §1-43

Week 16: Exam

[No additional reading]
Reflection Due

Expectations and Assessments

It is expected that you will carefully read the texts before class and contribute to discussion during class. The overall length of reading per class will never exceed 40 pages, but those pages should be read closely.

Apart from your contributions to discussions in class, your reading of the material will be assessed by (a) random spot-checks on your journals and (b) exams at the end of each major unit. The exams are not cumulative.

You are also expected to produce a research paper of 3k words during the semester. You will be expected to complete various stages of the writing process at various checkpoints throughout the course.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. This class is based on discussion, and when you miss class, you miss an integral part of the course (and rob us of your contributions as well!). I will take attendance at the beginning of every class. A pattern of unexcused absences can result in a lower grade or failure to pass.

Barring extreme circumstances, excused absences will never be granted if they are requested after the start time of a class period. It's your obligation to request an excused absence before missing it.

Journal

In this class, we'll use handwritten journals to help us process the reading material. There should be a journal entry for each class day for which reading was assigned. Your journal should be brought to class each day in the form of a composition notebooks. Each journal entry must include:

- 1) The date of the reading
- 2) The name of the article(s)
- 3) A sticky passage from the readings—a passage you had trouble understanding, or where you think the author might not be maximally clear. Actually write out the passage—slowing down to think about each word is a helpful way to begin to understand a sticky passage.
- 4) A question or objection that you have in response to the reading. Your questions don't need to be longer than a paragraph, but I expect them to be reasonably detailed and to show engagement with the reading.
- 5) A question or comment that another student asked during the discussion in class that you found insightful, along with the other student's name.
- 6) Elements 1-5 should be clearly labeled.

This is what is required in the journals, but I strongly recommend that you also use it to take other notes that may be useful to you as you read and as we discuss the readings in class.

A handful of times during the semester, I will randomly collect the journals to check that they are being completed in good faith and to assign a grade. I will also sometimes ask students to share their sticky passages or questions/objections during class.

(If there's a reason that handwritten notes are not feasible for you, please talk to me and we'll find an alternative.)

Exams

For the exams, several of the readings from the relevant unit will be selected. Each selected reading will have three questions: (a) an exegetical question to test comprehension of the concepts used in the paper, (b) a question that asks you to represent or otherwise engage with one of the central arguments of the passage, and (c) a question that introduces a new idea from outside the readings and invites you grapple with the new idea in light of the passage under discussion. You will have some (limited but significant) choice over which subset of the passages to answer questions about. But you must answer every question for any passage that you choose to engage. (I will show you a sample question set before the first exam.)

Research Paper

You will write one 3k word research paper over the course of the semester on a philosophy of language question of your choice. The project will be completed in stages:

1. Select a Question: The question should be (a) related to philosophy of language, (b) suitably narrow for a 3k word paper, and ideally (c) something that genuinely interests you! The question only needs to be a sentence or two, but this is arguably the most important step of the whole project!
2. Revise Question: Since it's the most important step, I will provide some feedback on your first question to make sure it is properly focused. You'll then submit a revised version of the question.
3. Bibliography Construction: Once you have your question, you'll need to identify some papers to research. You must compile a bibliography that contains at least five articles, at least three of which are not on the syllabus. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and PhilPapers.com will be good resources for you. We'll talk more in class about good strategies for finding useful articles.
4. *Précis*: You will be required to write one, 300-400 word *précis* of any of the articles on your bibliography that are not also on the syllabus. A *précis* should briefly summarize the thesis and central argument in the article, so that someone who has not read the article can easily understand the basic moves of the paper.
5. Abstract: A question picked and some research done, you're now in a position to write an abstract. Your abstract should (1) clearly identify your thesis, (2) outline the main argument(s) of the paper, and (3) give the reader a sense of the flow of the paper. Your abstract should be 400-500 words.
6. First Draft: Your first draft should be at least 2500 words and should have the number of words clearly displayed. It should be a complete draft, in that the central argument of the paper should be present and at least one objection should be developed with a response. Your draft will be graded.
7. Peer Review (2x): Every student will review two other students' papers. Students will complete a peer review form (to be given in class) in which they identify the strengths and weaknesses of the paper, evaluate the paper according to a rubric, and offer an objection to the view. Reviews should be charitable in tone, but it's also important to be honest about where the paper needs improvement—that's how you can be most helpful! One day of class is set aside to begin the peer review process and to discuss good peer review practices.
8. Final Version: Your final paper should be no more than 3k words (and should have the number of words clearly displayed). The paper should respond to (a) the comments in the peer review and (b) the instructor's comments on the first draft. How you responded to these comments will be a part of your grade so that, e.g., an unchanged draft resubmitted as a final version of the paper would earn a worse grade on the final version than it did on the draft. There should be a clear argument and at least two objections should be considered and responded to.
9. Writing Reflection: At the end of the writing project you will be asked to submit a one-page writing reflection. The reflection should address two questions: 1) What is

one thing I learned by writing this paper? 2) If I could do one thing differently about the writing process, what would it be?

You will receive grades for your abstract, your draft, your final version, and your reflection. The others will be checked for completeness and good-faith effort. Half a letter grade (5%) will be deducted from the grade of the final paper for each (ungraded) stage of the project that is not completed with a good-faith effort.

Assessment

Your grades on individual assignments will be combined to form your course grade in the following way:

Journals: 10%
Exam 1: 20%
Exam 2: 20%
Abstract: 5%
Draft: 10%
Final Paper: 30%
Reflection: 5%

As noted above, the final grade can be affected by unexcused absences.

What Grades Mean

A: 90-100% Truly excellent work that goes above and beyond the baseline requirements for the course. Work that achieves the level of an A exhibits mastery of the material taught in the course and the ability to build on that mastery to contribute something creative, rigorous, and ambitious of your own thought to the assignment.

B+: 85-90%

B: 80-85% Solid, commendable work that fulfills all of the project requirements. B-level work exhibits competence with the course material and genuine insight that goes beyond the confines of what was taught. There may, however, be small errors, or the paper may lack the full rigor or creativity of an A paper.

C+: 75-80%

C: 70-75% Decent work that fulfills most of the project requirements. C-level work may, however, show gaps in understanding of the course material or substantial defects in the argument presented.

D: 60-70% Incomplete work that exhibits a poor understanding of the course material and makes a weak contribution to the discussion.

F: <60% Dishonest, disingenuous, or markedly incomplete work

Late Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted. Extensions may be requested. But except in extreme circumstances, extensions will only be granted if they are asked at least 72 hours before the assignment is due.

Plagiarism and Citations

Plagiarism is representing someone else's work as your own. Don't do it. Give proper credit whenever you are using another person's words, arguments, or ideas. When in doubt, cite.

Citing well isn't just a way to avoid plagiarism—it's an opportunity to demonstrate that you have engaged seriously and in good faith with other thinkers. Citing well also (perhaps counter-intuitively!) highlights where you have made an original contribution, making it easier for your readers to see what distinguishes your work from that of others.

When citing printed material, always include the author's name, date of publication, and page number. Every citation should match an entry in your bibliography.

Plagiarism will result in an F on the assignment and reported to the dean. If the plagiarism is blatant or repeated, it will result in an F in the course.

The university's policy on academic integrity can be found here: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Technology Policy

You are welcome to use technology in class for and only for class-related purposes (i.e. displaying the course readings). But please be aware that when you use screens for other purposes it is often a distraction to others around you.

Email Guidelines and Office Hours

You should feel free to email me at any point for any course-related or philosophy-related questions!

Email is an excellent medium for *short and specific* questions about the course. I will always aim to get a response to you within 48 weekday hours. Feel free to gently remind me if I seem to have overlooked your email.

For more substantial questions or for extensive feedback on an assignment, it's better to meet during office hours. If my regular office hours do not work for you, we can set up an appointment for an alternative time.

Expectations for Discussion

All discussion in this class must be performed in a respectful and charitable way. The Rutgers Philosophy department writes:

“In our community we expect all participants to observe basic norms of civility and respect. This means stating your own views directly and substantively: focusing on reasons, assumptions and consequences rather than on who is offering them, or how. And it means engaging other’s views in the same terms. No topic or claim is too obvious or controversial to be discussed; but claims and opinions have a place in the discussion only when they are presented in a respectful, collegial, and constructive way.”

Here are three small recommendations that I think go a long way toward making philosophical discussions better:

1. Adopt a general attitude that you and your classmates are involved in the common pursuit of the truth, even when defending contrary theses.
2. Name other students when you’re responding to their idea. This shows that you’ve been listening to them and gives them credit for their contributions. Even when you are (politely) disagreeing, mentioning them communicates that you think their comment is worthy of discussion.
3. Unless the class is very small (and maybe even then), raise your hand before making a contribution. This allows me as the instructor to see that quieter students have a chance to enter the discussion when they want to.

Finally, if I do anything that doesn’t promote good dialogue in our seminar, please let me know! I’m still learning how to be a good philosophical interlocutor as well, and some of my best feedback comes from you.

Accessibility

Please get in touch with the Office of Disability Services (ods.rutgers.edu) if there is any way at all that this course can be made more accessible for you. I want to make this course as accessible for everyone as possible!

Other Services for Students

Student-Wellness Services

[Just In Case Web App](#)

<http://codu.co/cee05e>

Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS):

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/ www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA):

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 /

www.vpva.rutgers.edu/

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-118.