

Philosophy 146r: Philosophy of Language
Spring 1999

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General Remarks About the Course

In this course, we shall be concerned with philosophical questions about proper names and the relation between names and their bearers, which we call 'reference'. This kind of interest in language is a widely known, oft-criticized, and misunderstood feature of 'analytic' philosophy, so it may well be worth saying a few words by way of motivating an interest in such arcane matters. One might reasonably deny, by the way, that any *special* justification of philosophers' attention to proper names is needed. Reflection on our use of them raises characteristically philosophical puzzles, for example, how there can be significantly different names of one and the same object (e.g., "Samuel Clemens" and "Mark Twain"); how there can be such a thing as a name of an object that does not exist; and what is it for a speaker to understand an utterance of a name.

But the interest questions about language have excited among 'analytic' philosophers is not to be explained entirely in terms of their intrinsic interest. Philosophers' interest in language is a consequence of an interest in general questions about the nature of our thought about the world around us. In many areas of philosophy, we presuppose that we are able to have *thoughts* or *beliefs* about an 'external' world. Thus, in epistemology, one leading question is under what circumstances the belief that so-and-so is the case counts as knowledge. Surely we also want to ask how exactly do beliefs come to be *about* things, anyway: What makes a belief, say, the belief that snow is white, rather than the belief that three plus four is twenty-two? One suspects that other parts of philosophy presuppose answers to these questions, that their answers might influence the answers given to more familiar philosophical questions. Some such questions can be formulated especially clearly in connection with language: In what, for example, does it consist that a name refers to the very object to which it does?

Some philosophers have held that the study of the representational features of thought can proceed only *via* a study of language. But one need not hold such a strong view to think that the study of language will contribute to the study of thought. Any reasonable theory of representation has to address language, for it is undeniable that thoughts are expressed *in* language.

It is for such reasons that analytic philosophers spend so much time thinking about language: It is not language about which they take themselves to be thinking, but one way in which our thought comes into contact with the world outside us. This also explains why philosophers' interest in language is, in certain peculiar ways, *limited*: Analytic philosophers tend to worry less about poetic imagery, metaphor, and the like, than some might like; we will say almost nothing about such aspects of language here. The reason for the limitation is this: It is, or at least it seems plausible to think, that it is only in so far as language *represents* the world that its study will be relevant to epistemology, metaphysics, and the like. (That is not to say that these other features are not of interest in their own right.)

The problems we shall be discussing in this course are *basic* to many of the debates in philosophy today. One can not begin to understand current discussions in the philosophy of mind, for example, without some grasp of issues concerning reference. Anyone with a serious interest in philosophy therefore *must* take a course like this one.

Prerequisites

Contemporary analytic philosophy began with certain discoveries in formal logic, and much of the work we shall be reading is informed in one way or another by logic: Arguments, premises, and conclusions are often stated using the concepts of formal logic. A working understanding of basic logic is thus *almost* essential for this course. A course in logic is *not* a formal prerequisite, but those who have had absolutely no exposure to logic should consult the instructor before registering.

Prior exposure to philosophy *is* essential: Much of the material we will be reading is difficult.

Organization of Course

The course will meet for lecture every Monday and Wednesday at 11am in Emerson 307. There will be a section for the course, which will meet Fridays at 11am in the same room. This section will be taught by a teaching fellow, should enrollment warrant the assignment of one; otherwise, the instructor will teach it himself. The section is open *only* to those enrolled in the class, specifically, to undergraduates and to graduate students *not* in philosophy. (There will be a graduate section, the meeting-time for which will be arranged during the second week of the course. It will open to graduate students in philosophy who are enrolled in the course—and probably to auditors, though we shall have to wait to see how many people are enrolled before making that decision.)

Readings

There is one text for the course: Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*, which is available at the Harvard University Press Display Room, in Holyoke Arcade.

We shall also be reading a number of articles by different authors. Unfortunately, there is no good collection of articles on the topics we shall be discussing. I would like to be able to produce a course packet containing xeroxes of the articles, and then have these distributed, for the cost of the photocopying, in the department office. But current copyright law prohibits me from doing so, making no distinction between uses of copyrighted material for educational purposes and for commercial purposes, nor caring whether what is charged merely covers the costs of photocopying or exceeds it. I could still make a course packet, but I would have to obtain the permission of the holders of the copyrights and then charge you a royalty—which frequently exceeds 25¢ per page—which I would then forward to them. That adds up.

However, each of you is free to make a copy of the relevant reading materials, for you personal use. (Why it should be illegal for me to *make* the photocopies for you, after you've given me the money to do so, is somewhat puzzling.) So, what we're going to do is this: I'll put copies of the various articles on reserve in Robbins Library; it will be up to each of you to make copies of the articles along the way, or to make a copy of the complete packet. *Please* make your copies from the copies on reserve, not from the original books and journals: This will save wear and tear on them.

If any of this bothers you, write your senator or representative.

Course Requirements

Every student in the course will be required to submit one short (3-5 page) paper, chosen from a list of topics, to be due 26 March, the Friday before Spring Break. For undergraduates, and graduates from departments other than Philosophy, I hope to be able to offer a choice, between writing a longer term paper, of 15-20 pages, and writing a second short paper (5-8 pages) while also taking a final examination. (I have been able to get the dean's approval to do so in the past, but must get it again.) The point of offering the choice is this: Those intending to do further serious work in philosophy, such as philosophy concentrators, will benefit from spending some time thinking hard about a single, specific problem; those who are taking the course as an elective, or are just looking for a general familiarity with the area, are probably better off reviewing the material as a whole, as would be required for a final exam. (Graduate students in the philosophy department will be required to write a term paper of 20-25 pages.) Long papers are due on Wednesday, 19 May, the last day of Reading Period; shorter ones on Friday, 7 May, the last day of classes.

Syllabus

The material in smaller letters attempts to indicate a few initial avenues of exploration, for those who find a particular topic especially interesting (or confusing).

3 February	No Meeting: Instructor Out of Town
5 February	Introductory Meeting
8 February	Bertrand Russell, "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" Russell also discusses these issues in <i>Problems in Philosophy</i> and "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism"
10 February	Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Meaning" and "Comments on Sense and Meaning" Other relevant papers of Frege's are "On Concept and Object" and "Function and Concept", as well as Part I of his <i>Basic Laws of Arithmetic</i>
12 February	Bertrand Russell, "On Denoting" An excellent resource for questions about descriptions is Stephen Neale, <i>Descriptions</i> , which covers an enormous amount of material.
15 February	No Meeting: Presidents' Day Holiday
17 February	P.F. Strawson, "On Referring", and Bertrand Russell, "Mr. Strawson on Referring" There are general issues here about 'presupposition' and other pragmatic phenomena. There is a good collection of papers on these matter, edited by Davis, entitled <i>Pragmatics</i> .
19 February	<i>First Meeting of Undergraduate Section</i>
22 February	John Searle, "Proper Names" Similar 'cluster theories' of proper names were defended by a number of authors around this time.
24 February	W.V.O. Quine, "Three Grades of Modal Involvement" See also Quine's "Quantifiers and Propositional Attitudes". There was a dispute between him and Ruth Barcan Marcus, on these issues: See here "Modalities and Intensional Logic" and Quine's "Reply to Professor Marcus".
1-3 March	Saul Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , Lecture I Some may wish to familiarize themselves a bit with 'modal logic', to which Kripke was one of the foremost contributors and upon which he is relying, somewhat. There are some good textbooks, e.g., Chellas's <i>Modal Logic</i> and Hughes and Creswell's <i>Introduction to Modal Logic</i> .
8 March	David Kaplan, "Dthat" See also Kaplan's seminal paper "Demonstratives".
10 March	Jason Stanley, "Rigidity and Content"

- See also Gareth Evans, "Reference and Contingency", Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, Appendix to Ch.5, and Jason Stanley, "Names and Rigid Designation". For formal considerations, see Martin Davies and Lloyd Humberstone, "Two Notions of Necessity".
- 15 March Scott Soames, "Wide Scope and Rigid Designation"
- 17 March Keith Donnellan, "Reference and Definite Descriptions"
My remarks on this paper will be based upon Saul Kripke, "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference". See also the discussion in Neale's *Descriptions*.
- 22, 24, 26 March No Meetings: Instructor Out of Town
- 29, 31 March Spring Break
- 5-7 April Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Lectures II-III
Another relevant paper of Kripke's is "A Puzzle About Belief". (We will not be discussing the Cartesian argument for dualism given in Lecture III. There is a sizeable literature on this topic.)
- 12 April Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'"
See also Putnam's "Is Semantics Possible?" and Michael Dummett, "The Social Character of Language". See also Robert Stalnaker, "Twin Earth Revisited".
- 14 April Tyler Burge, "Individualism and the Mental"
Many of Burge's other papers are helpful here: See e.g. "Individualism and Psychology" and "Wherein Is Language Social?" For a response, see Gabriel Segal, "The Return of the Individual".
- 19 April Michael Devitt, "Singular Terms"
This sort of 'causal' theory was developed by many people. For background, see Hartry Field, "Tarski's Theory of Truth". For similar ideas in the philosophy of mind, see Jerry Fodor, *A Theory of Content and Other Essays and Psychosemantics*.
- 21 April Gareth Evans, "The Causal Theory of Names"
See Jerry Fodor, *A Theory of Content and Other Essays*, for additional criticism.
- 26 April Michael Dummett, "Frege's Distinction Between Sense and Reference"
Many of Dummett's other writings bear upon this issue, too. See in particular *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, Ch.5, and "Frege's Myth of the Third Realm".
- 28 April Richard Heck, "The Sense of Communication"
For not dissimilar ideas, see Gareth Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, Ch.9.
- 3 April Hector Neri-Castañeda, "'He': A Study in the Logic of Self-Consciousness"
Many of Castañeda's other papers are also concerned with this issue. See also John Perry, "The Problem of the Essential Indexical". Evans argues for similar conclusions in *Varieties of Reference*, as do many other people in many other places!
- 5 May John Perry, "Frege on Demonstratives"
The classic material on demonstratives is in David Kaplan's "Demonstratives".
- 7 May Final Undergraduate Section Meeting
- The Following Meetings Are 'Make-ups' for 22 and 24 March and May Be Moved*
- 10 May Gareth Evans, "Understanding Demonstratives"
Evans's view about demonstratives is further developed in *Varieties of Reference*. For a somewhat different sort of view, see Christopher Peacocke, *Sense and Content and Thoughts: An Essay on Content*.
- 12 May Richard Heck, "Do Demonstratives Have Senses?"