

PHIL 415:

## *Philosophy of Language*

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Wednesdays, Fridays: 14:35–15:55

LEA 15

Course web site: *MyCourses*

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

**Summary of Subject Matter.** The course will cover certain selected topics in the philosophy of language which have been central to the development of analytic philosophy in the 20th century. It will begin with a brief introduction outlining some of the general philosophical issues which the philosophy of language raises, especially the place that philosophy of language has come to assume in modern analytic philosophy. After this, the course will concentrate on important specific doctrines and theories meant as illustrations of some of the main points, in particular those concerning accounts of naming and describing (Locke, Frege, Russell, Strawson, Donnellan, Kripke); meaning (e.g., Frege, Quine, Putnam). Further topics might be (depending on time available) a discussion of the so-called Private Language Argument (e.g., Wittgenstein, Kripke), and the counterposed claim that the language capacity and access to language is innate (e.g., Chomsky or the ‘language of thought’ hypothesis). Of fundamental importance in all this will be Frege’s analysis of sense, especially the sense of sentences via an account of truth-conditions, and Kripke’s criticism of Frege’s theory of naming and descriptions (here we will read Kripke’s book *Naming and Necessity*).

The course will focus on the texts of the various authors we will read, and not at all on secondary sources. Accordingly, the main purpose of the lectures will be to focus on and articulate, and to some extent to expand upon, the arguments, positions and claims set out in these specific texts. Accordingly, it will be assumed that students have read the relevant material in advance of the lectures in which they will be discussed. Moreover, not all aspects of the texts can or will be discussed thoroughly in the lectures. Most of the reading will be distributed via *MyCourses*, the exception being the Kripke book *Naming and Necessity*.

If the class is not so big as to make this impractical, class discussion and participation will be encouraged. Students will thus not only be expected to read the texts assigned for the week in advance, but be prepared to initiate and/or pursue the discussion if asked to do so.

**Evaluation.** Students will be required to write a short paper in the middle of the term, worth 1/3 of the marks, and then two papers (or one paper and a ‘quiz’) set at the end of the course, worth the other 2/3 of the mark. All essays will be on questions set. The questions for the final essay(s)/quiz will be made available in the last day of lectures on *MyCourses*, and will be due 7–10 days after this. (For technical reasons, there will officially be a take-home exam, but these questions will be it.) There will be a word limit, probably of 2500 words for each of the essays; they are kept short with the expectation that the answers will be focused clearly on the issues raised by the questions.

**Submission of Work.** In order to avoid paper, it is required that *all work* be submitted *electronically*, to my e-mail address, as PDF documents. (WORD files are NOT acceptable: PDFs can be created very simply from any word processor files.) The file titles should be of the form ‘Bloggs-415-Essay-*n*’, where ‘Bloggs’ is here a placeholder for *your surname*, and *n* will be either 1, 2 or 3, as appropriate. *Extensions to deadlines set will be granted only in very exceptional circumstances, usually only for medical reasons and with a medical note, or other appropriate documentation.* Late papers will be penalised at the rate of a third of a grade per day overdue. (Thus a paper adjudged to be worth a B+ will be assigned a B if it’s one day late, a B– if late two days, and so on.)

**Requirements.** Students must be comfortable with logic and formal techniques; having completed PHIL 210 (Introduction to Formal Logic) or the equivalent, is an *absolute* requirement, and students will preferably have done at least one other course in Analytic Philosophy (e.g., a course in Philosophy of Mind).

**Reading Matter.** As stated above, most of the basic readings will be made available on *MyCourses*, although very important for a bit later in the course is the book:

- Saul Kripke: *Naming and Necessity* (Harvard University Press).

The Kripke book will be available at the Word Bookstore, on Milton Street, close to the University Street gates. (Cheques or cash; no credit cards.)

### McGill Policies

- 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 (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information).

*NB*

- In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.
- Students have the right to submit work in French.