

# Philosophy 415: Philosophy of Language

Instructor: Professor Michael Blome-Tillmann

Office: 940 Leacock

Office Hours: Tuesday 8:50-9:50, Thursday 8:50-9:50

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Course Location and Time: LEA 210, Tuesday & Thursday 14:30-16:00

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an introduction to some of the major topics and issues in contemporary philosophy of language and will thus address several of the most central and widely discussed questions of contemporary philosophy. In particular, we shall investigate views about the nature of meaning, reference, truth, and their relationships. Further topics will include the semantics of definite descriptions, proper names, indexicals, and conditionals, figurative or metaphorical uses of language, vagueness and the Sorites paradox, and the relationship between language and acts performed through its use (pragmatics).

## SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

1. Intro: Sense and Reference
2. Definite Descriptions
3. Proper Names
4. Truth
5. Truth & Meaning
6. Intensional Semantics and Possible Worlds
7. Demonstratives and Indexicals
8. Conditionals
9. Vagueness
10. Conversational Implicatures
11. Speech Acts
12. Metaphor

## REQUIREMENTS

Students who take this course must *complete readings on time* and must *participate in class*. Students are expected to have their texts with them at each class, and students may be called upon at random to discuss or explain parts of the week's readings. Warning: this *course will move quickly*, so students must take care not to fall behind. The course presupposes proficiency in first order predicate *logic* (PHIL 210 or equivalent).

## ASSESSMENT

50% Final essay; deadline: **December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011**

35% Midterm exam: **October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

15% Student presentations

Late papers will be downgraded at a rate of 1/3 of a grade per day (e.g. from A- to B+, C

to C-), including weekend days/holidays. Evidence of a consistent lack of preparation (including non-attendance without a medical excuse) results in a deduction of up to 5% from the course grade. Requests for extensions will be considered (but not automatically granted) only when requested at least 24 hours before the paper is due and substantiated at the time of request by a doctor's note documenting illness. Extensions will not be more than seven days. Class participation will not be formally graded, but enthusiastic and well-informed participation will be taken into account in borderline cases.

Students are urged to read Jim Pryor's excellent guidelines on how to read and write philosophy: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html> and <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

### **WEBCT**

The webpage for this course is located at <http://www.mcgill.ca/webct/>. It will be used to post the syllabus, readings, and periodic announcements. There is also a discussion function, and you are encouraged to post questions there. I will check regularly and respond to questions. Please feel encouraged to answer each other's questions and to discuss actively on WebCT! You must check the course webpage regularly. **IMPORTANT:** *Final essays must be submitted on WebCT.* Submissions by email or in hard copy will not be considered. If you have technical problems with WebCT, contact ICT customer support at: <http://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses/students/help/>.

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures. NB: In cases of doubt I will use the turnitin plagiarism detection software to determine whether submissions are plagiarized (see [www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/](http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/)) for more information).

### **TEXTBOOKS**

This course uses parts of the following textbook:

- Lycan, W.G., *Philosophy of Language – A Contemporary Introduction*, Routledge. (available electronically at the McGill Library)

For useful introductory reading *always* read up on the topics discussed in class on:

- [Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)
- [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)

### **READINGS**

This schedule is tentative and subject to change. Readings in square brackets are optional.

#### **Intro: Sense and Reference**

- Frege: 'On Sense and Reference'.
- Frege: 'Letter to Jourdain'.
- [Lycan: *The philosophy of language*, ch. 1]

### **Definite Descriptions**

- Russell: *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, Chapter 16.
- Russell: 'On Denoting'.
- Strawson: 'On Referring'.
- Russell: 'Mr Strawson on Referring'.
- Donnellan: 'Reference and Definite Descriptions'.
- [Lycan: *The philosophy of language*, ch. 1-2]

### **Proper Names**

- Kripke: *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture 1, pp. 22-34 & Lecture 2.
- Evans: 'The casual theory of reference'.
- [Searle: 'Proper Names'.]
- [Putnam: 'Meaning and Reference']
- [Stanley: 'Names and Rigid Designation'.]
- [Lycan: *The philosophy of language*, chs. 3-4]
- [Reimer: 'Reference', in *SEP*]

### **Truth**

- Walker: 'Theories of Truth'.
- Tarski: 'The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics'.
- [Kirkham: *Theories of Truth*, MIT Press (1992).]
- [Horwich: 'The minimalist conception of truth' in: *Truth* Blackburn & Simons, OUP.]

### **Truth and Meaning**

- Davidson: 'Truth and Meaning'.
- Davidson: 'Reply to Foster'.
- [Lewis: 'Languages and Language']
- [Larson and Segal, *Knowledge of Meaning: An Introduction to Semantic Theory*, MIT Press (1995), ch. 2. Reprinted as 'Knowledge of Meaning and Theories of Truth' in Ludlow, P. (ed.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Language*, MIT Press (1997).]
- [Lycan: *The philosophy of language*, ch. 9]

### **Intensional Semantics and Possible Worlds**

- Lewis: 'General Semantics'
- [von Fintel and Heim: 'Intensional Semantics']
- [Lycan: *The philosophy of language*, ch. 10]

### **Demonstratives and Indexicals**

- Perry: 'Frege on Demonstratives'.
- Braun: 'Indexicals', in *SEP*.
- [Kaplan: 'Demonstratives'.]
- [Lewis: 'Index, Context, and Content'.]

### **Conditionals**

- Stalnaker: 'A Theory of Conditionals'.
- Jackson: 'On Assertion and Indicative Conditionals'.
- [Edgington: 'Conditionals', *SEP*]
- [Edgington: 'On Conditionals', *Mind* 104 (1995), pp. 235-329]
- [Lewis: *Counterfactuals* (1973), ch.1]

### **Vagueness**

- Sainsbury and Williamson: ‘Sorites’.
- [Williamson: *Vagueness*, Routledge (1994), (chs. 4-5, chs. 7-8)]
- [Sorensen: ‘Vagueness’, in SEP]
- [Hyde: ‘The Sorites Paradox’, in SEP]
- [Fine: ‘Vagueness, Truth, and Logic’, in Keefe & Smith (eds.), *Vagueness*]

### **Speech Acts and Illocutionary Force**

- Austin: ‘Performative Utterances’
- Searle: ‘What Is a Speech Act?’
- [Lycan: *The philosophy of language*, ch. 12]

### **Implicative Relations**

- Grice: ‘Logic and Conversation’
- Grice: ‘Further notes on logic and Conversation’
- Searle: ‘Indirect Speech Acts’
- [Saddok: ‘On testing for conversational implicature’]
- [Bach: ‘Conversational Implicature’]
- [Bach: ‘The myth of conventional implicature’]
- [Lycan: *The philosophy of language*, ch. 13]

### **Metaphor**

- Davidson: ‘What metaphors mean’.
- Black: ‘How metaphors work: a reply to Davidson’.
- [Searle: ‘Metaphor’, in Martinich (ed.), *The Philosophy of Language*.]
- [Moran: ‘Metaphor’, in Hale and Wright (eds), *Companion to Phil of Language*.]
- [Lycan: *The philosophy of language*, ch. 14.]

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.