
Phil 342

The Philosophy of Language

Time & Place: TR 2.45-4.00, 408 Lathrop Hall

Instructor: Nate Bulthuis

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Office Hours: T 11.15-12.15 | Th 4.15-5.45

Office: 206 Hascall Hall

Course Description

Humans have a remarkable ability to create and use symbolic objects like money, maps and pictures. But what is it that makes something a *symbol*? How can an object signify something 'beyond' itself? In other words: how can an object have a *meaning*? In this class, we will focus on thinking about human language as a symbol system. While there are many kinds of symbols, words and sentences are perhaps the most characteristic, impressive and intricate examples. Accordingly, studying the symbolic nature of language provides a good testing ground for attempts to answer our questions about symbols. Although these questions are of intrinsic interest to many, when directed at language and thought, they have been argued to have a special relevance to both traditional philosophical topics (skepticism, logic, intentionality, moral values, the mind, the existence of God and many others) and various logical puzzles. This approach to traditional philosophical problems has become particularly predominant in philosophical work from the last century. In this course you will read the most important works in this tradition and acquire the skills and background necessary to understand it. This skill-set and background will be drawn from work in logic, linguistics, computer science and philosophy. There are no pre-requisites for this course but students with a background in logic or semantics will have an easier time with the material.

Readings

There are **two required texts** for this course.

Bergen, B. (2012). *Louder Than Words: The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning* (Basic Books)

Kripke, S. (1982). *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Harvard University Press).

All other readings will be made available on the course website.

Optional – though strongly suggested – texts for the course:

Kripke, S. (1980). *Naming and Necessity* (Harvard University Press).

Lycan, W. (2008). *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, 2nd edn (Routledge).

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation: Attendance is mandatory for all course lectures. Exceptions will only be made in the case of university-approved absences. Participation is expected.

Short Analysis Essay: This course will require a series of ten "short analysis essays," of roughly 750 words each, in which you analyze a piece of writing or an argument.

Essay: There will be a required essay in this course, due in the second half of the term.

Grading

Participation: 15%

Short Analysis Essays: 50%

Essay: 15%

Final Exam: 20%

Website

This course utilizes a website: philosophy.natebulthuis.com/language. It is password-protected. The password for the site is **meaning**. Please consult the website for the schedule and access to readings, for journal and essay prompts, and for any other material provided during the semester.

The Writing and Speaking Center

The Writing and Speaking Center in 208 Lathrop Hall offers assistance with essays for any course. Experienced writing consultants can help native and non-native speakers alike with a written paper's focus, development, organization, clarity, citations, and grammar. Details about all meetings will remain private. To make an appointment, see <http://www.colgate.edu/writingcenter> or call [\(315\) 228-6085](tel:3152286085).

Course Accommodations

In recognition that people learn in a variety of ways and that learning is influenced by multiple factors, resources to support student success are available on campus. Students who think they might benefit from these resources can find out more about:

- Course-level support (e.g., faculty member, departmental resources, etc.) by asking your course instructor.
- University-level support (e.g., tutoring/writing services) by visiting CLTR (101A Lathrop Hall) or by going to www.colgate.edu/cltr.

Students who believe that, due to a special need, they could benefit from academic accommodations are encouraged to visit Academic Support and Disability Services at 101A Lathrop Hall. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

Academic Dishonesty

A word about academic dishonesty: Don't. It is immoral (it's a form of theft). It also doesn't pass the risk-reward test. It's incredibly easy for us to catch, and the penalties are severe – up to and including expulsion from the university. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please feel free to talk to me. Consult the Academic Honor Code for a more detailed discussion of academic dishonesty.