

Philosophy 1760

Philosophy of Language

Instructor: Richard Heck
Office: 205 Gerard House
Office hours: M1-2, W12-1

Email: rgheck@brown.edu
Web site: <http://frege.brown.edu/heck/>
Office phone:(401)863-3217

Prerequisites

Contemporary analytic philosophy began with certain discoveries in formal logic, and much of the work we shall be reading is informed in one way or another by logic: Arguments, premises, and conclusions are often stated using the concepts of formal logic. A working understanding of basic logic, such as one would acquire in Phil 0540, will be very helpful for this course. A course in logic is not a formal prerequisite, but those who have had absolutely no exposure to logic should consult the instructor before registering.

Prior exposure to philosophy is essential: Much of the material we will be reading is difficult. As usual with 1000-level courses, then, at least one prior course in philosophy is really quite essential and two are really preferred.

Readings

There are no textbooks for the course. All readings are accessible from the course website (though you will need the username and password for many of them). That said, we will be reading quite a few papers that are collected in Donald Davidson's *Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation*, so it would be worth getting a copy, really.

Course Structure and Requirements

The course will meet Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 11am, in Gerard House 119. Typically, there will be lectures on Monday and Wednesday and class discussions on Fridays, though the discussion day will sometimes move around. On such days, students should arrive appropriately prepared with questions, comments, or criticisms. Otherwise, it will be very quiet.

There will be three short papers of about 3–5 pages, with a maximum length of 1500 words. Lists of 'topics' will be distributed on 15 February, 16 March, and 18 April; the papers will be due

on 22 February, 23 March, and 25 April, respectively. The ‘topics’ will be short quotations from various of the papers we read, and the object of the exercise will be expository: You will be asked to explain the passage and its significance.

Undergraduates will have a choice between writing a longer term paper, of 12–15 pages, and taking the final examination. Those intending to do further serious work in philosophy, such as philosophy concentrators, may more benefit from thinking hard about a single, specific problem; those who are taking the course as an elective, or who are just looking for a general familiarity with the area, may probably benefit more from reviewing the material as a whole. Students will be required to inform the instructor which option they have selected by no later than 25 April. If no explicit choice is made then the student will have to take the final.

Graduate students will be required to write a term paper, 15–20 pages, in lieu of the final.

Term papers are due on the day of the final, 18 May.

Warning: I do not accept late work, under any circumstances. On the other hand, I am extremely flexible about due dates. That is to say: If someone should need an extra day or two, she need only ask; no reason even need be given. If someone should need more time than that, then some reason does need to be given, but the request will usually be granted. Since I am so flexible, there can be no excuse for one’s not asking for an extension. It’s really just a matter of respect.

Syllabus

The syllabus for the course is available online at <http://frege.brown.edu/phil1760/syllabus.php>. That page also contains links to the readings.

25 January Introductory Meeting

Literal Meaning

27 January J. L. Austin, "Three Ways of Spilling Ink", *Philosophical Review* 75 (1966), pp. 427-440

30 January H.P. Grice, "Meaning", *Philosophical Review* 66 (1957), pp. 377-88

1 February H.P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation", in *Studies in the Ways of Words* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 22-40

3 February Discussion

Meaning and Truth-Theory: Davidson's Proposal

6 February Donald Davidson, "Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages", in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 3-15

8 February Donald Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", *Synthese* 17 (1967), pp. 304-23; reprinted in *Inquiries*, pp. 17-36

10 February Discussion

13 February John Foster, "Meaning and Truth-Theory", in G. Evans and J. McDowell, eds., *Truth and Meaning: Essays in Semantics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 1-32
You need only read sections 1-2, on pp. 1-16, carefully. The discussion in section 3 concerns Davidson's "revised thesis", which we have not yet encountered, and section 4 contains Foster's emendation of Davidson's position, which is known to fall to a version of Foster's own objection to Davidson.

15 February Donald Davidson, "Reply to Foster", in *Inquiries*, pp. 171-9, and "Radical Interpretation", *Dialectica* 27 (1973), pp. 314-328; also in *Inquiries*, pp. 125-39
Davidson's treatment owes, as he notes, a great deal to Quine's notion of radical translation, for which see W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1960), Ch. 2.

Topics for first short paper announced

17 February P.F. Strawson, "Meaning and Truth", in his *Logico-Linguistic Papers* (London: Methuen, 1971), pp. 170-89

20 February *No Class: Presidents' Day Holiday*

- 22 February Discussion
First short paper due
- 24 February David Lewis, “Languages and Language”, in his *Philosophical Papers*, vol.1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 163–88
 You should concentrate on sections I-III, in which Lewis summarizes the more extensive account of linguistic meaning given in his book *Convention* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), and on pp. 175–81 (pp. 17–24 of the PDF), where Lewis discusses a series of objections connected to compositionality.
- 27 & 29 February James Higginbotham, “Truth and Understanding”, *Philosophical Studies* 65 (1992), pp. 3-16 (DjVu, Springer), and Scott Soames, “Truth, Meaning, and Understanding”, *Philosophical Studies* 65 (1992), pp. 17-35
 See also Scott Soames, “Semantics and Semantic Competence”, in S. Schiffer and S. Steele, eds., *Cognition and Representation* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1988), pp. 185-207. For an approach that is different from but similar to Higginbotham’s, see Richard Larson and Gabriel Segal, *Knowledge of Meaning: An Introduction to Semantic Theory* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995), Chs. 1–2.
- 2 March Discussion

Metaphorical Meaning

- 5 March Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean”, *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978), pp. 31–47; also in *Inquiries*, pp. 245–64
- 7 March John Searle, “Metaphor”, in his *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 76–116
- 9 March Discussion
- 12 March Josef Stern, “Metaphor as Demonstrative”, *Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985), pp. 677–710
- 14 March Catherine Wearing, “Metaphor and What Is Said”, *Mind and Language* 21 (2006), pp. 310–332
- 16 March Discussion
Topics for second short paper announced

Sense and Reference

- 19 & 21 March Gottlob Frege, “On Sense and Meaning”, in his *Collected Papers*, ed. by B. McGuinness, tr. by M. Black and P. Geach (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), pp. 157–77
- 23 March Discussion
Second short paper due
- 24, 26, & 28 March *No Class: Spring Break*
- 2 April Bertrand Russell, “On Denoting”, *Mind* 14 (1905), pp. 479–93
 An excellent resource for questions about descriptions is Stephen Neale, *Descriptions*, which covers an enormous amount of material.

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- 4 April Bertrand Russell, “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 11 (1910-11), pp. 108–28
Russell also discusses these issues further in *Problems in Philosophy* and “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism”.
- 6 April Discussion
- 9 April P.F. Strawson, “On Referring”, *Mind* 59 (1950), pp. 320–44; and Bertrand Russell, “Mr. Strawson on Referring”, *Mind* 66 (1957), pp. 385–89
There are general issues here about presupposition and other pragmatic phenomena. There is a good collection of papers on these matter entitled *Pragmatics*.
- 11 April Keith Donnellan, “Reference and Definite Descriptions”, *Philosophical Review* 75 (1966), pp. 281–304
- 13 April Saul Kripke, “Speaker’s Reference and Semantic Reference”, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 2 (1977), pp. 255–76
See also the discussion in Neale’s *Descriptions*. There is now a very large literature on these issues.
- 16 April Discussion
- 18 April David Kaplan, “Dthat”, in P. Cole, ed., *Pragmatics* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), pp. 221–43
See also Kaplan’s classic paper “Demonstratives”.
Topics for third short paper announced
- 20 April John Perry, “Frege on Demonstratives”, *Philosophical Review* 86 (1977), pp. 474–497
- 23 April Gareth Evans, “Understanding Demonstratives”, in his *Collected Papers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 291–321
- 25 April Discussion
Third short paper due
- 27 April-8 May Reading Period
- 18 May **Final Exam, or Final Paper Due**