

Philosophy 415: Philosophy of Language

Course Information

Term & Year: Winter 2023
Prerequisites: PHIL 210 or equivalent and one intermediate course in philosophy
Course Time: T & R 08:30-10:00
Course Location: Burnside 1104

Instructor Information

Instructor: Professor Michael Blome-Tillmann
Office: Leacock, 9th floor
Office Hours: W 09:00-11:00 on Zoom (<https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/87672223875>)
In person: by appointment
Email: michael.blome@mcgill.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an introduction to some of the major topics and issues in the philosophy of language and will thus address several of the most central and widely discussed questions of 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, generics, the Sorites paradox, and the relationship between language and acts performed through its use (pragmatics).

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

1. On Sense and Reference
2. Definite Descriptions
3. Proper Names
4. Truth
5. Truth & Meaning
6. Demonstratives and Indexicals
7. Conversational Implicatures
8. Conditionals
9. Pragmatic Presupposition
10. Speech Acts
11. Context and Logical Form
12. Vagueness
13. Metaphor

This schedule is tentative and subject to change.

The course presupposes knowledge of propositional and first order predicate *logic* (Prerequisite: Introduction to Deductive Logic 1).

REQUIREMENTS

Students who take this course must *complete readings on time* and are strongly encouraged to *participate in class*. Warning: this *course will move quickly*, so students must take care not to fall behind. The course presupposes proficiency in first order predicate *logic*. Formal requirements for the course are PHIL 210 and one intermediate course in philosophy.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After taking this course students will:

- Be familiar with key philosophical problems and positions in contemporary philosophy of language
- Be able to identify key theses and argument structures in linguistic and philosophical texts
- Be able to differentiate between positions in the philosophy of language and compare their claims and assumptions
- Be able to express their own theses in the philosophy of language in writing and argue for them in a clear and concise manner
- Be able to critically evaluate arguments in the philosophy of language, both others' and their own

FORMAT

There will be two lectures per week, although as much time as possible will be devoted to discussion. Normally, the first class of each week will involve a presentation of the relevant literature and the second will consist of a mixture of lecturing and discussions. Students are required to *prepare short presentations* for their tutorial groups (see below).

Office hours: I will hold office hours on Wednesdays from 09:00-11:00 on Zoom (<https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/87672223875>) and in person by appointment during/after class.

ASSESSMENT

Attendance and Participation: 10%.

Midterm Exam: 30% (February 23rd, 2023).

Final Essay: 60%.

Additionally, each student must prepare a short presentation together with a group of fellow students. Failure to participate in a group presentation will result in the deduction of 6% from the final course grade.

Final Essay: About 3,000 words. Focuses on detailed evaluation of an argument. Students are asked to offer a critical analysis of their own. Based on a particular argument in a particular reading. Explain the argument and criticize it or develop it further. Be clear about exactly what you are objecting to—which premise, or premises, are you going to deny? Or why do you think the conclusion doesn't follow from the premises? You should also consider possible objections to your response—that is, what might the original author say in response to you, and what is your response to that? You should introduce, explain, and evaluate various authors' views as they pertain to your chosen question, but your own

framing and organization is central. Make sure to cite everything you're relying on.

Group presentation: Students must prepare a short presentation together with a group of fellow students. Group presentations will be assessed for credit only, as outlined above.

Students are asked 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>

EXTENSIONS

Late submissions 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 final 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.

MYCOURSES

The webpage for this course is located at <https://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses/>. It will be used to post the syllabus, readings, lectures, and periodic announcements. You must check the course webpage regularly. If you have technical problems with MyCourses, contact ICT customer support at: <http://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses/students/help/>.

IMPORTANT: *papers must be submitted on MyCourses as MS Word documents.* Submissions by email or in hard copy will not be considered. After submitting documents on MyCourses, always check that the correct file has been submitted. I will only grade those files that have been submitted on MyCourses. It is therefore crucial that you ensure after submission that the correct version of your work is on the system.

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/) for more information).

Submissions to this course will be automatically checked for plagiarism by means of Turnitin, Urkund, or equivalent/related software.

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](#)

PLAGIARISM

“Plagiarism” means the representation of another’s work, published or unpublished, as one’s own or assisting another in representing another’s work, published or unpublished, as his or her own. (a) No student shall represent another person’s work, published or unpublished, as his or her own in any academic writing, such as an essay, thesis, research report, project or assignment submitted in a course or a program of study, or represent as his or her own the work of another, whether the material so represented constitutes a part or the entirety of the work submitted. (b) No student shall contribute any work to another student with the knowledge that the latter may submit the work in part or whole as his or her own. Receipt of payment or other forms of compensation for work contributed shall be cause for presumption that the student had such knowledge.

Submissions to this course will be automatically checked for plagiarism by means of Turnitin, Urkund, or equivalent/related software.

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No audio or video recording of any kind is allowed in class without the explicit permission of the instructor.

INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY

As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009.

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.

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