

## Philosophy 4220: Philosophy of Language

### Course Meeting Times

Tuesday, 10:40AM-11:30AM, [Matherly Hall 0051](#)

Thursday, 10:40AM-12:35PM, Matherly Hall 0051

### Instructor Information

*Instructor:* Bob Beddor

*Email:* [r.beddor@ufl.edu](mailto:r.beddor@ufl.edu)

*Office Location:* 308 Griffin-Floyd Hall (This is in Philosophy Dept, located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor of [Griffin Floyd Hall](#))

*Office Hours:* Tuesday noon-1pm (in office); Wednesdays 2:00pm-3:00pm (over Zoom)

### Description

Over the last hundred years or so, philosophers and linguists have made great strides in understanding linguistic meaning and communication. This course will provide a broad overview of some of the major developments on this front. We'll tackle topics such as:

- *The Nature of Meaning.* Humans have a remarkable ability to invest noises and written marks with meaning. How is this possible? What makes a particular word – say, my use of the word “cats” – mean what it does (namely, *cats*), rather than something else (e.g., *dogs*), or, for that matter, nothing at all?
- *Demarcating Sense and Nonsense.* Some uses of language seem to be altogether meaningless. Can we develop any sort of useful criterion for distinguish meaningful language from meaningless language? If so, can we use it to adjudicate whether various philosophical claims are meaningful?
- *The Semantics/Pragmatics Distinction.* Sometimes we mean something (in a suitably broad sense of meaning) without directly saying it (e.g. sarcasm). What is the relationship between what is said and what is meant but not said?
- *Language Acquisition.* At any early age, humans acquire the ability to produce and understand a potentially infinite variety of new sentences – that is, sentences they've never previously encountered. How is this possible? What's the best explanation for this extraordinary ability?
- *Language and Thought.* Does language shape the way we think? If so, in what ways?

### Grading

The grade for the class will be a function of the following components:

#### *Attendance/Participation (20%)*

This course will be run like a seminar rather than a lecture. As such, discussion is absolutely vital. While I understand that some students are reluctant to speak in class, my aim is to create a welcoming and encouraging environment where everyone feels comfortable contributing.

- Specifically, attendance is worth 10% of the grade. Participation – asking questions, raising points, etc. – is worth an additional 10%, for a combined total of 20% of the grade.

#### *Weekly Questions (10%)*

Every week there will be an online multiple-choice question on Canvas, which students should complete by 10:30am on Thursday (before the Thursday class meeting). These questions are designed to check your comprehension of the readings/material to be covered that week.

### *First Paper (25%)*

The first paper assignment is to write a written response to one of the articles we have covered thus far in the class. It should be focused on a particular argument in one of the papers – you should briefly summarize the argument, and then engage with it critically, by either offering an original criticism of it, or extending the argument in some way.

### *Presentation (10%)*

A few class sessions will be reserved for student presentations (see the schedule below). The presentations are a warm-up for your final paper. In it, you should give a short “pitch” of your main argument, and provide any background necessary to make sure your pitch is understood by your classmates. *You are expected to prepare a short handout to accompany your presentation, and you should email the handout to me at least one full day (24 hours) before the presentation.* (Completing the handout and sending it in advance is part of the presentation grade.) The idea behind the presentation is to give you an opportunity get feedback on your ideas from your classmates – feedback that you can then incorporate into the final paper.

### *Final Paper (35%)*

The final paper is an opportunity to address a particular topic in depth. Your paper should demonstrate comprehension of the relevant literature, and also make some original contribution, either an original criticism of one of the articles, an original defense of one of the article’s positions, or a novel extension of some of the articles’ ideas) I will provide a list of potential paper topics closer to the due-date. (It is fine for you to write on a topic other than one of the suggested prompts, provided that you check with me beforehand.)

### **Student learning outcomes**

Through successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Reconstruct major positions and arguments in philosophy of language
- Analyze and evaluate these arguments and positions
- Draw connections between philosophy of language and other areas of philosophy, as well as related fields such linguistics

### **General Expectations**

#### *Discussion Expectations*

We want to create an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual respect in our classroom. This course emphasizes discussion and debate: I firmly believe that the best way to learn

philosophy is to practice doing philosophy, which involves formulating hypotheses, raising questions, and considering objections.

In the course of our discussions, disagreements will naturally arise. That is fine; disagreement is an integral part of philosophical activity. That said, it is important to pay attention to the way you voice your disagreement with others; we want to ensure everyone feels respected even in the midst of disagreement. Here are some general guidelines to achieve this goal:

- Please try to listen to your classmates, and avoid interrupting them.
- When you disagree, please take care to challenge the idea being discussed, rather than the person.
- When you disagree with a position, try to articulate your grounds for disagreement (backing up your position with reasons is an integral part of doing philosophy).

### *Other Classroom Expectations*

A number of studies suggest that learning is more effective when screens aren't present in the classroom. Because of this, please also avoid using cell phones or computers during class, except when working in discussion groups on the discussion questions.

### **Official Style Guide**

Philosophy writing is somewhat different from writing you may do in other classes. In philosophy papers, you primarily want to be arguing for some claim (your thesis). For this class, a helpful resource is Jim Pryor's philosophy paper style guidelines: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>.

### **Grade Scale**

The following grade scale will be used to assign final letter grades for the course. See UF grading policies for assigning grade points at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>.

Grade Scale	Grade Value
100-93=A	A=4.0
92-90=A-	A-=3.67
89-86=B+	B+=3.33
85-82=B	B=3.00
81-79=B-	B-=2.67
78-75=C+	C+=2.33
75-72=C	C=2.00
71-69=C-	C-=1.67
68-66=D+	D+=1.33
65-62=D	D=1.00
61-60=D-	D-=0.67

**Readings**

You will be expected to have read the assigned texts in advance. Readings will be made available on the course website. (Note: We will be reading a few chapters from Gary Kemp's *What is This Thing Called Philosophy of Language?* Students who prefer to have a hardcopy of relevant texts may thus wish to order a copy.)

**Preliminary Schedule**

(Note: The following is subject to change as the course develops)

Unit 1: *Reference and Meaning*

1. Thursday, Aug 22

Introduction to Philosophy of Language

2. Tuesday, Aug 27

Frege on Sense and Reference

*Required Reading:*

- Frege, "On Sense and Reference"

- Kemp, *What is This Thing Called Philosophy of Language?*, Chps.1-2.

3. Thursday, Aug 29

Frege continued

*No new reading – review Frege and Kemp on Frege*

4. Tuesday, Sept 3

Russell on Reference and Descriptions

*Required Reading:*

- Russell, "On Denoting"

- Kemp, *What is This Thing Called Philosophy of Language?*, Chp.3.

5. Thursday, Sept 5

Russell continued, Debate: Frege v Russell

*No new reading – review Frege and Russell*

6. Tuesday, Sept 10

Names and descriptions, round two: enter Kripke

*Required Reading:*

- Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (selections)

*Optional Reading:*

- Kemp, *What is This Thing Called Philosophy of Language?*, Chp. 4, sections 1-6 (pp. 54-63)

7. Thursday, Sept 12  
Kripke continued

*No New Reading, Review Kripke and Kemp on Kripke*

8. Tuesday, Sept 17  
Is Meaning in the head? Semantic externalism

*Required Reading:*  
- Putnam, "Meaning and Reference"

*Optional Reading:*  
- Kemp, *What is This Thing Called Philosophy of Language?*, Chp. 4, section 7 onwards (pp.63-70)

9. Thursday, Sept 19  
Semantic externalism and epistemology

*Required Reading:*  
- Putnam, Brains in vats (*Reason, Truth, and History*, chp. 1)

Unit 2: *The Pursuit of a General Theory of Meaning*

10. Tuesday, Sept 24  
From Verificationism to truth conditional semantics

*Required Readings:*  
- Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (chp. 1)  
- Hacking, "A.J. Ayer's Verification" (chp. 9 of *Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?*)

11. Thursday, Sept 26  
Beyond truth conditional semantics? Part 1: Implicatures

*Required Readings:*  
- Grice, "Logic and Conversation"

*Optional Reading:*  
- "Implicature", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*  
- Simons, "Foundational Issues in Presupposition"

12. Tuesday, Oct 1  
Implicatures Continued

13. Thursday, Oct 3  
Beyond truth conditional semantics? Part 2: Expressivism

*Required Readings:*  
- Schroeder, *Noncognitivism in Ethics*, Chps. 1&4

*Optional Further Reading:*

- Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, chp. 6

14. Tuesday, Oct 8

Catch-up/Review/Paper-Writing

Thursday, Oct 10

Catch-up/Review/Paper-Writing

Unit 3: *The Relation between Linguistic Meaning and Thought*

*Part 1: Explaining linguistic and mental content*

Tuesday, Oct 15 FIRST PAPER DUE (boooooo!)

Grice on Meaning

*Required Reading:*

- Grice, "Meaning"

*Optional Further Reading:*

- Searle, "What is a Speech Act?", section 4 (Meaning)

Thursday, Oct 17

Lewis on Meaning and Convention

*Required Reading:*

- Lewis, "Languages and Language"

*Optional Further Reading:*

- Hawthorne, "A Note on 'Languages and Language'"

*Part 2: What explains mental content?*

Tuesday, Oct 22

Back to Causation: Causal Theories of Content

*Required Readings:*

- Crane, *The Mechanical Mind*, Chp. 5, pp.169-184. (Feel free to skim the last two pages, on Fodor's asymmetric dependence theory.)
- Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson, *Philosophy of Mind and Cognition*, chp. 11, pp.203-210.

*Optional Further Readings:*

- Stampe, "Towards a Causal Theory of Linguistic Representation"
- Adams & Aizawa, "Causal Theories of Mental Content", SEP entry, available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/content-causal/>

Thursday, Oct 24

Teleosemantic Theories of Content

*Required Reading:*

- Millikan, "Biosemantics"
- Neander, "Swampman Meets Swampcow"

*Optional Further Reading:*

- Crane, *The Mechanical Mind*, Chp. 5, pp.185-207. (Focus on pp.189-194.)
- Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson, *Philosophy of Mind and Cognition*, chp. 11, pp.210-215.

*Part 3: Connections Between Language and Thought*

Tuesday, Oct 29 – Is language necessary for thought?

*Required Reading:*

- Gallistel, "Prelinguistic Thought"
- Stich, "Do Animals Have Beliefs?"

*Optional Further Reading:*

- Andrews, "Animal Cognition", SEP entry available at:  
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cognition-animal/>, esp. sections 2-4

Thursday, Oct 31 – Is Language sufficient for thought?

*Required Reading:*

- Turing, "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" (focus on pp.443-452)
- Crane, *The Mechanical Mind*, Chp. 3

Tuesday, Nov 5 – Does language shape thought?

*Required Reading:*

- Elbourne, *Meaning: A Slim Guide*, chp. 8
- Li and Gleitman, "Turning the Tables: Language and Spatial Reasoning"

*Optional Reading:*

- Winawer et al., "Russian Blues Reveal the Effects of Language on Color Discrimination"

*Part 4: Language Acquisition*

Thursday, Nov 7 – Acquiring a language, part 1 – sounds and words

*Required Readings:*

- Kuhl, "Early Language Acquisition"

*Optional Readings:*

- Saffran et al., "Statistical Learning by 8-Month-Old Infants"

Tuesday, Nov 12 - Acquiring a language, part 2 – acquiring sentences

*Required Reading:*

- Pullum and Scholz, "Empirical Assessments of the Poverty of the Stimulus Argument"

*Optional Further Reading:*

- Gomez et al, "Infant Artificial Language Learning and Language Acquisition"

Thursday, Nov 14 – Student Presentations

Tuesday, Nov 19 – Student Presentations

Thursday, Nov 21 – Student Presentations

Nov 25-29: NO CLASS THANKSGIVING (Gobble Gobble)

Tuesday, Dec 3 – Wrapping Up

**Final Paper Due**