

The University of Calgary
Department of Philosophy

Philosophy 371 L01
PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

Winter 2009 — R. Zach

Course Outline

Instructor: **Richard Zach**
Office: 1254 Social Sciences
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Lectures: MW 4:00-5:15 125 Science Theatres

Course Description

Philosophy of language concerns itself with the philosophical study of the nature and function of language. Some of the central questions are, e.g., how language hooks up to the world—how words can refer to things, how words get meaning, and how we use language to do things. We will begin by focussing on the first two questions: reference (descriptions and proper names) and theories of meaning, and later discuss some more advanced topics such as propositional attitudes and pragmatics and speech acts.

Prerequisites

Logic I (Phil 279) or Elementary Formal Logic (Phil 377) is a prerequisite for this course.

Required Texts

A. P. Martinich, ed., *The Philosophy of Language*, 5th ed. Oxford University Press, 2008. The text is available in the University Bookstore in MacEwan Hall.

Requirements and Evaluation

Writing Assignments. There will be 4 short writing assignments (10% each, or 40% of the final grade; 200 words max), each of which will focus narrowly on one of the readings; a midterm paper (700 words max; 20%), and a final paper (1,000 words max; 30%). There will be no exams. You will be given a choice of topics for the papers. For your final paper you will have the option of writing on a topic of your own choosing. You must hand in the midterm and final papers to pass the course.

Note that the short writing assignments may be due *before* the corresponding readings are discussed in class. While the aim of the papers is to develop your skills in exposition and argumentation, the short assignments are intended in part to train your *reading comprehension* skills. The questions you will answer in these assignments will be specific questions on the texts. All you need to do to answer them is read—and

comprehend—the text. They shouldn't require the historical or philosophical background you'll get from the subsequent lecture.

All assignments will be turned in electronically via BlackBoard.

Participation. Class participation counts for 10% of your final grade. Your participation will be assessed on the basis of your contribution to discussion in class and on the course website. (If you are shy and don't want to speak in class, 5 posts with substantive philosophical content in the online discussion forum will earn you an A for this part of the final grade.) However, if all of your posts occur within one 7-day period, at most 3 of them will be counted toward your participation mark. Only posts before the due date of the final paper count.

Evaluation and Grades. On each assignment you will receive a letter grade reflecting the level of comprehension of the readings and your ability to assess philosophical arguments shown by the work you submit. There will be no +/- grades, but "slash" grades (e.g., A/B) are possible. The meanings of letter grades are defined in the *Calendar*; for written work, they amount roughly to the following criteria:

- A Excellent—superior performance, showing comprehensive understanding of subject matter. (Your writing is clear and concise; your assignments make obvious that your understanding of the issues and arguments is correct and complete; you show superior ability in representing and assessing others' philosophical arguments; you show ability for original philosophical thinking).
- B Good—clearly above average performance with knowledge of subject matter generally complete. (You show a good grasp of the assigned reading; but either your writing is not perfectly clear or your assignments are largely only expository and don't show the critical ability required for an A).
- C Satisfactory—basic understanding of the subject matter. (Your work shows that you've worked through the reading and attended class, but your assignments misrepresent the arguments we're discussing, or your criticisms are off the mark.)
- D Minimal pass—marginal performance. (Your work is unclear or confused; or you grossly misrepresent the arguments we're discussing.)
- F Fail—Unsatisfactory performance. (Your work fails to show that you've made a serious attempt at coming to grips with the material; or your writing borders on the incomprehensible.)

Note the emphasis in the above on the fact that it is not enough that you understand the issues we discuss, your written work must *show this*. Thus, the quality of your writing will be a major factor in which grade you'll get. If your sentences miss subjects or verbs, your cross-references are unclear, or you use terminology ambiguously, you will receive a lower mark than if you had composed and proof-read your paper more carefully.

In computing your final grade, your marks will be converted to grade points and averaged according to the weights given above. The correspondence of letter grades with grade points is defined in the *Calendar* (A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, F = 0). “Slash” grades receive 0.5 below the value of the higher grade (e.g., A/B = 3.5).

The final grade will be the letter grade corresponding to the weighted average of your assignments, paper, presentation, and participation plus a margin of 0.2. For the final grade, +’s and –’s are possible, too; as defined in the *Calendar*, +/- adds/subtracts 0.3 grade points. In other words, a course average of 3.8 or higher receives an A; between 3.5 and 3.8, an A–; between 3.1 and 3.5, a B+; between 2.8 and 3.1, a B; and so on. There is no D– grade; to earn a D you require a course average of at least 0.8. The A+ grade is reserved for “truly outstanding” performance.

Assignments and Policies

Late work and extensions

Assignments handed in late will be penalized by the equivalent of one grade point per calendar day, unless you can document a medical or other valid reason for why your assignment is late. If you turn an assignment in late, you must give it to the instructor in person or put it in the department dropbox (it will then be date-stamped by department staff). Note that the dropboxes are cleared at 4 pm, the department closes at 4:30 pm on weekdays and *is closed Saturdays and Sundays*.

Plagiarism

You will find the University policy on plagiarism at the end of the printed version of this outline. Plagiarism is a very serious academic offense. It is *not limited* to copying papers wholesale from the Internet; close paraphrase of the texts, of the lectures, or of anyone (other than you) without attribution constitutes plagiarism. Your assignments should only contain your own formulations. You should use direct quotes from the texts sparingly, and clearly mark them as such by using quotation marks and giving a source reference. When in doubt, consult with the instructor. **Plagiarism will result in a failing grade in the course and a report to the Dean’s office.**

Checking your grades and reappraisals of work

University policies for reappraisal of term work and final grades apply (see the *Calendar* section “Reappraisal of Grades and Academic Appeals”). In particular, term work will only be reappraised within 15 days of the date you are advised of your marks. Please keep track of your assignments (make sure to pick them up in lecture or in office hours) and your marks (check them on the website) and compare them with the graded work returned to you.

Course Website

A course website on U of C’s BlackBoard server has been set up. You will be automatically registered if you’re registered in the class. To access the BlackBoard site, you can either go directly to blackboard.ucalgary.ca and log in with your UCIT account name

and password, or you can access it through the myUofC portal (my.ucalgary.ca; log in with your eID). **You must log on at least once by the end of the second week of class.**

Tentative Syllabus

This is a tentative syllabus to give you a rough idea what topics we will cover when. Due dates and reading assignments are subject to change. Mxx indicates the chapter number of the text in the Martinich anthology.

PART I. Reference

Week 1: Reference and Definite Descriptions (Jan 12, 14).

Readings: Frege, “On sense and nominatum” (M14); Russell, “On denoting” (M15)

Week 2: More Descriptions (Jan 19, 21).

Readings: Strawson, “On referring” (M17); Donnellan, “Reference and definite descriptions” (M19).

Short paper #1 due Monday, Jan 19.

Week 3: The Descriptive Theory of Proper Names (Jan 26, 28).

Readings: Searle, “Proper names”; Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (selections: M21)

Week 4: The Causal Theory of Proper Names (Feb 2, 4).

Readings: Putnam, “Meaning and reference” (M22); Evans, “The causal theory of names” (M23)

Short paper #2 due Wednesday, Feb 4

Week 5: Names in Intensional Contexts (Feb 9, 11).

Readings: Kripke, “A puzzle about belief” (M30)

PART II. Meaning

Week 6: Psychological Theories of Meaning (Feb 23, 25).

Readings: Grice, “Meaning” (M6)

Week 7: Verificationism (Mar 2, 4).

Readings: Hempel, “Empiricist criteria...” (M2); Quine, “Two dogms of empiricism” (M3)

Midterm paper due Wednesday, Mar 4.

Week 8: Truth and Meaning (Mar 9, 11).

Readings: Tarski, “The semantic conception of truth” (M5); Davidson, “Truth and meaning” (M7)

PART III. Propositional Attitudes

Week 9: Propositional Attitudes (Mar 16, 18)

Readings: Quine, "Quantifiers and propositional attitudes" (M28); Davidson, "On saying that" (M29); Kaplan, "Quantifying in" (M30)

Short paper #3 due Wednesday, March 18.

Week 10: Propositional Attitudes continued (Mar 23, 25).

PART IV. Pragmatics

Week 11: Speech Acts (Mar 30, Apr 1).

Readings: Austin, "Performative utterances" (M8); Searle, "The structure of illocutionary acts" (M9); Searle, "A taxonomy of illocutionary acts" (M10)

Short paper #4 due Wednesday, Apr 1.

Week 12: Implicature (Apr 6, 8).

Readings: Grice, "Logic and conversation" (M11)

Week 13: Review (Apr 13, 15).

Final paper due Friday, April 17.