PHIL 139: Philosophy of Language

Professor Gabbrielle M Johnson

Instructor: Gabbrielle Johnson [Gabby]
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Time: MW 1:15-2:30; 4:15-5:30
Place: KRV 168
Office Hours: Thurs 12-2pm

Course Overview:

This course will provide an overview of philosophical theories of linguistic meaning and applied philosophy of language. The class will be centered around three cornerstone questions: what do words mean, how do words mean, and what do words do? Most things in the world are meaningless. That is, they do not portray the world as being a certain way. Language is one of the very few exceptions to this: words and sentences mean things. That is, they are about things: the word 'dog' is about dogs; it picks dogs out. Perhaps most astonishingly, the ability of words to stand in for objects in communication and thought allows us to literally transcend space and time: while I can't see or touch Cleopatra, I can talk about her. How is this possible? How do I know my word 'Cleopatra' picks out Cleopatra? What else does this power of words allow me to do with language? We will look at a variety of classical and contemporary answers to these questions. Along the way, we will consider some of the deepest topics in philosophy: the relations between language, mind, and the world.

The course is divided into three units:

UNIT ONE:	UNIT TWO:	UNIT THREE:
What Words Mean	How Words Mean	What Words Do

Course Materials:
All required and supplementary materials (including readings, quizzes, and writing assignments) will be available through the course website on Sakai. It is very important to check it regularly for updates. There is no required textbook for the course.

Course Policies:
A more detailed outline of course policies is available on the course website under "Course Policies". Please check there for more information.

Regarding classroom etiquette, the most important policy to keep in mind is to always abide by the **Principle of Charity**. Formally, the principle requires that you interpret a speaker's statements in the most persuasive way possible, so as to render those statements rational and worthy of philosophical engagement. Intuitively, this requires that you give everyone you interact with the benefit of the doubt. A student following the Principle of Charity, for example, would not speak over their fellow student or be outright dismissive of the points they're intending to convey. This applies not only to your fellow students, but also those readings with which we'll be engaging. The primary aim of the principle is ensure a respectful, worthwhile, and collaborative intellectual environment Thus, all students will be expected to always act in ways that further these aims.

Course Requirements:
Final grades will be calculated on the basis of 5 assignment categories:

(1) reading responses	(10% of your final grade)
(2) first paper 4-6 pages	(20% of your final grade)
(3) take-home midterm	(30% of your final grade)
(4) second paper, 6-8 pages	(40% of your final grade)

As you can see, this class requires a lot of writing. Philosophy is at its best when students are given the opportunity to engage deeply and critically with a topic—skills you will develop over time and with each assignment. The rising percentage distributions reward progress on these skills.

Reading Responses:
Students must complete a total of 15 reading responses over the course of the semester.
The following is the format that all reading responses *must* follow:

I. **250-word abstract of the reading:**
   In 250 words or fewer, summarize the article.
II. **Reading Questions:**
   Answer as many of the reading questions as you can.
III. **250-word Free Response:**
   In 250 words or fewer, tell me your reaction to the reading. For example, what struck you a most interesting? What was most confusing? Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?
IV. **Question(s) for Class:**
   Write at least one question you have for class (more if you have them). Questions must be 50 words or fewer and should be numbered.

Each reading response will received a letter grade; however, credit will be given on a pass/fail basis, with any response earning a "C" or above receiving full credit. Reading responses must be submitted before 11:59pm the day preceding each class through the course website and cannot be submitted after this deadline. Once a student reaches 15 reading responses, they may choose to replace two of their lowest scores by completing two additional reading responses.

Paper Assignments:
Prompts and details for written assignments will be made available at least one and a half weeks before the assignment is due. All written assignments will be graded anonymously.

Take-Home Midterm:
Questions on the midterm will require essay responses and will substantially overlap with content surveyed in the reading response "guiding questions". The midterm will be distributed in class on a Wednesday and due at 11:55 PM on a Saturday (not in class), and must be uploaded through TurnItIn. Students are not permitted to consult with others about the content of the midterm once it has been distributed.

Schedule:
Tentative - This schedule is highly subject to change. Always check the course website for updates.

* = recommended

UNIT ONE - What Words Mean

Week One

Aug 29 (M): Introduction and Overview of the Philosophical Method

(1) *****Lewis Carroll - "Humpty Dumpty" from *Through the Looking Glass* (1871)

Aug 31 (W): The Puzzle of Meaning

(1) Tim Crane - "The Puzzle of Representation" (2003)

Week Two

Sept 5 (M): Labor Day!

Sept 7 (W): On Two Kinds of Meaning

(1) Gottlob Frege - "On Sense and Reference" p. 1 (1892)

Week Three

Sept 12 (M): Definite Descriptions

(1) Bertrand Russell - "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" (1910)
(2) *Bertrand Russell - "Denoting" Chapter V of *Principles of Mathematics* (1903)

Sept. 14 (W): Denotation

(1) Betrand Russell - "On Denoting" (1905)
(2) *Betrand Russell - "Descriptions" (1919)

Week Four

Sept 19 (M): Existence, Context, and Presupposition

(1) P.F. Strawson - "On Referring" (1950)
(2) Betrand Russell - "Mr. Strawson on Referring" (1957)

Sept 21 (W): Reference

(1) Keith Donnellan - "Reference and Definite Descriptions" (1966)

Week Five

Sept 26 (M): Descriptivist Theory of Proper Names

(1) Ludwig Wittgenstein - Excerpts from *Philosophical Investigations* (1953)
(2) John Searle - "Proper Names" (1958)

Sept 28 (W): Against Descriptivism for Proper Names

(1) Keith Donnellan - "Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions" (1972)

UNIT TWO - How Words Mean

Week Six

Oct 3 (M): Meaning Giving vs Reference Fixing

(1) Saul Kripke - "Naming and Necessity" (lecture one) (1980)

Oct 5 (W): Causal Theory of Reference

(1) Saul Kripke - "Naming and Necessity" (lecture two) (1980)

Oct 7 (F): PAPER ONE DUE

Week Seven

Oct 10 (M): Against Descriptivism for Kind Terms

(1) Hilary Putnam - "It Ain't Necessarily So" pp. 237-239 (1962)
(2) Hilary Putnam - "Is Semantics Possible" pp. 144-152 (1970)
(3) Hilary Putnam - "Explanation and Reference" pp. 204-214 (1973)

Oct 12 (W): Externalism About Meaning

(1) Hilary Putnam - "The Meaning of 'Meaning'"pp. 215-252, 268-271 (1975)
(2) Tyler Burge - "Remarks on Putnam's Contributions to Semantics" pp. 235-239 (2013)

Week Eight

Oct 17 (M): Fall Break

Oct 19 (W): Anti-Individualism About Meaning

(1) Tyler Burge - "Other Bodies" (1982)

Week Nine

Oct 24 (M): Social Language

(1) Tyler Burge - "Individualism and the Mental" pp. 104-114, 118-121, 132-150 (1979)
(2) *Burge - "Wherein is Language Social" (1989)

Oct 26 (W): Convention

(1) David Lewis - Excerpts from *Convention,* Ch. 1 and 4.1 (1969)
(2) *David Lewis - "Languages and Language" (1975)

Oct 26-29 (W-S): Take-Home Midterm

UNIT THREE - What Words Do

Week Ten

Oct 31 (M): Implicature

(1) Paul Grice - "Logic and Conversation" (1975)

Nov 2 (W): Insults

(1) Elisabeth Camp - "Why metaphors make good insults" (2017)

Oct 4 (F): Elisabeth Camp Colloquium (attendance = one makeup reading response)

Week Eleven

Nov 7 (M): Racist Jokes

(1) Luvell Anderson - "Racist Humor" (2015)

Nov 9 (W): Dogwhistles

(1) Jennifer Saul - "Dogwhistles, Political Manipulation, and Philosophy of Language" (2018)

Week Twelve

Nov 14 (M): Generalization

(1) Sarah-Jane Leslie - "Original Sin of Cognition: Fear Prejudice, and Generalization" (2017)

Nov 16 (W): Slurs

(1) Eleonore Neufeld - "Essentialist theory of Slurs" (2019)

Week Thirteen

Nov 21 (M): Human and AI Communication

(1) Katherine Ritchie - "Essentializing Language and the Prospect for Ameliorative Projects" (2021)

Nov 23 (M): Thanksgiving Break!

Week Fourteen

Nov 28 (M) :

(1) Johnson and Dupre - "Uncanny Performance, Divergent Competence: Biases as Principled Barriers to Human-Machine Communication" (MS)

Nov 30 (W): Class Canceled

Week Fifteen

Dec 5 (M):

(1) Students' choice! (Options include code switching, meaning and reference in fiction, pictorial representation, etc.)

Dec 8 (W): Wrapping Up

(1) No Reading

Dec 16 (F): PAPER TWO DUE

Academic Misconduct:

Students are expected to know and to follow the college's guidelines for academic honesty. Academic misconduct can occur in a variety of ways, including (but not limited to) cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism. When in doubt about whether some academic practice is acceptable, ask the instructor for assistance. Always err on the side of avoiding misconduct. **Any suspected violation of university policy regarding academic conduct will be reported directly to the Academic Standards Committee. There are no exceptions.**

Academic Accommodation:

Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Student Disability Resources Center (SDRC) at (909) 607-7419 or in person at the Tranquada Student Service Center, 757 College Way, 1st floor. When possible, students should contact the SDRC within the first two weeks of the term as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations.

College Resources:
For more information, check out the following resources:

- Office of the Dean of Students:
  https://www.cmc.edu/dean-of-students/academic-integrity
- Student Conduct Code:
  https://www.cmc.edu/dean-of-students/policies-and-procedures
- Claremont Colleges Library Tutorial on Academic Integrity:
  https://library.claremont.edu/exploring-academic-integrity
- Claremont Center for Writing and Public Discourse:
  https://www.cmc.edu/writing
- Claremont Student Disability Resource Center:
  https://services.claremont.edu/sdrc/
- Monsour Counseling and Psychological Services (MCAPS):
  https://services.claremont.edu/mcaps/
- CARE Center (Civility, Access, Resources, and Expression):
  https://www.cmc.edu/care-center
- Chaplains:
  https://services.claremont.edu/chaplains/
- EmPOWER Center
  https://www.7csupportandprevention.com/empower-center
- Student Health Services
  https://services.claremont.edu/student-health-services/
- Queer Resource Center:
  https://colleges.claremont.edu/qrc/