

PHIL 223 PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE
TUES. & THURS. 11:00 – 12:15 NICELY 108
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT
FALL 2015

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Course Description: This course serves as an introduction to the Philosophy of Language. Arguably, the ability to use language distinguishes humans from every other sort of being. So, it's pretty important. Yet most of us have no idea how it works or how we acquire it. We even learn it without trying or thinking about it. Sure, you "know" how to talk; but if I ask you what this knowledge consists of, you will soon run out of things to say. Understanding how language works (and how it doesn't) is a lot like trying to think about how you are able to talk while you are (try it), because we have to use language in order to understand it. Have you ever been in a house of mirrors? It's easy to get lost, because every direction looks like everywhere else. This course focuses mostly on a *philosophical* account of language, which focuses on how words (sounds or linguistic signs) have *meaning*. However, I wish to cover more than the usual philosophical account, by covering some linguistic theory, as well as some broader issues like metaphor and interpretation. We will begin with a piece by Plato, then get introduced to linguistic theory and syntax, briefly cover topics like innateness, rule-following, radical translation, and animal and machine language. Then about halfway through we will turn to some less exciting but important formal methods for understanding meaning. What we end up covering depends a great deal on how well we grasp the material along the way.

Aside from understanding language, my main goal is to help you become a more effective thinker and writer. Toward that end, each week we will have a set of readings to discuss in class. You are expected to have read them ahead of time, so that we can discuss them fruitfully. Most of the readings are difficult and you will have trouble understanding them. You will need to keep track of complicated arguments and unfamiliar terms. You will be quizzed occasionally on the readings and you will write two short papers and one longer paper. Occasionally, we will do "group work" where you will answer several questions in a small group and discuss them with the class. This is not an easy course. If you have never taken a philosophy course, you should seriously consider whether you should be taking this one.

In general, this course mainly emphasizes philosophical thinking, which I take to be the slow, careful, reflective reading and analysis of texts and concepts. Classes will be discussion-driven and centered on the assigned readings. My goal is not only to introduce the student to various problems in the philosophy of language, but also to develop the habit of reading and thinking philosophically.

This course fulfills the GE Humanities List I requirement.

Course Outcomes

- The ability to precisely identify the conclusion for which a writer is arguing.
- The ability to accurately represent the argument(s) which someone is using to support his or her conclusion.
- The ability to identify and assess objections to arguments in our readings.
- The ability to develop, explain, and defend your own views.
- To explain and critically evaluate the various theories of language.

Essential: By taking this class, you agree to understand and to comply with this syllabus. By 'syllabus' I mean all of the documents found in the **Syllabus Section** on Moodle. Read all syllabus documents carefully. If I make any changes, I will inform you. If you have a question about any policy, I am happy to talk about it. But if it is in the syllabus, you can never say that you did not know it.

Required Texts: See course schedule below for assigned readings.

- All readings are or will be available on Moodle.

Graded Requirements:

- Quizzes (approx. eight, dispersed throughout the semester): 25% of course grade
- Short paper 1 (20%)
- Short paper 2 (25%)
- Final paper: 30%

Quizzes: These are multiple choice or short answer quizzes given occasionally (according to Course Schedule) designed to keep you up with the readings and to sharpen comprehension. The Quiz for that day will be over the readings assigned for that day (or the previous day) only. Quizzes may *not* be made up. Your two lowest quiz scores will be dropped from your total Quizzes score. Here is how they are scored: -1 = 90; -2 = 80; -3 = 70; -4 = 60; -5 = 0. Note that if you cheat on the quiz by looking at someone else's quiz or by giving or obtaining answers from some other source, you will receive a zero for the quiz.

Short papers and Final paper:

Short papers are around 700 to 800 words in length and will be based on a question about the assigned readings. The Final paper will be around 1,700 words, based on topics I will give you, but you can modify the topic to suit your interests. All papers are of the “critical” type, meaning that you will take a position (a thesis) and defend it. The grading criteria for these papers are as follows: You must be able to identify and discuss the main idea (thesis) of the readings. You must be able to identify the reasons that are given in support of that thesis. You must be able to critically evaluate that thesis. You must be able to write in clear, grammatically correct, English. Your thoughts must be well-organized. Papers that fulfill all of the above in an excellent manner will receive at least 90 points. Those that do so in a “good” manner, or fulfill the criteria partially, will receive at least 80 points. Those essays that need work in at least two of the above criteria will receive at least 70 points. Those that do not fulfill several of the criteria, or do so in a weak manner, will receive at least 60 points. Those essays that fail to display much knowledge of the readings, *or* are incomprehensible or thoughtless in expression, will receive a 59 or less. The best way to prepare for these essays is to read the assigned readings *carefully* and pay attention during class discussions. Also, for most of the readings, I will provide “reading questions” on Moodle that will help you focus on what is important. More information on how to write philosophy papers can be found on Moodle. Plagiarism is severely punished. See below.

Attendance: Attendance will be taken, but there is no attendance grade. However, your performance on the papers and exams will depend heavily on your ability to understand the assigned readings and to think critically about these issues. Also, quizzes cannot be made up. So, it is in your best interest to attend every class, be attentive, and participate. However, if you miss more than six classes, for whatever reason, you will either be dropped from the course and receive a “W”, or you will receive a failing grade of 50. No exceptions. If some problem arises for you during the course, you must notify me about it as soon as possible. Persistent lateness will count as an absence.

Participation and class conduct: Participation is strongly encouraged. To participate well, you must do the readings *before* class so we can go over them in class. Ask questions, make comments, and respond (respectfully) to other students. No question or comment is too silly or off-base. Everyone has questions, and surely others have the same questions as you. However, please do not monopolize the discussion. Give others a chance to speak. *Be respectful of me and others by listening to what is going on, rather than talking among yourselves.*

NOTE: Repeat offenders of the following behaviors will be ejected from class and have **points removed from their final grade.** (1) Talking while someone else is talking. (2) Using cell phones in class. All electronic devices must be turned off and put away completely out of sight. If you must take notes with a computer, you must sit in the front and the internet connection must be turned off. (3) Leaving the room to make or answer phone calls; playing games or reading non-class material during class. (4) Repeated

lateness; leaving early. Also, as a courtesy to me, *please do not make preparations to leave class until I say class is over*. If I seem unaware that class time has expired, kindly alert me, thank you.

Grade Calculation: I want you to understand how your grades are assigned and calculated, so that you can know better what I expect and so that you can exercise more control over your own progress. See “Calculating and Estimating Your Grades” on Moodle. This will show you completely explicitly how all calculations are made, so that you can do them yourself. Here is a brief explanation: All grades are recorded on Moodle’s “Grades” (as well as on the assignments themselves), so you can view them as soon as I have put them up (Moodle→Administration→Grades).

To estimate your grade at any point in the semester, simply figure your average and multiply it by the “weighted” amount; then sum the weighted amounts (see “Calculating and Estimating. . .”).

NOTE: Never tell me that you “need” a certain course or paper grade, nor ask me to “go easy” on grades or anything else. The request is completely inappropriate and unethical. If made, I will *reduce* your course grade by at least 2 points. The best way to get the grade you need is to do the required work as best you can. I am a hard grader but I try to be fair and constructive. I want you to learn. But there are no guarantees that you will get the grade you need. Keep in mind I am here to work with you. So, feel free to come to office hours or make an appointment.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the intentional or careless use of someone else’s writing or ideas as if they were your own. I consider it equivalent to stealing, lying, and cheating, and no amount of it will be tolerated in my class. Plagiarism is wrong for another reason: The general objective of college is to become a better writer, thinker, learner, and person. Plagiarizing severely undermines that objective and harms, not only you, but all students, professors, the university, and society in general. If you plagiarize, you fail to learn how to write and think. You represent yourself as having skills and knowledge that you in fact do not have. Also, I take your work and my work seriously. If you plagiarize, then my work becomes a pointless waste of time. I hate wasting time, because I wish to fill my life with meaning and accomplishments. Nor do I wish to have false relationships. When I read and respond to your work, I consider myself as engaged in a mutual relationship of trust, respect, truth, care, and progress. If I am reading your plagiarized work, then I am having a false relationship with you. I despise false relationships because they destroy the substance of life. **If you plagiarize anything in this class, you will receive a grade of zero for the assignment and be reported to the Dean. It will go on your record and you could be dismissed from the university. No exceptions. If I so much as suspect that your work has been plagiarized, I will give it a zero and submit it to the Academic Affairs Committee for judgment.** This applies to any submitted work whatsoever (including essay drafts, single sentences and ideas, using dictionary definitions, encyclopedia entries, or any part thereof, paraphrasing, whether from books, internet, magazines, friends, wherever). You must also discourage plagiarism by not giving your paper to someone else to copy. Unfortunately, I catch plagiarizers *every semester*. I am an experienced reader and can usually tell, simply by reading, when a student has plagiarized. (This also applies to papers written by ghost writers.) I can tell because the writing does not match the assignment, because the text has an “internet feel,” or because it uses awkward wording in an attempt to disguise the source. I also use Google, Turnitin, and other resources.

You can, of course, easily avoid plagiarism simply by *citing your sources properly*. If you are unsure of how to cite sources properly, see “**Documenting Sources: Rules & Mechanics**” posted on Moodle. But *you are responsible for any plagiarism*. If you are struggling with an assignment, or with your English, please come and talk to me. I am here to help.

Turnitin. Students must submit all assignments to Turnitin.com. Failure to do so results in an automatic 0 for the assignment. Here is how it works: As their website says, “Every paper submitted is returned in the form of a Originality Report. Results are based on searches of billions of pages from current and archived instances of the Internet, millions of student papers submitted to Turnitin, and commercial databases of journal articles and periodicals” (http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_solutions.html). NOTE that Turnitin only submits a “similarity” report, not a plagiarism report. The similarity report shows the percentage of your text that is similar or identical to another text, and therefore helps me determine

whether you have plagiarized. Some similarity is fine and to be expected. But identical similarity or paraphrased similarity is plagiarism. NOTE: Writing papers does *not* consist of using a source and changing a few words here and there. Nor does paraphrasing a source consist of changing a few words here and there. It means making a compact summary of the main point of a paragraph, for purposes of clarification for the reader. All paraphrasing must be documented.

To submit your paper to Turnitin, go to Moodle and click on “Turnitin submission” for the current assignment.

More information on Plagiarism is posted on Moodle.

The Writing Center:

If you have writing issues that need extra attention, please take advantage of the Writing Center. Their instructors help all students, from first-year to doctoral. Keep in mind that they will *not* proofread or copy-edit your work. Walk in or make an appointment: 9 am - 5 pm, Monday – Friday. West Hall 336; Ext. 3157; E-mail: writing@aub.edu.lb

Moodle: Here you will find course material such as the syllabus, some course readings, citation mechanics, tips on writing papers, and such. Class notices and announcements will be sent to you by e-mail (via the “News Forum”) so, **check your AUB e-mail** regularly. You may also post your own thoughts on the News Forum for everyone to see.

E-mail: So that we may better communicate, you must use your AUB e-mail and “authenticate” it so that I can see your name and know who you are.

See Course Schedule, next page--

Course Schedule: This schedule is subject to change, although any changes will be announced well in advance. To be prepared for class discussions, read the assigned material *prior* to class time. *Always* bring the assigned material to class. Bring whatever is assigned for Tuesday to Thursday's class as well. *If you do not bring the readings to class, I may ask you to leave until you return with them!*

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
1 Sep		03 Introduction to course
2	8 Plato's <i>Cratylus</i>	10 Plato's <i>Cratylus</i> (continued)
3	15 Carnie, Intro to Linguistics	17 Carnie, continued Practice exercises (in back)
4	22 Duan, "On the Arbitrary Nature of the Sign." Quiz 1	24 No Classes (Wed. - Fri.) Al-Adha
5 Oct	29 Martin Ch. 1, The Structure of Language Ch. 2, Meanings as Ideas. Passage from Locke	01 Chapter 3, Innateness Quiz 2
6	6 Martin Chapter 5 Private language	8 Martin Ch. 6 Radical Translation
7	13 No Class—out of town. Short paper 1 due	15 Martin Ch. 7 Rules No Classes, Hijra New Year
8	20 Martin Ch. 8 Conventions Quiz 3 on 7 Rules and 8 Conventions	22 Martin Ch. 10 Animal and Machine Language (Bee language and Searle, minds brains)
9	27 Martin, Part II Ch. 11 Function and Object	29 Martin 12 Quantifiers Quiz 4
10 Nov.	03 Martin Ch. 13 Definite Descriptions	05 Martin Ch. 14 Extensionality Quiz 5
11	10 Martin Ch. 15 Modal Contexts and Possible Worlds	12 Martin Chapter 16 Proper Names Chapter 17, More on Proper Names and Definite Descriptions
12	17 Martin Ch. 18 Psychological Contexts	19 Martin Ch. 19 Sense and Reference Quiz 6 Paper 2 Theses due Sunday Noon
13	24 Martin Ch. 21 General Terms	26 Martin Ch. 22 Truth and Meaning Quiz 7 Paper 2 due Friday, Nov. 27, 12 Noon.
14 Dec	01 Martin Ch. 23 Boundaries of Meaning	03 Ch. 23 continued Quiz 8 Last Official Class
15	08 Dec. 8-10, reading period.	10
16	15 Final Paper: Due 12 Noon Dec. 16th.	17 (Semester ends Dec. 19)