Philosophy 306: Philosophy of Language

Class meets Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 2:40 - 3:55 PM in UL 209

Your host: Prof. Michael P. Wolf
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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 10:00-12:00 and by appointment

Required Texts
Robert Brandom, Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism.
A.P. Martinich, The Philosophy of Language.
Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations.

What Is This Course About?
My aim in this course, as in every course I teach, is to make you do some philosophy. Just what it means to "do some philosophy" is a matter of some debate, though. If you asked twenty philosophers what it means to do philosophy, you would get somewhere between twenty-five and thirty answers. Just which questions are important, and just how we ought to pursue answers for them are not matters on which philosophers agree. The one element that seems to be common to all these conceptions of philosophy seems to be that we must give and ask for reasons for what we believe. We may judge that some reasons are better than others, and so some views may be more plausible to us. Giving and asking for reasons is a practice that belongs to all rational animals - Earthly or extraterrestrial, human or not - and this is what we will focus our attention on this course. The goal of this course is not to provide you with information (names, dates, and famous quotes) that you can recite at cocktail parties in the future, although in many cases, knowing those details is an important part of taking part in the class. Rather, my goal here is to teach you (or improve upon) a certain kind of skill: the skill of giving and asking for reasons, and evaluating the reasons other may give.

The more narrow focus of our work here will be on contemporary philosophy of language, stretching from Frege's work on logic and meaning in the late 19th Century to the present. The work we look at will also be fairly exclusively in the Anglo-American analytical tradition. Continental philosophy has a great deal to offer the philosophical study of language, but most of that material is available in other courses at the College, while the material included here is not. (If you have a special interest in figures such as Foucault, Derrida or Habermas and their relation to some of the topics discussed here, you may want to consider designing your own paper topic to address those issues.) We will spend the bulk of our time concerned with the general parameters and methods of a theory of meaning, though we will spend significant amounts of time discussing topics like the analytic-synthetic distinction and theories of reference as well.

Assessment
Class participation is an important issue to me, especially in a small class like this. I expect you to come to class with the readings done and ready to discuss them. In order to get you involved in these ways and as an exercise in immersing yourself in the debates and details of real developments in the philosophy of language, each student in this class will take part in a scheduled presentation. The presentation will involve offering an account of the emergence of a new theory or portion of a theory, or an explanation of the parameters of an actual debate in the recent literature. You will be expected to provide notes on what you expect to present a week in advance so that it may be evaluated in advance. The amount of preparation expected here is roughly the same as a five-page paper. Details of the format and topics will be made available as we progress. This will count for 20% of your final grade.
There will be two major paper assignments, each about 3000-3500 words (8-10 pages), due at roughly the mid- and endpoints of the semester. Each of these is worth 40% of your final grade. We will discuss topics and the way in which you should approach this assignment as the semester progresses.

I should mention a few things in closing. First, you are of course bound by the honor code here and any form of plagiarism will be severely punished. (Speak to me or consult a student handbook if you are unsure what counts as plagiarism.) This does not mean that you cannot use another source, or discuss and consult with your classmates about your assignments. I permit you to do the former and strongly encourage you to do the latter, so long as all the sources and classmates in question are properly cited in your paper. Finally, be forewarned that I reserve the right to lower the grades of papers given to me whose grammar and spelling do not meet college-level standards.

A Tentative Syllabus

**Class 1. (September 24):** Introduction

**Class 2. (September 26):** The Linguistic Turn
Read Frege "On Sense and Nominatum"

**Class 3. (September 28):** The Linguistic Turn
Read Russell "On Denoting"

**Class 4. (October 1):** Verificationism
Read Hempel "Empiricist Criteria.."

**Class 5. (October 3):** Verificationism
Read Hempel "Empiricist Criteria..

**Class 6. (October 5):** Problems With Verificationism
Read Class handouts.

**Class 7. (October 8):** The Turn to Pragmatism
Read Quine "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"

**Class 8. (October 10):** Guest Lecturer Chris Latiolais - Speech Act Theory

**Class 9. (October 12):** NO CLASS

**Class 10. (October 15):** The Turn to Pragmatism
Read Quine "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"

**Class 11. (October 17):** PRESENTATIONS: The Analytic-Synthetic Distinction

**Class 12. (October 19):** Truth and Meaning
Read Davidson "Truth and Meaning"

**Class 13. (October 22):** Truth and Meaning
Read Davidson "Truth and Meaning"

**Class 14. (October 24):** The Early Wittgenstein
Read Selections for the Tractatus (handout)
Class 15. (October 26): The Later Wittgenstein
Read *Philosophical Investigations*, sections 1-395

Class 16. (October 29): The Later Wittgenstein
Read *Philosophical Investigations*, sections 1-395

First Paper Due October 29

Class 17. (October 31): The Later Wittgenstein
Read *Philosophical Investigations*, sections 1-395

Class 18. (November 2): The Later Wittgenstein
Read *Philosophical Investigations*, sections 1-395

Class 19. (November 5): Private Language
Read Kripke "On Rules and Private Language" (handout)

Class 20. (November 7): PRESENTATIONS: The Private Language Argument

Class 21. (November 9): Inferentialism
Read Brandom, Introduction and Chapter 1

Class 22. (November 12): Inferentialism
Read Brandom, Introduction and Chapter 1

Class 23. (November 14): Inferentialism
Read Brandom, Chapter 4

Class 24. (November 16): Inferentialism
Read Brandom, Chapter 4

Class 25. (November 19): The Fregean Tradition
Review Frege and Russell, read Searle "Proper Names"

Class 26. (November 21): Direct Reference
Read Kripke, selections from *Naming and Necessity*

Class 27. (November 26): Direct Reference
Read Kripke, selections from *Naming and Necessity*

Class 28. (November 28): Direct Reference
Read Kripke, selections from *Naming and Necessity*

Class 29. (November 30): PRESENTATIONS: Direct and Indirect Reference

Second Paper Due December 3