

PHIL 546 | TOPICS IN PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

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Bartlett 363

This course is an high-level survey of central issues in the philosophy of language. Our main concern will be with the notion of meaning. In the first part of the course we will look at various ways of motivating and developing a powerful approach to meaning in terms of truth-conditions. In the second, longest part of the course, we will look at different questions that arise for this approach to meaning. Which specific questions we will focus on will depend on how things evolve and on the interests of class participants, but they may include: Can a truth-conditional theory of meaning be a theory of understanding? Can it account for the behavior of presuppositions and donkey anaphora? Can we assign truth-conditions to all well-formed, meaningful sentences? Is a truth-conditional theory of meaning genuinely explanatory? How can speakers know the truth-conditions of sentences in their language? Are truth-conditions enough to account the complexities of communication?

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Meetings: W 15.30-18.00, Bartlett 374

Course website: <http://perezcarballo.org/phil546>

Office hours: TH 3:30-4.30, and by appointment

Feel free to stop by my office if you want to talk about the readings for the class, or if you have an idea (or a proto-idea, for that matter) you would like to bounce off me. If you can't make it to my office hours, email me so we can arrange to meet at some other time.

PREREQUISITES

This class is only open to graduate students in philosophy or to undergraduates who have taken *three* prior courses in philosophy. I will only consider making exceptions

for students with a strong enough background in linguistics, computer science, and cognate fields.

Although this is not a technical class, you will be at an advantage if you have done some formal logic before. I strongly encourage undergraduate students who have not yet taken PHIL 110 (Intro to Logic), or a similar class, to contact me as soon as possible.

READINGS

All readings will be made available electronically. Nonetheless, you may find it useful to own copies of the following two books:

- S. A. Kripke. *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980
- P. Ludlow, ed. *Readings in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & EXPECTATIONS

It is a good idea to think of the class—whether or not you are enrolled for credit—as a reading group of which you are an *active* participant. This means I will expect all of you to have carefully read the material before our meeting and to have carefully thought about it.

Response pieces

If you are enrolled in this course for credit you will submit weekly ‘response pieces’ on one of the assigned papers for that week. These are expository in nature. Most weeks, they will involve answering questions about the readings submitted the week before. Sometimes, they will involve stating the main thesis and outlining the author’s argument for it. In all cases, assignments should take no more than a page, and are due on Tuesdays by 3pm. Response pieces will not be graded, although failure to submit at least eight of them will affect your final grade for the course.

Writing assignments

In addition, you will write three short papers ($\leq 1,500$ words). Each paper should be a critical response to one of the readings discussed in class.

Seminar credit

If you wish to obtain seminar credit, you will have to write a term paper instead of the second and third short papers, after meeting with me to discuss your paper topic. This should happen by 4/4. In addition, you will give a 30 minute seminar presentation during the course of the semester. We will discuss relevant details in due course.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

It goes without saying that EVERYTHING YOU SUBMIT MUST BE YOUR OWN WORK. I take academic honesty very seriously.

General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Each student must be familiar with the University's **Academic Honesty Policy**. If you have any questions about academic dishonesty, please come talk to me as soon as possible.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

In order to help us make reasonable, effective, and appropriate accommodations to meet your needs, you should first register with **Disability Services**. Once you do that, please come talk to me. It would be most helpful to receive the proper paperwork as soon as possible so we can make the appropriate accommodations in a timely manner.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

This is mostly a list of some possible readings. The reading schedule may end up looking nothing like this.

01.22 Introduction: background and overview

Nothing to read.

The truth-conditional paradigm

01.29 Frege on thought and language

Frege, 'The thought' // Frege, 'On *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*'

02.05 Russell on Definite Descriptions

02.12 Kripke against Descriptivism

Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (excerpts TBA)

02.19 Grice and communication

Grice, 'Utterer's Meaning and Intention' // Grice, 'Logic and Conversation' // Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (excerpts TBA)

Speech act pluralism and systematicity

Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (excerpts TBA) // Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (excerpts TBA) Lewis, 'Scorekeeping in a language game' // Lewis, 'A problem about permission' Stalnaker, 'Assertion' Hare, *The language of morals*

Presupposition, anaphora, and dynamic semantics

Heim, 'Presupposition Projection and the Semantics of Attitude Verbs' // Stalnaker, 'Presuppositions' // Stalnaker, 'Pragmatic Presuppositions' // Lewis, 'Scorekeeping in a language game' // Schlenker, 'Presuppositions and Local Contexts' // Veltman, 'Defaults in update semantics'

Meaning, Understanding, and Knowledge of Language

Dummett, 'Truth' // Dummett, 'What is a Theory of Meaning? (I)' // P. M. Pietroski, 'The Character of Natural Language Semantics' // Chomsky, 'Language and nature' // Higginbotham, 'Truth and Understanding' // Soames, 'Truth, Meaning, and Understanding' // Chomsky, *New Horizons in the Study of Language and Mind* // McDowell, 'In Defence of Modesty' // P. Pietroski, 'Meaning before truth'

Deflationism, Meaning, and use

Horwich, 'What's truth got to do with it?' // Lewis, 'General semantics' // Lewis, 'Languages and Language' // Heck, 'Use and Meaning' // Burgess, 'Mainstream semantics + deflationary truth' // M. Williams, 'Meaning and Deflationary Truth' // Horwich, *Meaning*

Skepticism about meaning

Quine, *Word and Object* // Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* // Boghossian, 'The Rule-Following Considerations' // Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'

Conditionals

Edgington, 'On Conditionals' // Edgington, 'Counterfactuals and the Benefit of Hindsight' // Stalnaker, 'A theory of conditionals' // Gibbard, 'Two Recent Theories of Conditionals' // Lewis, 'Probabilities of conditionals and conditional probabilities' // J. R. G. Williams, 'Counterfactual triviality: A Lewis-impossibility proof for counterfactuals'

Etc

Strawson, *Meaning and Truth* // Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* // Yalcin, 'Epistemic Modals' // Partee, 'Possible worlds in model-theoretic semantics: a linguistic perspective' //

Price, 'Immodesty Without Mirrors: Making Sense of Wittgenstein's Linguistic Pluralism'

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- Burgess, A. 'Mainstream semantics + deflationary truth'. *Linguistics and Philosophy* 34.5 (2011), pp. 397–410.
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 ——— 'What is a Theory of Meaning? (I)'. In: *Mind and Language*. Ed. by S. Guttenplan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975. Reprinted in Dummett, *The Seas of Language*, pp. 1–33. Page numbers refer to the reprinted version.
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- Edgington, D. 'On Conditionals'. *Mind* 104.414 (1995), pp. 235–329.
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