DESCRIPTION

A survey of foundational and highly influential texts in Analytic Philosophy of Language. Emphasis will be on three topics: contrasting conceptions of linguistic meaning; the semantics-pragmatics boundary; and two case studies (namely, definite descriptions and metaphor).

REQUIRED TEXT


OBJECTIVES

The twin objectives are honing of philosophical skills and enriching students’ familiarity with some “touchstone” material in contemporary Analytic Philosophy of Language. In terms of skills, the emphasis will be on: professional-level philosophical writing; close reading of notoriously challenging texts; methodological reflection; and respectful but incisive philosophical dialogue.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Six “Briefing Notes”: 50%

- On the day they are discussed in class, students will submit 2-3 page (i.e., 750-1000 words) “reader responses” to selected writings, consisting of an outline of the central
argument, along with the student’s comments and questions. (This is to be sharply contrasted with an outline of the paper, section-by-section.)
- Each Briefing Note is worth 10%, and all are obligatory. However the lowest grade will be dropped
Short Term Paper: 35%
- Students will write a brief paper, the length and style of a conference paper (i.e., about 4000 words), on one of the topics addressed in the class.
Class Participation: 15%

COURSE READINGS

I. Four Approaches to Meaning

A. Reference and Truth Conditions
Gottlob Frege (1892), “On Sense and Reference”
Bertrand Russell (1919), “Descriptions”

B. Use Theory
J.L. Austin (1956), “Performative Utterances”

C. Dynamic Semantics
David Lewis (1979), “Scorekeeping in a Language Game”

D. Mentalistic Semantics

II. The Semantics-Pragmatics Boundary

A. Foundations

B. Indexicals

C. Pragmatic Determinants of Literal Truth Conditions
John Perry (1986), “Thought without Representation”

III. Two Case Studies

A. Definite Descriptions Revisited
Keith S. Donnellan (1966), “Reference and Definite Descriptions”
Saul Kripke (1977), “Speaker’s Reference and Semantic Reference”

B. Metaphor
Donald Davidson (1978), “What Metaphors Mean”