

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.

Course Structure

The course will meet MWF at 1pm, in Corliss-Brackett 106. We will generally discuss a different paper each meeting, and each student is required to post a 'response' to the reading to the course forum by no later than 10am the day we will be discussing it. (This is to give everyone, and especially me, time to read and digest your responses.)

Course meetings will primarily consist of discussion, though I will lecture when that seems advisable. Students are not specifically required but are encouraged to read each other's postings, to comment upon them, and generally to use the course forum as a platform for discussing the readings and asking questions.

Class periods marked as 'Discussion' are an opportunity for us to try to synthesize some of what we've been studying. You should plan to review the papers we've read since the previous Discussion session and write some thoughts, as usual, to the course forum.

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

The papers we will be reading are generally quite difficult. You should expect to read each paper *at least* twice in order to understand it. The first time you read a paper, I'd suggest you just read through it, and don't worry too much if you're not getting everything. At this point, you're just trying to get a general sense for what the author is trying to do. The second time you read the paper, you should slow down. This is when you really do want to pause and think carefully through the various arguments that the author is giving. You will find extended reading notes to help you on the course web site.

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.

Requirements and Grading Policies

Grades for the course will be determined as follows.

- Reading Responses and Participation: 30%

For each assigned reading, students are required to post, on the course forum, 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 have something to say, 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 main criterion is the amount of thought that emerges in the response. A 3 should be considered average. A 4 means the reply shows a deeper understanding than would necessarily be expected, and a 5 will be given only for exceptionally good responses. A 2 means there is some inadequacy in one's understanding of the reading, and a 1 signals a serious misunderstanding that should probably be corrected, or else just a lack of genuine effort.

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

the course forum.

- Short Papers: 40%

There will be two short papers of about 4–5 pages, with a *maximum* length of 1500 words. Lists of topics will be distributed on 10 February and 17 March; the papers will be due on 17 February and 24 March. They will be returned, with comments, on 27 February and 3 April. A revised version of the paper will then be due about a week later: 6 March and 12 April.

Separate grades will be given for the initial version of the paper and for the revised version. 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, 9 May. The paper should be a *maximum* of 4500 words (roughly 15 pages), but can be as short as 3000 words (roughly 10 pages). The paper should be 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 must be cleared with the instructor no later than 28 April. Doing so means sending the instructor an email containing a paragraph or so that explains the proposed topic.

Grades will be recorded on the course's Canvas site (which will really be used only for that purpose). *Pay no attention* to Canvas's report of your cumulative grade. This is useless.

The short papers are due ***at the beginning of class on the day specified***. 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.

Time Expectations

- In class time: We expect to have about 35 meetings, so you will spend about 35 hours in class.
- You should expect to spend about 3 hours per class reviewing material from the previous class, reading the material for that class, and writing your response on the course forum. This accounts for 105 hours.
- For each of the two short papers: 8 hours on the initial draft; 4 hours on the revised draft. This accounts for 24 hours.
- Final paper: 4 hours reviewing material, formulating a topic, and drafting a paper proposal; 12 hours spent writing the paper. This accounts for 16 hours.

You should thus expect your total time commitment for this class to be about 180 hours.

In Class Behavior

Students may use laptops and the like to take notes in class or to access material we are discussing in class, but *all other use of computers, tablets, and mobile devices is prohibited during class*. This includes but is not limited to checking email, texting, and searching the web, even if the search is related to the course. I establish this rule not for my benefit, not even for yours, but rather for that of your peers.

In a study entitled “Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers” (PDF [here](#)), Faria Sana, Tina Weston, and Nichola Cepeda showed exactly that. It is not just that students who “multi-task” during class—check e-mail, text, or whatever—received significantly lower grades in the study than students who did not. This is not surprising, since the human brain simply cannot focus on very many things at one time. (If you’re skeptical about this, then watch this video or perhaps some of these ones.) Rather, the surprising conclusion was that students who were sitting *near* other students who were multi-tasking *also* received significantly lower grades than students who were not. In fact, they were almost as distracted as the students who were actually doing the multi-tasking!

There is thus evidence that multi-tasking does not only hurt the person doing it. It also harms the people around them. And that is the

basis of my request that students not engage in such activities during class. If someone near you is doing so, you should feel free to ask them to stop.

Syllabus

25 January	Introductory Meeting
27 January	Bertrand Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description"
30 January & 1 February	Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Meaning"
3 February	Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting"
6 February	P. F. Strawson, "On Referring"
8 February	John Searle, "Proper Names"
10 February	Keith Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions" <i>Topics distributed for first short paper</i>
13 February	Robert Stalnaker, "Pragmatics"
15 February	Saul Kripke, "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference"
17 February	<i>Discussion</i> (or No Class) <i>First short paper due</i>
20 February	<i>No Class: Presidents' Day Holiday</i>
22 February	A Very Short Introduction to Modal Logic Reading: James Garson, "Modal Logic", at the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
24 February	W. V. O. Quine, "Three Grades of Modal Involvement"
27 February	W. V. O. Quine, "Quantifiers and Propositional Attitudes" <i>First short paper returned</i>
1 & 3 March	Saul Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , Lecture I
6 March	<i>Discussion</i> <i>Revised version of first short paper due</i>
8 & 10 March	Saul Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , Lecture II
13 March	Edouard Machery, Ron Mallon, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich, "Semantics, Cross-cultural Style"
15 March	Max Deutsch, "Experimental Philosophy and the Theory of Reference"
17 March	Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'"

	<i>Topics distributed for second short paper</i>
20 March	Tyler Burge, "Individualism and the Mental"
22 March	Brian Loar, "Social Content and Psychological Content"
24 March	<i>Discussion</i> <i>Second short paper due</i>
27–31 March	<i>No Class: Spring Break</i> <i>Second short paper returned</i>
3 April	Robert Stalnaker, "Twin Earth Revisited"
5 April	Katalin Farkas, "What Is Externalism?"
7 April	Brie Gertler, "Understanding the Internalism–Externalism Debate: What Is the Boundary of the Thinker?"
10 April	<i>Discussion</i> <i>Revised version of second paper due</i>
12 April	David Kaplan, "Dthat"
14 April	Marga Reimer, "Demonstratives, Demonstrations, and Demonstrata"
17 April	Susanna Siegel, "The Role of Perception in Demonstrative Reference"
19 April	Allyson Mount, "Intentions, Gestures, and Salience in Ordinary and Deferred Demonstrative Reference"
21 April	<i>Discussion (or no class)</i>
24 April	Jennifer Saul, "Substitution and Simple Sentences"
26 April	Graeme Forbes, "How Much Substitutivity?" and Jennifer Saul, "Reply to Forbes"
28 April	Richard Heck, "Intuition and the Substitution Argument"
9 May	<i>Final Paper Due</i>