

California State University Sacramento
Fall 2016

PHILOSOPHY

OF

LANGUAGE

PHIL – 154

Instructor: Dr. Saray Ayala-López
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Office location: Mendocino Hall 3018
Preferred gender pronouns:
she/they, her/them, hers/theirs

Office hours:
Tuesday & Wednesday 12:00-1:30pm
and by appointment.
Course meets:
Tuesday & Thursday, 10:30-11:45am
Location: Douglas Hall 208

Course description

This course covers some of the central questions in Western philosophy of language, with attention to how philosophy of language can help us understand discourse in a variety of domains. We will start by discussing what language is, and throughout the semester will examine notions such as meaning, sense, reference, truth, presupposition, implicature, performative, speech act, slur, convention, silencing, and communication. We will explore how these notions help us understand everyday discourse, and go over some examples of the good and bad things we can do with words.

Course format

All classes contain at least 2 of these elements:

1. Instructor introduction: the instructor introduces the reading for the day.
2. Class discussion: the whole class discusses the questions students are required to bring to class, questions raised during the lecture, and/or questions posed by the instructor.
3. Group discussion: students form discussion groups.

Important: Students are required to come to class having read all the assigned readings.

Evaluation: Your total points are calculated by adding the following differently weighted assessment items:

Assessment	Details	Due date	% of final mark	Required to pass the course
Questions	Max. of 0.5 per question per class	By midnight the day before any class with an assigned reading	10%	Yes
Passage analysis	200-400 words	09/20	10%	Yes
Handout	any format	10/25 by 11:45am	15%	Yes
Draft of response paper	1,500-1,700 words	11/15 by 11:45am	15%	Yes
Final response paper	1,500-1,700 words	12/8 by 11:45am	25%	Yes
Participation	Max. of 0.5 per class	Any day	10%	No
Case brainstorming items	Max. of 5 marks per item per session	10/11, 11/3, 12/6	15%	No

Description of assessment items:

Questions: You must bring one question to class every day when we are scheduled to discuss an assigned reading. You must submit your questions to the SacCT course site by midnight the day before class, and pose your questions during the class discussion. Questions are evaluated on a 0/0.2/0.5 scale:

0: there is no question or the question is irrelevant

0.2: the question is somehow related to the reading, but it does not engage with the argument and/or it does not show understanding

0.5: the question engages with the argument and shows understanding of the material.

Questions account for 10% of the final grade, max of 10 points.

*You are encouraged to start a question journal: A question journal helps you organize questions to build a coherent line of inquiry about a topic. Frantic questioning of everything, posing questions that are disconnected from each other, is not, contrary to a common misconception, what philosophy is about. That type of questioning does not facilitate understanding and creates a false sense of justified skepticism. A question journal helps you connect your questions and outline possible lines of inquiry you might want to develop. Start your question journal by writing down the questions that pop up in your mind as you are reading a text for the first time, then

contrast them with the questions you have after reading the text the second time and/or discussing it in class, and also with the questions your classmates and the instructor raise.

Opportunity to improve the grade for your questions: if you did not earn the maximum grade (0.5) for some of your questions, you can resubmit a maximum of 3 questions after having restated them as a result of class discussion.

Passage analysis: It consists of (i) providing context for the passage, and (ii) paraphrasing the passage.

Handout: You are expected to select a reading and develop a handout for it. The handout must summarize the argument of the reading. Ideally, it will also include questions challenging the reading's argument or expanding it. Handouts will be graded on a 0-1-2 scale (0: non-existent or poor; 1: good; 2: very good). Handout length: up to one two-sided page. Format: it does not have to be regular structured prose, it can be a mental map, a comic stripe, a song (up to 2 mins), an animation (up to 2mins), a collage ... be creative! (samples of handouts will be made available).

Response Paper: This is a critical response to one of the assigned readings. It cannot be a mere summary of the paper, or a statement of a personal opinion that does not explicitly engage with the paper's argument. A good paper response will contain both an accurate summary of the paper's argument, and a critical analysis of some part of that argument. Maximum length: 1,500-1,700 words. Tip: you can use one of the questions from your question journal as a starting point for the response paper. The Department has very useful guidelines on how to do this:
<http://www.csus.edu/phil/guidance/how-to-analyze.html>

Response paper draft: 15%

The draft of the response paper will be graded according to three parameters:

1. Accuracy of the summary of the text's argument.
2. Clarity of exposition (in both the summary of the argument and critical analysis).
3. Originality of the critical analysis.

Response paper final: 25%

The final response paper will be graded based on the same parameters as the draft paper, plus the following:

4. Engagement with instructor's feedback

Participation in class discussions: You are required to participate in class discussions. Respectful and constructive discussion is a critical part of philosophy. The pathway to good ideas and well-formed arguments is usually not a lonely one, but one filled with contributions and insights from others, sometimes in the form of challenges and questions, sometimes in the form of suggestions or comments. It is important to keep

in mind that in this course, and in many others, you can learn not only from the texts and from me, but also from your classmates. Class discussions are a good opportunity to learn from classmates and to practice your own argumentative skills. It is also a way to invite possible collaborative projects.

Participation will be evaluated according to two parameters: relevance and quality. There is a maximum of 0.5 of a point per class, and a total of 10 points.

Case Brainstorming items: Students and instructor bring to class examples of language use in media outlets, blogs, or personal conversations, which we will analyze using what we learned in class. Examples must be accompanied by a brief introduction connecting them to the class material, e.g. stating which notions or theories can be used to analyze the excerpt, what phenomenon it exemplifies, etc. Max. of 5 points per item per Case Brainstorming session. Cases need to be submitted to SacCT course site by midnight the day before the session.

Course schedule

Session	Day	Date	Topic	Readings for the day	Required for the class
1	Tue	8/30	Syllabus overview		
2	Thu	9/1	What is Language?		
3	Tue	9/6		Locke 1690	Submit your question by midnight 9/5
4	Thu	9/8		Wittgenstein 1953	Submit your question by midnight 9/7
5	Tue	9/13	Meaning and Reference	Frege 1892 + supporting reading	Submit your question by midnight 9/12
6	Thu	9/15		Kripke 1972 + supporting reading	Submit your question by midnight 9/14
7	Tue	9/20	Passage Analysis		
8	Thu	9/22	Meaning and Reference	Putnam 1973	Submit your question by midnight 9/21
9	Tue	9/27		Russell 1919 + supporting reading	Submit your question by midnight 9/26
10	Thu	9/29		Haslanger 2006	Submit your question by midnight 9/28

11	Tue	10/4		Diaz-Leon 2016	Submit your question by midnight 10/3
12	Thu	10/6		Review	
13	Tue	10/11	Case Brainstorming I		Submit a case by midnight 10/10
14	Thu	10/13	Doing Things with Words	Austin 1961	Submit your question by midnight 10/12
15	Tue	10/18		Grice 1957	Submit your question by midnight 10/17
16	Thu	10/20		Lewis 1979	Submit your question by midnight 10/19
17	Tue	10/25		McGowan 2009	Submit your question by midnight 10/24 + Handout due
18	Thu	10/27		Maitra 2012	Submit your question by midnight 10/26
19	Tue	11/1		Camp 2013	Submit your question by midnight 10/31
20	Thu	11/3		Case Brainstorming II	
21	Tue	11/8	(Un)successful Communication	Langton 1993	Submit your question by midnight 11/7
22	Thu	11/10		Dotson 2011	Submit your question by midnight 11/9
23	Tue	11/15		Kukla 2014	B Submit your question by midnight

					11/14 + Draft paper due
24	Thu	11/17		Saul 2012a & 2012b	Submit your question by midnight 11/16
25	Tue	11/22		Review	
	Thu	11/24	Thanksgiving - No class		
26	Tue	11/29	(Un)successful Communication	Frankfurt 2005	Submit your question by midnight 11/28
27	Thu	12/1		Medina 2004	Submit your question by midnight 11/30
28	Tue	12/6	Case Brainstorming II		Submit a case by midnight 12/5
29	Thu	12/8	Last day: open discussion		Final paper due

List of readings:

1. What is Language?

Locke, John. 1690. *Of Words*. (Excerpt)

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations*. (Excerpt)

2. Meaning and reference:

Frege, Gottlob. 1892. On Sense and Reference.

Kripke, S. 1972. Lecture II of *Naming and Necessity*.

Putnam, Hillary. 1973. Meaning and Reference.

Russell, Bertrand. 1919. On Denoting.

Haslanger, Sally. 2006. What Good Are Our Intuitions?

Diaz-Leon, Esa. 2016. 'Woman' as a Politically Significant Term: A Solution to The Puzzle.

3. Doing things with words (and with silence):

Austin, J.L. 1961. Performative Utterances.

Grice, H. P. 1957. Logic and Conversation.

Lewis, Davis. 1979. Scorekeeping in a Language Game.

McGowan, Mary Kate. 2009. Oppressive Speech.

Maitra, Ishani. 2012. Subordinating Speech.

Camp, Elisabeth. 2013. Slurring Perspectives.

4. (Un)Successful communicative exchanges:

Langton, Rae. 1993. Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts.

Dotson, Kristie. 2011. Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing.

Kukla, Rebecca. 2014. Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice.

Saul, Jennifer. 2012a. Just Go Ahead and Lie.

Saul, Jennifer. 2012b. *Lying, Misleading and What is Said*. (Chapters 2 & 4)

Frankfurt, Harry. 2005. *On Bullshit*. (Excerpt)

Medina, José. 2004. The Meanings of Silence: Wittgenstenian Contextualism and Polyphony.