



FACULTY OF ARTS
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 471.01 – “Philosophy of Language”
Fall Term 2011

Course Outline

Meetings: 2:00-4:30pm Thursdays in PF 120

Instructor: Dr. Nicole Wyatt
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Email: nicole.wyatt@ucalgary.ca
Office Hours: Monday 3:30-4:30pm, and by appointment

Course Description

"I see nobody on the road," said Alice.

"I only wish I had such eyes," the King remarked in a fretful tone. "To be able to see Nobody! And at that distance, too! Why, it's as much as I can do to see real people, by this light!"

— Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There*, Chapter 7.

Philosophers have been interested in language for a variety of reasons. For one, language use is a central characteristic of human beings (though perhaps not exclusive to them), and thus to study language is to study human beings.

Additionally, certain philosophical problems seem to arise from false beliefs about the syntax and semantics of language, as we see in the quote from Lewis Carroll. If, as medieval logicians frequently claimed, 'Nobody' is a referring term of the same sort as 'Lewis' or 'Alice' then the King's response is perfectly cogent. This would seem to lead one directly to the view that nobody is a something that exists—a view that many, though not all, philosophers would find difficult to accept. But if 'Nobody' is not a referring term then what is it? It certainly seems to be of the same syntactic type as the names mentioned above, since substitution of 'Nobody' for 'Alice' in a sentence will generally preserve grammaticality, though not of course truth.

Thirdly at least some philosophers have thought that studying the structure of language could reveal something about the structure of reality. The thought, roughly, is that language is the expression of human thought, and that given that human thoughts can count as knowledge of the world, those thoughts must to some degree reflect reality. This view, which goes at least as far back as Plato, perhaps culminates in Leibniz's attempt to construct a perfect language in which any grammatical sentence has the additional virtue of truth.

Language is of course simply inherently interesting in its own right, which is perhaps the best reason of all to subject it to philosophical scrutiny.

The course is a survey of a variety of issues in philosophy of language of either historical or contemporary importance. It does not however attempt the impossible task of providing a comprehensive survey—many important and interesting topics will be passed by. We will however attempt to deal with those topics we do address in more than a superficial manner.

The primary objectives of the class are for students to (a) acquire an understanding of the general outlines of the field of philosophy of language, (b) acquire familiarity and basic competence with

the methodologies of philosophers of language, (c) improve their exegetical, analytic and argumentative skills more generally.

The course will be run as a seminar, with all students expected to come to each session prepared to discuss the readings for that day. The reading list will be made available on the Blackboard site for the course.

Required Texts

Stainton, Robert J. 2005. *Philosophical Perspectives on Language*. Broadview Press.

Stainton, Robert J. 2000. *Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language*. Broadview Press.

Supplemental readings provided through the Blackboard site for the course.

Evaluation

Grades in this class will be based on a term paper and participation in the production of a set of collaborative class notes. There will be no Registrar-scheduled final exam.

Due Dates

Term paper

Monday December 12th

Grading

- *Ceteris paribus*, the term paper will be worth 50%, and contributions to the class notes will be worth 50%.
- Grading will be based on both content *and* quality of presentation, which includes spelling and grammar.
- Interim grades for contributions to the class notes will be issued on November 8th. The final grade will be based on contributions made to the notes over the entire term (i.e. up to and including the last day of classes).
- In computing your final grade, your marks on individual assignments will be converted to grade points as defined in the calendar (A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, F = 0).

Late policy

The term paper will not be accepted after the deadline without special permission from the instructor. Failure to submit on time will normally result in a mark of zero. Students who cannot submit a paper due to medical reasons or other reasonable grounds should contact the instructor as soon as possible.

Website

In addition to the Blackboard site there is a wiki for the course which will be used for the production of class notes. This can be found at <https://language2011.wikispaces.com/>, however please note that you will not be able to access this site until you have been added as a user, which will happen after the official start of classes.

INTELLECTUAL HONESTY

Intellectual honesty is the cornerstone of the development and acquisition of knowledge and requires that the contribution of others be acknowledged. As a result, cheating or plagiarism on any assignment or examination is regarded as **an extremely serious academic offence**, the penalty for which may be an F on the assignment and possibly also an F in the course, academic probation, or requirement to withdraw. The University Calendar states that plagiarism exists when:

- *the work submitted or presented was done, in whole or in part, by an individual other than the one submitting or presenting the work (this includes having another impersonate the student or otherwise substituting the work of another for one's own in an examination or test);*
- *parts of the work are taken from another source without reference to the original author;*
- *the whole work (e.g., an essay) is copied from another source; and/or*
- *a student submits or presents work in one course which has also been submitted in another course (although it may be completely original with that student) without the knowledge of or prior agreement of the instructor involved.*

While it is recognized that scholarly work often involves reference to the ideas, data and conclusions of other scholars, intellectual honesty requires that such references be explicitly and clearly noted. Plagiarism occurs not only when direct quotations are taken from a source without specific acknowledgement, but also when original ideas or data from the source are not acknowledged. A bibliography is insufficient to establish which portions of the student's work are taken from external sources; footnotes or other recognized forms of citation must be used for this purpose.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

It is the student's responsibility to request academic accommodation. If you are a student with a documented disability who may require academic accommodation and have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre, contact their office at 220-8237. Students who have not registered with the Disability Resource Centre are not eligible for formal academic accommodation. You are also required to discuss your needs with your instructor no later than fourteen (14) days after the start of this course.

FACULTY OF ARTS PROGRAM ADVISING & STUDENT INFORMATION RESOURCES

- Have a question, but not sure where to start? The new Faculty of Arts Program Information Centre (PIC) is your information resource for everything in Arts. Drop in at SS110, phone 403-220-3580 or email at artsads@ucalgary.ca. You can also visit the Faculty of Arts website at <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/undergraduate> which has detailed information on common academic concerns.
- For program planning and advice, contact the Student Success Centre at 403-220-5881 or visit them in their new space on the 3rd Floor of the Taylor Family Digital Library.
- For registration (add/drop/swap), paying fees and assistance with your Student Centre, contact Enrolment Services at 403-210-ROCK [7625] or visit them at the MacKimmie Library Block.
- Email Contact Addresses for Students Union Representatives for the Faculty of Arts:
arts1@su.ucalgary.ca arts2@su.ucalgary.ca
arts3@su.ucalgary.ca arts4@su.ucalgary.ca