

Philosophy of Language

Richard Lawrence

Fall 2021

1 Course Description

How should we think about linguistic meaning? What do our words mean, and in virtue of what do they mean what they do? According to a traditional philosophical picture, words express ideas and refer to things in the world, and sentences are true or false depending on the facts about those things. In the twentieth century, philosophers began to question and criticize this picture of meaning, by asking such questions as: Are there different kinds of meaning? What is done by means of language, besides referring to things in the world and stating facts? How do speakers' intentions influence the meaning of their words? We will examine some of the more sophisticated views of language that emerged, focusing especially on the idea that in some sense, meaning lies in how language is used. But this view faces its own challenges. Which aspects of use are relevant to meaning? How do we know when words are used correctly? How do we know what others use words to refer to? These challenges will lead us to re-examine the traditional picture. Does the idea that we use language to speak *about* things in the world make any sense at all? If so, how can we make sense of it?

Course learning objectives

By the conclusion of the course, the student will:

- understand the traditional picture of language and be able to explain both why it was intuitively appealing and what its shortcomings were
- understand and be able to explain several philosophical views about the meaning of language and its relationship to use
- practice analysis, reconstruction, and evaluation of philosophical arguments from both historical and contemporary philosophical literature

Contact information

	Instructor	GSI
	Richard Lawrence richard.lawrence@berkeley.edu	TBD
Office:	301 Moses Hall	
Office hours:	Thursdays, 1PM–3PM	

Course meeting times

	Day	Time	Location
Lecture:	Tuesday	10:30AM-12PM	204 Wheeler
	Thursday	10:30AM-12PM	204 Wheeler
Discussion:	Friday	TBD	TBD

2 Course Requirements

	Due date	Length	Weight in final grade
Participation and study questions	Weekly	1 page	25%
Essay 1	<i>Thursday, September 28</i>	5–6 pages	25%
Essay 2	<i>Thursday, November 8</i>	5–6 pages	25%
Final examination		2 hours	25%

2.1 Study questions

A few study questions will be provided about the reading each week. Their purpose is to help you review and practice articulating the important ideas and arguments from the week's reading. You should answer these questions in writing, totaling approximately one page, and turn in your answers at the beginning of the following week.

2.2 Essays

You will write two essays in this course. You generally have two tasks to complete in the essays: first, to reconstruct one or more philosophical arguments from the texts we have read; and second, to present your own philosophical argument in response, saying why the author's arguments are correct or incorrect, whether you agree with their conclusions, and why. Your analysis of arguments in the readings, the structure of your own argument, and correct spelling, grammar, and citations are all important.

2.3 Final examination

There will be a final examination in this course. The exam will cover material from the entire course, and will include both short-answer questions and a longer essay. A good way to prepare for the exam is to review your answers to the study questions provided throughout the course.

2.4 Attendance and participation

Attendance and active participation is required in lecture and discussion. The lectures will focus on explaining the important ideas in the texts and relating them to the themes of the course, and will leave plenty of time for discussion. To prepare for lecture, you should read the assigned material, and make notes to yourself about the important points in the reading and any questions you have. You will get the most out of the course if you read each assigned reading twice, once before the lecture, and once after, as you prepare your responses to the study questions.

Participating in discussion does not simply mean sharing a thought once per class. Rather, you are expected to:

- be an active listener
- ask clarificatory questions when you do not understand something
- answer questions posed by your classmates and instructors
- raise objections when you do not think that proposals made by others are true

2.5 Academic honesty

It is your responsibility to ensure that your work in this course accords with the University's standards for academic honesty. Students found to have plagiarized will be reported to the Center for Student Conduct and may fail the course, at the determination of the instructor. For further information on plagiarism and how to avoid it, see: <http://sa.berkeley.edu/conduct/integrity/definition>.

3 Readings and Schedule

The texts for the course are readings from contemporary philosophical literature. They will be made available electronically and as a course reader.

The traditional picture	
Week 1	Aristotle, <i>De Interpretatione</i> 1–8 John Locke, “Of Words” John Stuart Mill, “Of Names”
Week 2	Gottlob Frege, <i>Begriffsschrift</i> (selections) Gottlob Frege, <i>The Foundations of Arithmetic</i> (selections) Gottlob Frege, “On Sense and Reference”
Week 3	Bertrand Russell, “Descriptions” P. F. Strawson, “On Referring”
Speech acts and intentions	
Week 4	H. P. Grice, “Meaning” J. L. Austin, “Performative Utterances”
Week 5	H. P. Grice, “Logic and Conversation” Elisabeth Camp, “Contextualism, Metaphor, and What is Said”
Language as a rule-governed practice	
Week 6	Ludwig Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> (selections)
Week 7	Wilfrid Sellars, “Some Reflections on Language Games” Lewis Carroll, “What the Tortoise said to Achilles”
Week 8	Saul Kripke, <i>Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language</i> (selections) Hannah Ginsborg, “Primitive Normativity and Skepticism about Rules” A. N. Prior, “The Runabout Inference-Ticket”
Indeterminacy and the new theory of reference	
Week 9	W. O. Quine, <i>Word and Object</i> (selections) W. O. Quine, “Ontological Relativity”
Week 10	Hilary Putnam, “Meaning and Reference” Saul Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> (selections)
Week 11	Ruth Barcan Marcus, “Modalities and Intensional Languages” (selections) David Kaplan, “Demonstratives” (selections)
Interpretation, intensionality, and truth	
Week 12	John Perry, “The Problem of the Essential Indexical” Elizabeth Anscombe, “The First Person”
Week 13	Daniel Dennett, <i>The Intentional Stance</i> (selections) Donald Davidson, “On Saying That”
Week 14	Donald Davidson, “Radical Interpretation” Donald Davidson, “Belief and the Basis of Meaning”