

Philosophy 208: The Language Revolution  
Fall 2011  
Tuesdays, Thursdays, 9am - 10:15am

Hamilton College  
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## Syllabus

### Course Description and Overview

If there is one unifying theme for twentieth-century philosophy, it is the study of language. Some philosophers believed that all philosophical questions arise from misuses of language. Others believed that clarifying our uses of language can lead us to solutions to perennial philosophical questions, like the mind and body problem, or whether God exists. Still others explored the nature of language and its uses for its own sake. The profound developments in logic in the twentieth century were concomitant with this focus on language.

We will start by looking briefly at some pre-twentieth-century views of language and Frege's seminal work on language in the late nineteenth century, especially his distinction between sense and reference. The second part of the course, roughly the first half of the term, will focus on the nature of reference: How do words hook on to the world? The third part of the course, roughly the second half of the term, will focus on the nature of meaning: How does language get its content? At the end of the term, we will look briefly at linguistic ontology. Along the way, we will read some of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, including Russell, Wittgenstein, Tarski, Hempel, Strawson, Grice, Quine, Putnam, Chomsky, and Kripke.

### Texts

Required readings are listed below and available on the course website, as will be my class notes. There are many good secondary sources in philosophy of language. See the course bibliography, available on the website.

### On-Line Resources

The website for this course is:

[http://www.thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Course\\_Websites/Language\\_F11/Course\\_Home.html](http://www.thatmarcusfamily.org/philosophy/Course_Websites/Language_F11/Course_Home.html)

The course website includes the syllabus and schedule, readings, class notes, handouts, and links to websites specifically selected for this course. I will use the Blackboard site *only* to post grades.

### Office Hours

My office hours for the Fall 2011, term are 10:30am - noon, Monday through Friday. My office is upstairs in 202 College Hill Road.

## Assignments and Grading

Your responsibilities this course include the following, with their contributions to your grade calculation in parentheses:

Attendance and participation  
Readings  
Two Précis (10%; 5% each)  
In-Class Presentation (20%)  
Two papers (45%; 20% for the first and 25% for the second)  
Final Exam (25%)

**Attendance and Readings:** While there is no direct reward or penalty for attendance, I expect students to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned reading.

**Précis:** The two précis are on specific, assigned topics. The first topic is Frege's distinction between sense and reference. It is due on September 15. The second topic is a theme of your choice in David Rosenthal's lecture, "Translation and Understanding," on October 17 at 4pm. The second précis is due on October 20. Each précis is to be no more than 500 words. I expect you to have to work to say what you want to say in so few words.

**Presentation:** Each student is required to participate in one in-class presentation. Presentations will mainly be done in pairs, though there are some opportunities for solo presentations. You should prepare a ten-to-fifteen minute presentation. Given discussion, your time leading the class may vary from half a class period to a full class period. I will distribute more specific guidelines, as well as a sign-up sheet, in class. I welcome, indeed encourage, you to use your presentation topic as the theme for either your first or second paper.

**Papers:** Each student will write two short papers. The first paper, 4-6 pages on any theme from Part II of the course (Reference) is due on Thursday, October 6. The second paper, 5-8 pages on any topic in the material from Part III of the course (Meaning) is due on Tuesday, December 6. I will distribute more details about each paper in class.

**Final Exam:** The final exam will be given on Wednesday, December 14, 9am - noon. Preparatory questions will be posted on the website.

**On Grades:** Grades on assignments will be posted on Blackboard, along with a running total, which I call your grade calculation. Your grade calculation is a guide for me to use in assigning you a final grade. There are no rules binding how I translate your grade calculation, which will appear in Blackboard as a percentage, into a letter grade. In particular, the Hamilton College key for translating your letter grades into percentages, used for graduate school admissions, is not a tool for calculating your final grade. I welcome further discussion of the purposes and methods of grading, as well as my own grading policies.

Both the [Writing Center](#) and the [Oral Communications Center](#) have astoundingly wonderful sets of resources to help you write and speak more effectively.

**The Hamilton College Honor Code will be enforced.**

## Topics and Readings

### Part I: Before the Revolution

Class	Date	Topic	Readings for Class
1	August 25	Introduction: Plato and the Moderns	Lewis Carroll, <i>Through the Looking Glass</i> , Chapter 6 Selections from Plato's "Sophist" Selections from Berkeley's <i>Principles</i> Locke, "Of Words" Swift, "Getting Rid of Words"
2	August 30	Contrasting Non-Linguistic and Linguistic Responses to the Ontological Argument	Selections Anselm, Gaunilo, Descartes, Caterus, Hume and Kant
3	September 1	Introduction: Two Nineteenth-Century Views	Meinong, "The Theory of Objects," §1-§6 Mill, "Of Names"

### Part II: Reference

Class	Date	Topic	Readings for Class
4	September 6	Frege's Projects	Martinich, Introduction to <i>The Philosophy of Language</i> Frege, from Preface to <i>Begriffsschrift</i> Frege, from Preface to <i>Grundlagen</i>
5	September 8	Fregean Intensionalism	Frege, "The Thought: A Logical Inquiry"
6	September 13	The Sense/Reference Distinction	Frege, "On Sense and Reference"
7	September 15 <b>Précis 1 due</b>	The Description Theory	Russell, "Descriptions"
8	September 20	Presupposition	Strawson, "On Referring"
9	September 22	The Attributive/Referential Distinction	Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions"
10	September 24	Direct Reference I	Kripke, from <i>Naming and Necessity</i>
11	September 29	Direct Reference II	Kripke, from <i>Naming and Necessity</i>
12	October 4	Natural Kinds	Putnam, "Meaning and Reference"

### Part III: Meaning

Class	Date	Topic	Readings for Class
13	October 6 <b>Paper #1 due</b>	Logical Empiricism	Wittgenstein, from <i>Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus</i> Ayer, "The Principle of Verification"
14	October 11	The Verification Theory	Hempel, "Empiricist Criteria of Cognitive Significance: Problems and Changes"

<b>Bonus</b>	Monday October 17	David Rosenthal's Lecture, "Translation and Understanding"	
15	October 18	Meaning Holism I	Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism"
16	October 20 <b>Précis 2 due</b>	Meaning Holism II	Quine, "Ontological Relativity"
17	October 25	Meaning Holism III	Quine, "Ontological Relativity"
18	October 27	Meanings Skepticism I	Wittgenstein, "Meaning as Use" Wittgenstein, "On Private Language"
19	November 1	Meanings Skepticism II	Wittgenstein, from <i>Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics</i> Kripke, "On Rules and Private Languages"
20	November 3	Meanings Skepticism III	Kripke, "On Rules and Private Languages"
21	November 8	Intention-Based Semantics I	Grice, "Meaning"
22	November 10	Intention-Based Semantics II	Schiffer, from <i>Meaning</i>
23	November 15	Tarski's Theory of Truth	Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics"
24	November 17	Truth Theories as Meaning Theories	Davidson, "Truth and Meaning"
25	November 29	The New Intensionalism	Katz, "Introduction" and "Sense"

#### Part IV: Linguistic Ontology

Class	Date	Topic	Readings for Class
26	December 1	Conceptualism	Chomsky, "Language and Problems of Knowledge"
27	December 6 <b>Paper #2 due</b>	Platonism	Katz, "The Unfinished Chomskyan Revolution"
28	December 8	Nominalism	Devitt, "Linguistics is Not Psychology"

Final exam: Wednesday, December 14, 9am - Noon