Phil 123: Philosophy of Language

Professor: Michael Hicks
E-mail: mihicks@ucsc.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday 3:30–4:30, and by appointment
Office: Cowell Faculty Annex A101

Assistant: Matthew Ong
E-mail: mcong@ucsc.edu
Office Hours: Friday 11–12
Office: Stevenson 265

Introduction

While language has always been a topic of philosophical interest, in the twentieth century it came to play an especially central role in philosophical activity. It is not universally agreed that this is a positive development, but this development is the central one of concern for this class. Thus, in the first unit, we consider some of the works of the two men (Frege and Russell) who, more than any, set the stage for “linguistic philosophy”, and in the second unit, we pursue the questions they raised through the twentieth century literature. Of course, this tradition did, eventually, lead back to general questions about the nature of language, and in the third unit we address those questions.

Readings

Most of our readings this quarter will come from the textbook:

(available at the Literary Guillotine, 204 Locust Street).

Other readings (marked with an * in the syllabus) will be made available on e-Commons.

In addition, you are encouraged to read widely in the philosophy of language. The internet puts resources at your fingertips. Two websites are especially important for contemporary philosophical research:
The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (plato.stanford.edu) is the now standard reference work, with essays by leading philosophers on most every philosophical topic. These essays also typically have superb bibliographies.
Philpapers.com is a repository of online philosophical writings. You can search by topic or author.

Evaluation

Homework: For every reading, I will provide at least one question on e-Commons. I expect you to answer one question per week. These will be graded on a 4 point scale that will be explained in class. We will count your 8 highest scores towards your homework grade; you
may answer as many questions as you like. Homework constitutes 30% of your final grade.

**Essays:** There will be two essays, one 3–5 pages due at midterm, one 8–10 pages instead of a final. In each case, I will provide a series of prompts, from which you should choose one. For the final paper, if you have a project you would like to pursue instead of one of my prompts, you should submit a detailed proposal or rough draft by the beginning of week 9. I will assign your midterm paper around the end of week 5 (depending on how far we have gotten at that point), and it will be due a week later. It will constitute 30% of your grade. I will assign your final paper by the beginning of week 9, and it will be due during exam week, in lieu of a final exam. It will constitute 40% of your grade.

**Attendance:** I will send around a sign-in sheet every class. You may have up to four absences without penalty or excuse. Beyond that, I reserve the right to lower your final grade 1/2 letter grade every two absences: if you have more than four absences, 1/2 letter grade; more than six absences, up to one full letter grade; etc.

**Participation:** I cannot require participation in a class of this size, but it is encouraged.

**Syllabus**

The following is a rough guide to reading assignments. I will always make expectations for reading clear in class. I use the following conventions: texts outside of parentheses are mandatory, and will be discussed in roughly the order they appear. Texts in parentheses are recommended, but not mandatory. When they are listed with mandatory texts, the two are related, and so I recommend reading them together. (I will probably mention such texts when I lecture on the texts to which they are related.) Those on their own lines we will discuss if we have time: they are extensions of, or background to, the other texts in that unit. Texts with asterisks (*) beside them are (or will be) available on e-Commons.

**Unit 1 (Weeks 1–3) Frege and Russell**

1.1 Frege
Frege, On Sense and Reference (Function and Concept*; Letter to Jourdain*)
Frege, The Thought
(Dummett: from *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*)

1.2 Russell’s Theory of Descriptions
Russell, On Denoting (Descriptions; Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description*)
Quine, On What There Is*

**Unit 2 (Weeks 4–6) Names and Descriptions**

2.1 Problems with Russell’s Theory
Strawson, On Referring (Russell, Mr Strawson on Referring)
Donnellan, Reference and Definite Descriptions

2.2 Names
Searle, Proper Names (Mill, Of Names, from *System of Logic*)
Kripke, from *Naming and Necessity* (Putnam, Meaning and Reference; Evans, The Causal Theory of Reference)
(Plantinga, The Boethian Compromise*)

2.3 Indexicals
Anscombe, The First Person*
Perry, The Essential Indexical (Kaplan, Demonstratives)
(Perry, Frege on Demonstratives*; Evans, Understanding Demonstratives*)

Unit 3: Using Language (Weeks 7–10)

3.1 Saying and Implying
Grice, Logic and Conversation (Kripke, Speaker’s Reference and Semantic Reference)
Bach, Conversational Impliciture (Travis, On What is Strictly Speaking True*)

3.2 Quinean Complaints
Quine, Two Dogmas of Empiricism
Strawson & Grice, In Defense of a Dogma (Putnam: “Two Dogmas” Revisited)
Quine, Speaking of Objects*

3.3 The Nature of Language
Wittgenstein, from *Philosophical Investigations*
Lewis, Languages and Language (Millikan, Language Conventions Made Simple*)
Chomsky, Language and Problems of Knowledge
Davidson, A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs
(Kripke, from *On Rules and Private Languages*)