

Phil 309: Language, Meaning, and Society
Bryn Mawr College
Fall '23

Location and time: W 1:10-4pm Old Library 223
Instructor: Augie Faller
Office: Old Library 122
Office Hours: T/Th 2:30–3:30 and by appt (calendly.com/augiefaller)
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Course Description

“Every oak tree on Bryn Mawr’s campus has at least three owls in it.” You have never seen that sentence, but you understood it. How? Well, you know what the words mean. But what kinds of things do words mean? How do words even get their meanings? And how exactly do word-meanings combine to generate sentence-meanings? To answer these questions, we will study classic and contemporary texts on the philosophy of language. We will apply what we have learned to study language’s role in society, considering topics like testimony, socially and politically significant terms, and propaganda.

Learning Outcomes

1. Develop an understanding of some central concepts and theories in contemporary philosophy of language, how they interrelate, and how they might apply to social issues.
2. Gain the philosophical skills to critically evaluate these theories, including an understanding of the key concepts of evidence vs. explanation, how to construct arguments, and how to identify potential contributions.
3. Produce philosophical writing that meets the field of philosophy’s expectations regarding clarity, argument, and citation practices.

Course Materials

All course readings will be available on the course webpage. Print versions of several readings can be found in:

Aloysius Martinich, *The Philosophy of Language*, 4th Edition (2001)

For writing guidelines, please consult:

Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"
<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Williams and Bizup, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, 11th Edition, (other editions acceptable as well)

Technology in the Classroom

Please refrain from using your cellphone in class. Students are encouraged to print the readings and to take notes using a notebook, though laptops are allowed. I will ask students to turn off their wifi during class to limit distraction.

Accessibility

Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Access Services. Students can call 610-526-7516 to make an appointment with the Director of Access Services, Deb Alder, or email her at dalder@brynmawr.edu to begin this confidential process. Once registered, students should schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible to share the verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website. (<http://www.brynmawr.edu/access-services/>)

Any student who has a disability-related need to record this class first must speak with the Director of Access Services and to me, the instructor. Class members need to be aware that this class may be recorded.

Title IX

Bryn Mawr/Haverford College is committed to fostering a safe and inclusive living and learning environment where all can feel secure and free from harassment. All forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic violence, and dating violence are violations of Bryn Mawr/Haverford's policies, whether they occur on or off campus. Bryn Mawr/Haverford faculty are committed to helping to create a safe learning environment for all students and for the College community as a whole. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination, harassment, or violence, know that help and support are available. Staff members are trained to support students in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more.

The College strongly encourages all students to report any incidents of sexual misconduct. Please be aware that all Bryn Mawr/Haverford employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors, clergy, and healthcare providers) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the Bi-College Title IX Coordinator.

Information about the Colleges Sexual Misconduct policy, reporting options, and a list of campus and local resources can be found on the Colleges website:

<https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/policies-guidelines-handbooks/title-ix>

Notes on Academic Integrity

I regard plagiarism as a very serious matter. In this class, plagiarism consists of work taken partially or entirely from an uncited source (online content, a peer, a published article, etc.) and assumed as your own. Any use of AI to write for you is also considered plagiarism and is detectable. If I have reason to suspect plagiarism, I will ask that you report yourself to the Bryn Mawr Honor Board. See the Bryn Mawr Honor Code and Honor Board Hearing Process in the Student Handbook for more information.

Evaluation

- *Argument analyses* 30%
You will be asked to critically evaluate arguments from the reading (three, at 10% each). These will be take-home assignments designed to test your understanding of the course content. Paying attention in class will be very helpful!
- *Writing Assignments*: 55%
These include a summary assignment (20%) and an essay (35%).
The goal of summary assignment (2 pages) is to practice the skill of condensing and paraphrasing complex arguments. The final assignment will be a philosophical essay (6–8 pages) on a topic of your choice.
- *Participation*: 15%
Your participation grade will be determined by your attendance and the extent to which you are actively engaged in the course. Please come to class with 3–5 questions about the week’s reading. These can be as simple as, “What does the author mean by...?”

Grading Policies

1. Extensions can be granted on papers, but you need to talk to me a few days in advance. Papers submitted late without an extension will be downgraded by 1/3 letter grade

per day.

- Attendance is expected. You receive two free absences; after that, missing class will hurt your participation grade. If you face unique circumstances, an exception to this policy can be made, but you must communicate with me.

Grade breakdown:

Grade	Grade Points	Percentage Range
A	4.0	94–100%
A-	3.7	90–93%
B+	3.3	87–89%
B	3.0	83–86%
B-	2.7	80–82%
C+	2.3	77–79%
C	2.0	73–76%
C-	1.7	70–72%
D	1.0	60–69%
F	0	0–59%

Tentative Schedule of Readings:

September 6

Introduction to course

Optional: Martinich, Introduction to *The Philosophy of Language* sections I–VI; John Stuart Mill, “Of Names” (*A System of Logic*, Book 1, Chapter 2)

Topic 1: Semantics

September 13: Frege’s Puzzle

Gottlob Frege, “On Sense and Nominatum”

September 20: Reference and Descriptions

Bertrand Russell, “On Denoting” and “Descriptions”

September 27: Names and Reference

Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Excerpt

October 4: Are Meanings in the Head?

Hilary Putnam “Meaning and Reference”

October 11: Social Constructionism and Conceptual Analysis

Sally Haslanger, “What Good are our Intuitions? Philosophical Analysis and Social Kinds”

October 18:

Fall Break

October 25: Gender and Other Politically Significant Terms

Jennifer Saul, “Politically Significant Terms and Philosophy of Language: Methodological Issues”

Talia Mae Bettcher, “Trans Women and the Meaning of ‘Woman’”

Topic 2: Pragmatics

November 1: How to Do Things with Words

J. L. Austin, “Performative Utterances”

*** Summary Assignment due Sunday 10/29 ***

November 8: Working Out What’s Meant

Paul Grice, “Logic and Conversation”

November 15: Assertion

Robert Stalnaker, “Assertion”

November 22: Speech and Power

Jennifer Hornsby, “Disempowered Speech”

Quill Kukla, “Performative force, convention, and discursive injustice”

Optional: Jennifer Hornsby, “Illocution and its significance”

November 29: Thoughts on Writing

Williams and Bizup, *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, chapters “Using Sources” and “The Ethics of Style”

Samuel Delany, “About 5,750 Words”

December 6: Propaganda

Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, excerpt

Olúfémi Táíwò, “Beware of Schools Bearing Gifts: Miseducation and Trojan Horse Propaganda”

December 13: Anthropology and Language: The Case of Place Names

Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*, Chapter 3: “Speaking with Names”

Emiliana Cruz, “Documenting Landscape Knowledge in Eastern Chatino: Narratives of Fieldwork in San Juan Quiahije”

*** Final essay due during finals week ***