

Language and Philosophy (Phil 170-10)

Summer 2018 – Georgetown University

MTWTH 3:15 – 5:15PM

Maguire 103

Course Instructor: Quentin Fisher

Email: qaf2@georgetown.edu

Office Hours: TBA (or by appt.)

Course Description

In this course we will be examining philosophical attempts to understand what language is, how sentences come to mean what they do, the relation between language and thought, and how all this relates to us and the world. In the first part of the course, we will look at some of the most influential attempts to make sense of linguistic phenomena such as reference, sense, pragmatic force, metaphor, proper names, and literal meaning. In the second part of the course, we will use some of the tools developed in the first part of the course to understand particular uses of language and expression – e.g., slurs, legal claims, pornography, and ideology.

Required Texts

Austin, J.L., *How to Do Things With Words*, Harvard University Press, 1975.

Lycan, William G., *Philosophy of Language: a Contemporary Introduction*, 2nd Edition, Routledge, 2008.

All other readings will be available for free download on the Canvas site.

Assessment¹

2 Papers (Each worth 25% of your grade)

Reading Responses (25%)

Participation/ Preparedness (25%)

Papers:

You must write two 5-7 page papers. In the first paper, you must explain in detail an argument that was discussed in class or in the readings. You must then offer one criticism of this argument. In the second paper, you will choose any topic discussed over the course of the term and offer (i) an analytical reconstruction of an argument relevant to that topic, (ii) a criticism of that argument, and (iii) a

¹ The instructor reserves the right to revise the nature of the assignments throughout the course.

rejoinder to the argument in (ii). All paper topics must be approved by course instructor. More information to come in class.

Reading Responses

Before *each class*, you must email me a reading response. This response can be an observation about the reading, a question you have, or a worry/ objection you want to raise. Your response should be a **MAXIMUM of four sentences and must be emailed by 2:00PM on the reading for that class**. Anything received after 2:00PM will not receive credit.

Participation

Since this is a *discussion* based course, participation and preparedness make up 25% of your grade. I expect you to come prepared having done the reading(s) and ready to engage in discussion about the material. Participation does not necessarily mean speaking as frequently as you can. While I will not be evaluating you on the content of your comments, I will be looking for thoughtful contributions that demonstrate a serious attempt to think about the ideas under discussion. I also expect you to be respectful and courteous toward both your peers and me in class. Not only is this important for creating a welcoming environment, but it is *essential* for doing good philosophy. Engaging charitably, even with ideas with which you strongly disagree, is a central philosophical and intellectual virtue. If you are worried for any reason about your ability to participate, please talk to me. I am very sympathetic to concerns of this kind, and I am happy to find ways to accommodate many different learning styles.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. Please do not be late. We will begin class at 3:15PM sharp. You are given two excused absences, no questions asked. If you are late to class more than 3 times, it will affect your participation grade. Each unexcused absence after 2 absences will lower your participation grade by one whole grade – e.g., from an ‘A’ to a ‘B’.

Academic Integrity

Students found to be in violation with the Georgetown University honor code will be reported to the Honor Council and will receive a failing grade on the assignment, or in the course, or worse, depending on the severity of the infraction. We will discuss in class proper citation conventions in philosophy.

Course Schedule²

Introduction	No assigned reading
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² Schedule subject to change – indeed, you can be certain that it will change.

Meaning and Reference	Lycan, Ch. 1 + Frege, "On Sense and Reference" (selection)
Excursus on Logic	Priest, <i>Logic: A very short introduction</i> (selection)
Definite Descriptions	Lycan, Ch. 2
Proper Names 1	Lycan, Ch. 3
Proper Names 2	Lycan, Ch. 4
Traditional Theories of Meaning	Lycan, Ch. 5 + Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> (selection)
"Use" Theories of Meaning	Lycan Ch. 6
Psychological Theories	Lycan Ch. 7
Semantics and Pragmatics	Lycan Ch. 11 + MacFarlane, "What is Assertion?"
Speech Acts	Lycan, Ch. 12 + Hornsby, "Speech Acts and Performatives"
Freedom of Expression Pt. 1	Altman, "Freedom of Expression and Human Rights Law: The Case of Holocaust Denial"
Slurs	Camp, "Slurring Perspectives"
Generics	Leslie, "Carving up the Social World with Generics"
Slurs	Camp, "Slurring Perspectives"
Language and Pornography/ Another Take on Reference	Langton & West, "Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game"
Language and Genocide	Tirrell, "Genocidal Language Games"
<i>How to Do Things With Words</i>	Lectures 1 & 2
	Lectures 3 & 4
	Lectures 5 & 6
	Lectures 7 & 8
	Lectures 9 & 10
	Lectures 11 & 12

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