

Tuesdays, 14.35–17.25, LEA 517

Course Page: *myCourses*

MICHAEL HALLETT

**Office Hours:** TBA (Look for Sign-Up Sheet)E-mail: *michael.hallett@mcgill.ca*

**Brief, Provisional Description** [NB. *A fuller Description will be posted next week on the MyCourses site for this course.* The current version is just to give a preliminary idea of the scope of the seminar.] This seminar will begin with a close reading of Kripke's lectures *Naming and Necessity* from the 1970s. In these lectures, Kripke is responding to particular views of, respectively, Frege and Russell, which assign a certain primacy to definite descriptions ('the current [2023] President of France') over ordinary names ('Macron'), roughly that descriptions (largely) take the place of names, and Kripke presents a very different view, according to which the two should not be assimilated, and play a very different semantic role. The lectures are fascinating in themselves. They start from what one might call a 'common-sense view' of the way we use ordinary language in ordinary discourse in the most basic way, for example, to refer to ordinary things, like our friends or the holders of political office, and to say straightforward things about them, 'wears a red pullover', 'leads a new political party', 'could have watched Man. Utd. today, but didn't'. This, quite rightly, is seen as a corrective to the overly restrictive attempts by Frege (and especially Russell) to think of ordinary language as subservient to attempts to reformulate it in formal language. Yet from this view of the role of names and descriptions in 'ordinary language', we can draw profound lessons about, among other things, the purpose and aim of scientific discourse.

The first task, then, is come to an understanding of the richness of Kripke's ideas here. Having said this, much changes about the balance between names and descriptions in theoretical frameworks, especially for mathematics. I am interested in the way that Frege himself applies his ideas about the primacy of descriptions in his important accounts of the foundations of mathematics, specifically arithmetic, and analysis of this will form the second half of the seminar. My suggestion is even stronger: that this this dominance of definite descriptions in the theoretical sphere was waht dictated his approach to definite descriptions to language generally. In any case, the primary text for this will be Frege's *The Foundations of Arithmetic* from 1884.

**Arrangements.** The seminar will be based on student presentations over the twelve weeks, each time followed by discussion. You can expect to do at least 2 presentations over this time, depending somewhat on how many students are registered. Since the Frege material is less accessible than Kripke, I will probably take the lead in the exposition of that. But in any case, since our aim is to get to grips with the point(s) of this material, the presentations should take the form more of 'question and answer' rather than that of a polished conference lecture. So: 'In the first half of Lecture I, Kripke lays out 2 central theses, A and B. It's clear why A is central, it's because of . . . but it's not so clear at all why B is adopted. So we have here a question to explore: why B? I have a vague idea, which is . . . etc.'

**Prerequisites.** Having done PHIL 210 (or COMP 230 is *essential*), and having done PHIL 310 (or equivalent) and PHIL 311 is *highly recommended*. It would also be greatly beneficial to have done a course in Philosophy of Language (here PHIL 415).

**Course Material/Readings.** The lectures will concentrate on close reading and discussion of original texts, all of which will be made available through the *myCourses* Website, supplemented by detailed Handouts on some of the subjects covered. The readings will be *essential*; participation in, and benefit from, the seminar sessions depends on it.

**Marking and Assessment: Provisional** The final mark is composed of a final paper (70% or more), and then assessment of written up versions of the presentations. But this also can be regarded as provisional, depending (again) on the number of people present.

**Important:** Students experiencing difficulties for any reason, especially for reasons connected directly or indirectly with COVID and the now semi-permanent 'unusual' circumstances, *should contact me as early as they can*. My experience suggests that delay simply makes it more difficult, and greatly increases stress for you and the workload for both you *and* me. In cases of clear difficulties of this sort, deadlines will be treated with flexibility.

For specific problems concerning completion of assignments or with exams, you are encouraged to contact the office for *Student Accessibility and Achievement* (Formerly known as the *Office for Students with Disabilities*); please see <https://www.mcgill.ca/access-achieve/>. NB

**Submission of Work.** All work is to be submitted *electronically*, to *myCourses* as PDF documents. (WORD or PAGES files are NOT acceptable: PDFs can be created very simply from any word processor files.) The titles of the files submitted are to be of the form 'Bloggs-G-611-X', where 'Bloggs' is here a placeholder for *your surname as it appears on the course registration*, 'G' is a placeholder for your first **given name** as it appears on the registration sheet, 'X' is a placeholder for the kind of written Assignment it is, so for example 'Presentation-2', or 'Final'.

### McGill Policies

1. 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

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

3. In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right, without seeking permission, to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

4. As instructors of this course, the Lecturer and (where appropriate) TAs endeavour to provide an inclusive learning environment. If you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with us or with Student Affairs or the Office for Students with Disabilities, <https://www.mcgill.ca/osd>, 514-398-6009.

5. McGill University is on land which long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous people whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.