

Instructor: James Shaw
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Office Hours: Thursdays 10:00am-12:00pm
Cathedral of Learning 1029K

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The philosophy of language studies meaning, truth, communication, and their relationships. It has proved to be among the most influential branches of philosophy in the past century insofar as it provided insight into cognition, clarified human interrelations, shaped the terms of debate in all other branches of philosophy, and even motivated distinct positions within them. This course will survey some classic issues in the field while providing you with a “toolbox” of concepts and techniques that are invaluable for philosophical inquiry more generally.

A prerequisite for signing up is having taken a course in logic, linguistics, or computer science, or having my permission.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

The requirements for the course are (roughly) weekly problem sets, a midterm and a take-home final exam. The latter will be composed problems and essay questions like you'll see on the weekly problem sets. Your grade is made up as follows.

55% Problem Sets
20% Midterm
25% Final Exam

See the Problem Set Policy for information on how problem sets are graded.

TEXTS

There are relatively few readings from primary sources for the class. There is a "textbook" for the course, which is really just a more organized version of the lecture notes I'll be working from in giving the course. To pass the course you must grasp the material that's presented in lecture well enough to do the problem sets, midterm, and final exam. You should use the textbook in whatever way you find best facilitates your ability to assimilate the lecture material. For example, you can read the chapters before, or after lectures as you see fit. You can find the textbook and other readings for the course at the following website.

www.jshaw.net/courses/language.html

You will need a password to access the documents, on the syllabus handed out on the first day of class. If you're missing it, just e-mail me.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

The following is a *very rough* outline of the pace of the course. We may slow down or speed up (and perhaps even cover more chapters), depending on many different factors. I may also slightly adjust the readings as we proceed.

PoL = *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language* (i.e. the online lecture notes).

Introduction, Use/Mention First Class
No Readings

Frege and Russell (Weeks 1-3)
Readings: “On Sense and Reference”, Frege; “On Denoting”, Russell; *PoL* Chapter 1

Foundations of Semantics (Week 4-5)
Reading: “Meaning”, Grice; *PoL* Chapter 2

Compositional Semantics (Weeks 6-8)
Reading: *PoL* Chapter 3

****In-Class Midterm Thursday, February 28th****

The Semantics of Names (Week 9-10)
Reading: *Naming and Necessity* (lecture 2), Kripke; *PoL* Chapter 4

Analytic, A Priori, Necessary (Week 11)
Reading: *PoL* Chapter 5

Semantic Externalism (Week 12)
Reading: “the Meaning of “Meaning”” (selection), Putnam; *PoL* Chapter 6

Pragmatics and Implicature (Week 13)
Reading: “Logic and Conversation”, Grice; *PoL* Chapter 7

Make up Day/Sum Up, Review (Week 14)

****Take-Home Final handed out Tuesday April 16th and due Thursday April 25th****