

Philosophy of Language

Instructor: Kevin Lande

1 Topic

Philosophy of language was perhaps the central area of philosophical investigation for much of the 20th century. In addition to being closely tied to developments in logic and linguistics, theories and results from the philosophy of language were often extended to other philosophical domains, such as ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of mind. Some argued that philosophical questions in all other areas could be resolved by a careful analysis of the terms used to formulate those questions. Today, very few people hold this view, and the near-hegemony of philosophy of language has waned substantially. Still, questions about language are deeply interesting in themselves (even if they are not the *only* legitimate philosophical questions), and insights from philosophy of language can still be brought to bear fruitfully on other areas of inquiry.

In this course we will be interested in philosophical accounts of the *meaning of linguistic expressions* (words and sentences). To put some jargon to it, we will be interested in accounts of *semantic content*. It is in virtue of having meaning or content that language allows us to talk about the world around us—about how the world is, was, will be, or could be.

We cannot possibly hope to cover everything. Instead, we will spend some time on some of the most important papers in philosophy of language—papers by Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Saul Kripke, W.V.O. Quine (and, time permitting, others), that set the tone for how philosophy of language is done and how theories of meaning are approached. A central issue will be how *reference* works (e.g. how names and other expressions refer to/denote/pick out objects in the world).

2 Requirements

- 2 short papers (1-2 pages) = 25%
- 1 long paper (4-5 pages) = 45%
- Section attendance and participation = 5%

3 Readings

All readings will be posted on the course website.

4 Tentative Schedule

- (1) Week 1 - Introduction & Frege
M: Course introduction (no readings)

- W: Frege, *On Sense and Reference*
- (2) Week 2 - Frege cont'd
M: Frege, *On Sense and Reference*
W: Frege, *On Sense and Reference*; Frege, *Function and Concept*
- (3) Week 3 - Frege cont'd
M: Frege, *The Thought*
W: Frege, *The Thought*
- (4) Week 4 - Russell & Kripke
M: Russell, *On Denoting*; Russell, *Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description*
W: Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*
- (5) Week 5 - Kripke cont'd & Quine
M: Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*
W: Wettstein, *Has Semantics Rested on a Mistake?*
- (6) Week 6 - Meaning Skepticism
M: Quine, *Cognitive Meaning*
W: Summing up