

# **PHIL 1765: Sense and Reference**

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## **Course Description**

In this course, we shall be concerned with philosophical questions about proper names, more precisely, about the relation between names and their bearers, which relation we call ‘reference’. This kind of interest in language is a widely known, oft-criticized, and misunderstood feature of ‘analytic’ philosophy, so it may well be worth saying a few words by way of motivating an interest in such arcane matters. Then again, one might reasonably deny that any special justification of philosophers’ attention to proper names is needed. Reflection on our use of them raises characteristically philosophical puzzles, for example, how there can be significantly different names of one and the same object (e.g., ‘Samuel Clemens’ and ‘Mark Twain’); how there can be such a thing as a name of an object that does not exist; and what is it for a speaker to understand an utterance of a name.

But the interest questions about language have excited among so-called ‘analytic’ philosophers is not to be explained entirely in terms of their intrinsic interest. Philosophers’ interest in language is a consequence of an interest in general questions about the nature of our thought about the world around us. In many areas of philosophy, we presuppose that we are able to have thoughts or beliefs about an ‘external’ world. Thus, in epistemology, one leading question is under what circumstances the belief that so-and-so is the case counts as knowledge. Surely we also want to ask exactly how beliefs come to be about things in the first place: What makes a belief, say, the belief that snow is white, rather than the belief that three plus four is twenty-two? One might well suspect that other parts of philosophy presuppose answers to these

questions and that the answers presupposed might influence the answers given to more familiar philosophical questions.

In fact, the problems we will be discussing are not really special to language. They arise as well with respect to our thoughts, beliefs, desires, and so forth. But many of these questions can be formulated especially clearly in connection with language, and much of the existing discussion proceeds in those terms.

The problems we shall be discussing in this course are basic to many debates in philosophy today. One can not begin to understand current discussions in the philosophy of mind, for example, without some grasp of issues concerning reference. Anyone with a serious interest in philosophy therefore really must take a course like this one.

## **Course Organization**

The course will meet MWF at 1pm, in Sayles 200. We will generally discuss a different paper each meeting, and each student is required to post a "response" to the reading to the course's Canvas site by no later than 10am the day we will be discussing it. (This is to give us time to read and digest your responses.) Course meetings will consist of a mixture of lecture and discussion, shaped by and based upon students' postings to Canvas. Students are not specifically required but are encouraged to read each other's postings, to comment upon them, and generally to use Canvas as a platform for discussing the readings and asking questions.

## **Requirements and Grading Policies**

- **Reading Responses and Participation: 30%**

For each assigned reading, students are required to submit, to the course's Canvas site, a response to that reading no later than 10am the day we will be discussing it. I encourage all of us to read and, if we wish, comment upon, the submissions of the others. The responses will be graded on a scale of 0–5 points. The main criterion here is the amount of thought that emerges in the response.

The participation part of the grade will take into account both in-class participation and engagement with other students on Canvas.

- **Short Papers: 40%**

There will be two short papers of about 3–4 pages, with a *maximum* length of 1250 words. Lists of topics will be distributed on 11

February and 13 March; the papers will be due on 18 February and 20 March. They will be returned, with comments, on 25 February and 30 March. A revised version of the paper will then be due about a week later: 9 March and 6 April.

Separate grades will be given for the initial version of the paper and for the revised version, and the grade for the revised version will reflect the extent to which the student has made use of the feedback provided to improve the paper.

- **Final Paper: 30%**

The final requirement for the course is a shortish term paper, which will be due on the last day of reading period, 5 May. The paper should be a *maximum* of 4500 words (roughly 15 pages), but can be as short as 3000 words (roughly 9 pages). The paper should in the style of a submission to the journal *Thought*, of which I am one of the Associate Editors. Articles published in *Thought* are brief, direct discussions of tightly specified issues. (Students should look at a few of these papers to get a sense for their style.) The topic of the paper is up to the student but must relate directly to at least two of the papers we have read. It also must be cleared with the instructor no later than 24 April.

Students are *encouraged* to work together, if they wish, on this assignment: I.e., joint papers are acceptable. But no more than two authors on a given paper, please.

The short papers are due *in class* on the day specified. (Electronic submissions are of course acceptable, as well. Please send me a PDF if you wish to submit electronically.) I will not accept late papers. On the other hand, you will find that I am quite prepared to grant extensions, so long as they are requested in advance, that is, at least one day prior to the due-date. Extensions will not be granted after that time except in very unusual and unfortunate circumstances.

Because I am so reasonable, exploitation of my reasonableness will be taken badly.

## **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, is thus almost essential 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.

Prior exposure to philosophy *is* essential: Much of the material we will be reading is difficult, and some of it is *very* difficult. Students really should have had at least two prior courses in philosophy, therefore. Students who have not should again consult the instructor.

## **Readings**

There is one required text for the course: Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*, which should be available at the Brown Bookstore.

Other readings will be distributed electronically. Many of these are available online, through Brown's digital journal holdings; others will be scans of articles, or chapters from books, that are not otherwise available digitally. Students will be able to download these from the course website.

## Syllabus

21 January  
23 & 26 January

Introductory Meeting  
Gottlob Frege, “On Sense and Meaning”,  
esp. pp. 157–63

Other relevant papers of Frege’s are “On Concept and Object” and “Function and Concept”, as well as Part I of his *Basic Laws of Arithmetic*.

28 January  
30 January

*Discussion*  
Bertrand Russell, “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description”

Russell also discusses these issues further in *Problems of Philosophy* and “The Philosophy of Logical Atomism”

2 February

Bertrand Russell, “On Denoting”

An excellent resource for questions about descriptions is Stephen Neale’s book *Descriptions*, which covers an enormous amount of material.

4 February  
6 February  
  
9 February  
  
11 February  
  
13 February  
  
16 February  
18 February  
  
20 February

*Discussion*  
P. F. Strawson, “On Referring”, esp. pp. 1–17, and Bertrand Russell, “Mr. Strawson on Referring”  
*Topics distributed for first short paper*  
Keith Donnellan, “Reference and Definite Descriptions”  
Saul Kripke, “Speaker’s Reference and Semantic Reference”  
Marga Reimer, “Donnellan’s Distinction / Kripke’s Test”  
*No Class: Presidents’ Day Holiday*  
*Discussion*  
*First short paper due*  
W. V. O. Quine, “Reference and Modality”

23 February	Ruth Barcan Marcus, “Modality and Intensional Languages” Optional but recommended: W. V. O. Quine, “Reply to Professor Marcus”
25 February	<i>Discussion</i>
2 March	John Searle, “Proper Names”
4 & 6 March	Saul Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , Lecture I

For a review of the literature on rigidity, see Jason Stanley, “Names and Rigid Designation”.

9 March	<i>Discussion</i> <i>Revised version of first short paper due</i>
11 & 13 March	Saul Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , Lecture II <i>Topics distributed for second short paper on 13 March</i>

You should read Lecture III at some point. We will not be discussing it in class, however.

16 March	Hilary Putnam, “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’”, esp. pp. 215–41
18 March	Brian Loar, “Social Content and Psychological Content”
20 March	<i>Discussion</i> <i>Second short paper due</i>
23–27 March	<i>No Class: Spring Break</i>
30 March	Katalin Farkas, “What Is Externalism?”
1 April	Michael Dummett, “Frege’s Distinction Between Sense and Reference”
3 April	David Kaplan, “Dthat”

See also Kaplan’s seminal paper “Demonstratives”.

6 April	<i>Discussion</i> <i>Revised version of second paper due</i>
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8 April	John Perry, “Frege on Demonstratives”
10 April	Gareth Evans, “Understanding Demonstratives”

Evans’s view about demonstratives is further developed in *Varieties of Reference*.

13 April	Richard Heck, “Do Demonstratives Have Senses?”
15 April	Imogen Dickie and Gupreet Rattan, “Sense, Communication, and Rational Engagement”
17 April	<i>Discussion</i>
20 April	Jennifer Saul, “Substitution and Simple Sentences”
22 April	Graeme Forbes, “How Much Substitutivity?” and Joseph Moore, “Saving Substitutivity in Simple Sentences”
24 April	Richard Heck, “Intuition and the Substitution Argument”
5 May	<i>Final Paper Due</i>