

Philosophy 1860: 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 much 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? 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. So we shall begin by talking about language and consider the corresponding questions about thought later in the course.

All that said, though, let me be honest: This is a course for real philosophy nerds. While some of the topics we'll discuss do have connections to cognitive

science, these issues are hardcore philosophical and don't have much 'real world' application. Personally, I find them fascinating, and I have devoted much of my career (and so much of my life) to thinking about them. But I know that I am not normal.

Course Structure

The course will meet MWF at 1pm, in Alumnae Hall 212. Course meetings will primarily consist of discussion, though I will lecture when that seems advisable.

We will generally discuss a single paper each meeting. Each student is required to post a 'response' to the reading to Canvas by no later than 12:01am the day we will be discussing it. A typical post would be a short paragraph commenting upon, or asking questions about, some aspect of the reading. It's fine to write more if one has more to say, but a short paragraph is all that's required. Note, in particular, that you do *not* need to answer any of the questions asked in the reading notes, let alone all of them.

After shopping period, the class will be divided into two groups. For each meeting, one group will be required to post in the way just described; students in the other group will be required either (i) to post one question they'd like us to discuss in class or (ii) to comment upon one of the other students' posts. Students should plan to read each other's postings and generally to use Canvas as a platform for discussing the readings and asking questions. Only to post one question about the reading they would like us to address in class.

Class periods marked as 'Discussion' are an opportunity for us to try to synthesize some of what we've been studying. (They also occur when papers are due, so you do not have any additional reading for those days.) You should plan to review the papers we've read since the previous Discussion session. For the Canvas post, it will be enough to post one question you'd like us to discuss in class.

Office Hours

Office hours are listed above. (It's possible they will change. The course website will always have the current hours.) You may attend either in person or by Zoom. Please note that you do *not* need to have some fantastic question to attend office hours. You're more than welcome to stop by just to chat about the readings, or about philosophy. This is time set aside specifically for this purpose, so you should not feel as if you are 'interrupting' or 'bothering' your instructors when you stop by.

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, and logic symbolism will appear frequently. A working understanding of basic logic, such as one would acquire in Phil 0640, is

therefore essential. A course in logic is not a formal prerequisite, but those who have had absolutely no exposure to logic should consult the instructor. Really, the main thing you need to know is what something like:

$$\exists x(Fx \wedge \forall y(Fy \rightarrow x = y) \wedge Gx)$$

means.

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

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 and from Canvas.

Most of what we will be reading was written by white men. This is because most of what we will be reading was written at a time when Western philosophy was dominated by white men (even more than it is now). Later in the course, when we read more contemporary material, there will be some readings by women. I'll also list readings by women among the optional readings. People of color are even less well represented, unfortunately.

Requirements and Grading Policies

Grades for the course will be determined as follows.

- Reading Responses and Participation: 30%
Students are required to post, on Canvas, a response to the reading no later than 12:01am the day we will be discussing it. This is to give everyone, especially me, time to read and digest the responses. I encourage all of us to read and, if we have something to say, comment upon, the submissions of other members of the course.
- 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 23 September and 28 October; the papers will be due on 30 September and 4 November. They will be returned, with comments, on 7 October and 11 November. A revised version of the paper will then be due about a week later: 14 October and 21 November.
Only the grade for the revised version will count. The grade given for the first draft is intended only to give the student a sense for how the paper stands. The grade for the revised version, *which is not optional*, will reflect the extent to which the student has made use of the feedback provided

to improve the paper. It is possible to get a worse grade on the revised version than on the original one, and that is especially likely if no serious effort is made to revise 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, 12 December. The paper should be a *maximum* of 4500 words (roughly 15 pages), but can be as short as 3000 words (roughly 10 pages).

The topic of the paper is up to the student but must relate directly to at least two of the papers we have read. The topic for the paper should be submitted on Canvas no later than 5 December for approval.

Pay no attention to Canvas's report of your cumulative grade. This is useless.

All work for the course should be submitted on Canvas.

The short papers are due ***at the beginning of class on the day specified***. Late papers will have one grade 'level' deducted for each day they are late. (So, e.g., a B+ would become a B after one day late, a B- after two days.) That said, I am quite prepared to grant extensions, so long as they are requested at least one day prior to the due-date. Extensions will not be granted after that time except in very unusual and unfortunate circumstances.

Time Expectations

- In class time: We expect to have about 37 meetings, so you will spend about 37 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 111 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 188 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.

Notice Regarding Academic Accommodations and Short-term Adjustments

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform the instructor early in the term if you have a disability or other condition that might require accommodations or modification of any of the course procedures. For more information, please contact the Office of Student and Employee Accessibility Services. Students in need of short-term academic advice or support can contact one of the deans in the Dean of the College’s office.

Course Schedule

7 September Introductory Meeting

Sense, Reference, and Descriptions

9 September Bertrand Russell, “Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description”

12 & 14 September Gottlob Frege, “On Sense and Meaning”

16 September Bertrand Russell, “On Denoting”

19 September Sir P. F. Strawson, “On Referring”

21 September Keith Donnellan, “Reference and Definite Descriptions”
Topics distributed for first short paper

23 September Saul Kripke, “Speaker’s Reference and Semantic Reference”

Naming and Necessity

26 September James Garson, “Modal Logic”

28 September W. V. O. Quine, “Three Grades of Modal Involvement”

30 September *Discussion*
First short paper due

3 October Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture I

5 October Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture I

7 October Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture II
First short paper returned

10 October *No Class: Indigenous People’s Day*

12 October Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture II

14 October *Discussion*
Revisions to first short paper due

17 October David Chalmers, “On Sense and Intension”

The Role of 'Intuitions': A Brief Foray Into Experimental Philosophy

- 19 October Edouard Machery, Ron Mallon, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich, "Semantics, Cross-cultural Style"
- 21 October Max Deutsch, "Experimental Philosophy and the Theory of Reference"
- 24 October Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa, "Who Needs Intuitions? Two Experimentalist Critiques"

Externalism

- 26 October Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'"
- 28 October Tyler Burge, "Individualism and the Mental"
Topics distributed for second short paper
- 31 October Brian Loar, "Social Content and Psychological Content"
- 2 November Robert Stalnaker, "Twin Earth Revisited"
- 4 November *Discussion*
Second short paper due

Demonstratives

- 7 November David Kaplan, "Dthat"
- 9 November John Perry, "Frege on Demonstratives"
- 11 November Gareth Evans, "Understanding Demonstratives"
- 14 November Marga Reimer, "Demonstratives, Demonstrations, and Demonstrata"
- 16 November Allyson Mount, "Intentions, Gestures, and Salience in Ordinary and Deferred Demonstrative Reference"

Externalism and Frege's Puzzle

- 18 November Jerry A. Fodor, "Substitution Arguments and the Individuation of Beliefs"
- 21 November *Discussion*
Revised version of second paper due
- 23 & 25 November No Class: Thanksgiving Holiday

28 November	Christopher Peacocke, “Externalist Explanation”
30 November	Aidan Gray, “Relational Approaches to Frege’s Puzzle”
Saul’s Puzzle	
2 December	Jennifer Saul, “Substitution and Simple Sentences”
5 December	Graeme Forbes, “How Much Substitutivity?” and Jennifer Saul, “Reply to Forbes” <i>Topic for final paper due</i>
7 December	Richard Heck, “Intuition and the Substitution Argument”
12 December	<i>Final paper due</i>