

PHIL 3685 – PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

Spring 2018

This syllabus is tentative and subject to change. Please refer to Canvas for up-to-date syllabi and information.

Time:	TR 10:10-11:25 a.m.
Place:	530 Altschul
Professor:	Karen Lewis
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Office:	Milbank Hall 326E
Office Hours:	TR 2:30-3:30 and by appointment
TA:	Billy McCarthy
TA email:	wkm2105@columbia.edu
TA office hours:	Fridays 11-1, in Milbank Hall 326E

Course Description and Goals

Human language is symbolic. Languages are made up of strings of sounds (when spoken), or series of marks (when written), or series of gestures (when signed), but those sounds, characters, and gestures have meanings. Moreover, we can *do* many things with these symbols: assert, insult, insinuate, promise, command, name... In this course, we will ask questions like: How does language come to have meaning? What is the relationship between meaning and reference? What is the relationship between meaning and truth? What is the relationship between meaning and context? How is it that we manage to communicate what we do with language? We will address these questions through careful examination of seminal 20th and 21st century works in the philosophy of language.

You will hopefully come away from this course with a good understanding of important topics in the philosophy of language. You will have plenty of opportunity to further develop your skills in reading critically, analyzing, and responding to texts. You will also develop your skills in effective philosophical writing.

Textbook

There is no required textbook for this course. All readings are on available on Canvas.

Website

This course has a Canvas site. The syllabus and other resources will be posted on the site. Updates and announcements will also be posted on the site, so be sure to check it regularly. All assignments will be submitted and returned through Canvas.

Course requirements

1. **Papers:** Students are required to write three papers of approximately 2000 words each (one on each unit). Topics will be posted on Canvas several weeks in advance of the due dates. Papers are (tentatively) due according to the following schedule:
Paper 1: Tuesday, February 22
Paper 2: Tuesday, April 5
Paper 3: Tuesday, May 8

2. **In Class Exercises:** Students are expected to participate in group exercises in class. These may take the form of small group discussions, working together on answering a particular question or questions, coming up with critical questions on a reading, among other things. Written summaries of what you do in your groups will be submitted via Canvas during the class in which the exercise takes place. There will be approximately 10 in class exercises over the course of the semester. They are graded on a pass/fail basis. Students will work with the same group the entire semester. You will be awarded a grade for the assignment even if you were absent on the day of the exercise so long as your group submitted a satisfactory assignment.
3. **Reading:** Students are expected to do all the assigned readings, and come to class prepared to ask and answer questions and engage in discussion. Reading, writing, and engaging with the material in discussion are all important aspects of philosophy. Students are required to submit short reading responses (approx. 1-1.5 pages double-spaced) on 10 readings throughout the semester. Reading responses are to be submitted via Canvas by midnight the night before the class in which the reading in question is discussed for the *first* time.
4. **Attendance:** Philosophy is more than just writing a good essay (though that is certainly part of it!). It is about coming to class, working through the material in the in class exercises, listening to the lecture, asking questions, and participating in class discussion. As such, attendance is mandatory. **Students are allowed 3 absences for any reason.** (If you are sick, stay home! If you need to go out of state for your sister's wedding, have fun! etc.) If you have more than three unexcused absences, you will lose 2 percentage points *for each class missed above 3*. An excused absence requires documentation of an emergency or illness. Students who have to miss class for religious reasons will of course be excused *but must talk to me about it in advance*. **Mandatory attendance begins on Tuesday, January 30, 2018.**

The final grade will be calculated as follows:

Papers: 25% each

In class exercises: 10%

Reading responses: 15%

Lateness Policy

All assignments must be submitted via Canvas by the time and date indicated on the assignment. Papers not submitted by the appointed time on the due date are considered late. I will deduct 4% of your grade for each day that it is late. If you have a legitimate reason for being unable to submit a paper on time — e.g. serious illness, emergency etc. — you must bring supporting documentation and contact me as soon as possible (before the assignment is due, if possible). Technical difficulties are **not** a legitimate reason for being unable to submit a paper. If you are having trouble with Canvas, email me the assignment. If you are having trouble with the internet, print out the assignment and bring it to class. I highly recommend saving your work to some sort of internet-based storage, like dropbox or google drive. That way if your hard drive crashes at the last minute, you still have access to your last saved version of the assignment on any computer with access to the internet, and can therefore demonstrate that you in fact were about to complete the assignment when your computer

broke down. In Class Exercises must be submitted at the time instructed during the exercise in question. Late ones will not be accepted. Reading responses submitted before class but after midnight will count as one day late. Reading responses submitted after class has started will not be accepted.

Academic Honesty

Cheating and other forms of dishonesty will not be tolerated. While you are more than welcome to discuss class material and the assignments with your classmates, you are **not** allowed to submit the same assignment. All sources must be properly cited and you may not represent someone else's work as your own. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism, you should look at the following valuable resource, or come and talk to me: <http://library.barnard.edu/find-books/guides/plagiarism> You are expected to abide by the Barnard College and Columbia University honor codes at all times during this course. For more resources on academic integrity see: <https://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity>

Technology policy

Laptops and tablets are welcome in class for note-taking. But please do not surf the web/check your email/go on facebook/play games or do anything non-class related on your computer. If I see you doing so, I will ask you to put your computer away for the remainder of the lecture. This is because it not only negatively affects your own learning, but studies show that it is distracting to the students around you, and negatively affects their learning. For the same reasons, I do not want to see or hear your cell phone during class.

Respectful Learning Environment

Students are encouraged to voice their ideas and to respond to the ideas of their fellow students and the professor. However, I expect you to treat each other and each other's ideas respectfully. This does not mean you should not be critical (quite the opposite!), but do so in a respectful manner. We are all responsible for making this class a welcoming and productive environment for every member of the class.

Contacting me

Finally, a note about email contact. The best way to talk to me about anything to do with the course is to come to office hours or make an appointment. I have a lot of students, and it is difficult to keep up with emails if everyone asks me their questions via email. Therefore, it is a bad idea to wait until the day before an assignment is due to email me with clarificatory questions or a request for help. I also cannot guarantee that I can meet with you on short notice. The moral is to start assignments early and contact me as early as possible to make an appointment or come to my office hours if you have questions or need help.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

Date	Readings	Other Information
01/16	None	Introduction to the course
Unit 1: Pragmatics: Speech Acts, Context, and Implicature		
01/18	J.L. Austin, "Performative Utterances"	
01/23	J.L. Austin, <i>How to do things with words</i> , Lectures VIII-IX	
01/25	None	NO CLASS (I am away at a conference)
01/30	Rae Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts"; Jason Stanley, "Ways of Silencing" (NY-Times article)	
02/01	Rebecca Kukla, "Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice"	
02/06	H.P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation"	Optional: Watch my "Introduction to Gricean Pragmatics" video
02/08	Robert Stalnaker, "Assertion"	
02/13	David Lewis, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game"	
02/15	No new reading	Lewis continued
Unit 2: Semantics: Reference and Referring		
02/20	Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Reference"	
02/22	No new reading	Frege continued, PAPER #1 DUE
02/27	Bertrand Russell, "Descriptions"	
03/01	No new reading	Russell continued
03/06	Saul Kripke, excerpts from <i>Naming and Necessity</i>	
03/08	No new reading	Kripke continued
03/13	None	SPRING BREAK
03/15	None	SPRING BREAK
03/20	None	NO CLASS (I am away at a conference)
03/22	Delia Graff Fara, "Names are Predicates"	
03/27	No new reading	Fara continued
03/29	John Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical"	
Unit 3: What is meaning?		
04/03	Gottlob Frege, "The Thought"	
04/05	No new reading	Frege continued, PAPER #2 DUE
04/10	A.J. Ayer, excerpts from <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i>	
04/12	W.V.O Quine, "Translation and Meaning"	
04/17	H.P. Grice, "Meaning"	
04/19	Donald Davidson, "Truth and Meaning"	
04/24	Saul Kripke, excerpts from <i>Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language</i>	
04/26	Ruth Milikan, "Truth Rules, Hoverflies and the Kripke-Wittgenstein Paradox"	