



LUNDS
UNIVERSITET

FTEA21:3 Philosophy of Language
Theoretical Philosophy: Continuation Course
Lecture 1: Introduction

- (1) The course will consist of ten meetings. Every meeting will have the following structure:
- Lecture on the topic of the day (45 minutes)
 - Break (15 minutes)
 - Seminar on original texts related to the topic (45 minutes)

It's important to be prepared for the seminar and to have read the texts in advance. The questions on the exam will require knowledge from both the course book and the texts.

- (2) (a) My goal with this course isn't just that you learn about philosophy of language but also that you develop your abilities to take and evaluate philosophical positions. That's why the seminar- and homework questions will mainly be about evaluating and comparing the theories we will be talking about.
- (b) Given that that's the goal, I also want to provide the support necessary for you to be able to answer those kind of questions. But since you're all different I don't know beforehand what kind of help or support each of you might need. For that reason I prefer to keep the lectures open to questions and discussions of the material and not just as a traditional presentation.
- (c) You're also more than welcome to ask me questions in between the meetings. Either e-mail me or book an appointment if you'd rather talk in person.
- (d) As an additional aid, I've posted a proposed work schedule on Canvas for when to read what in order to keep the workload evenly spread throughout the course.
- (3) (a) During the seminars you will discuss the material in smaller groups. I'll post the questions on Canvas beforehand so that you can keep them in mind when reading the texts.
- (b) Always bring a copy of the texts to the seminars. When something is unclear or you disagree on how to interpret them you will need to go back and re-read some parts. Also, make notes about your thoughts and questions when you read and bring them to the seminars.
- (c) The seminars themselves are not in any way part of the grading for the course. They are just an opportunity to discuss and develop your understanding of the original texts which are part of the course. Try to have an opinion on the theses of the papers. It's not important that you're right, but it's valuable to practice arguing for a philosophical position. It's often discussion which prompts a deeper understanding of the problems in question.

- (4) (a) The course will be examined through a take-home exam which you have one week to complete. The deadline for submitting your answers is **23:59 Monday, November Monday 20th**.
- (b) The exam will consist of 7 questions where each answer will be evaluated according to whether it satisfies the grading criteria for Pass (1 point) or Pass With Distinction (2 points).
- (c) In total, the exam can provide 14 points. To achieve a Pass on the course you need to get at least 7 points and for a grade of Pass With Distinction you need at least 11 points.
- (d) After the take-home exam there will be an oral examination on **Tuesday, November 21st**. This will take up to 15 minutes where the student will explain an answer to one or more of the questions from the take-home exam.
- (e) The oral exam is only meant to check that the student has understood the material and is hence only graded with a Pass or Fail. As such, it can't improve your grade in the course, but passing it is required to receive a passing grade on the course.
- (5) (a) There will also be two homework assignments during the course. These are not required, but each passed homework assignment provides 1 extra point towards your exam results.
- (b) I will post the homework on Canvas one week before the deadline. To get the extra point you need to hand them in by:
- Homework 1 (**Friday 3/11, 12:00**)
 - Homework 2 (**Friday 10/11, 12:00**).
- (c) Each assignment consists of one question of the same kind that you will get on the take-home exam. You'll get feedback in the form of comments and how your answers relate to the grading criteria. So, beyond extra credit, consider the assignments an opportunity to get feedback on what will be expected of your answers if you're aiming for a Pass With Distinction.
- (d) Additionally, to get the extra point you will be required to offer anonymous comments on one of the other students homework answers.
- (6) So, what are we actually going to talk about in this course?
- (a) Human language is pretty amazing. We've somehow acquired an ability to use sounds and symbols to both *represent the world* and *express our thoughts*.
- (b) But since successful communication is ever present, it's easy to forget how extraordinary it is. We've gone from being simple creatures which can barely express anything to having a language which lets us express scientific theories, construct social institutions, and coordinate our everyday actions.
- (c) As philosophers of language, we're interested in explaining how that's possible. How do the systems which underlie our communication work? And how have we gone from pre-linguistic beings to the sophisticated speakers we are today?

- (7) (a) For much of the 20th century, philosophy of language has had a special status within analytic philosophy. Frege's formalisation of mathematical language and logic seemed to many philosophers like an enormous success which ought to be extended to the rest of philosophy.
- (b) Russell, the early Wittgenstein, and the logical positivists picked up where Frege left off and tried to reformulate philosophical problems as questions about language. In part, they were motivated by the metaphysics of their time, which they felt was excessive and epistemologically questionable. In part, it's because all of our theorising takes place in language. So, getting clear about the it's nature seemed like a pre-condition for solving philosophical puzzles.
- (c) Thus, instead of asking questions like 'What is justice?' or 'What is time?', they approached the problems by looking for answers to 'What does the word justice mean?' or 'How do we think and talk about time?'.
- (d) In contemporary analytic philosophy, this language-based approach is still very much present, but it's not nearly as dominant as it used to be. Many philosophers still see the value in understanding the systems of rules which underpin, say, ethical or metaphysical language, but also think that we miss something important when we try to replace questions about the nature of ethics or the world with questions about words and meaning.
- (8) There are, however, still plenty of connections with other branches of philosophy.
- (a) It's quite common to think that our thoughts are linguistically expressed. It's similarly common to think that linguistic utterances are a way to make thoughts public by expressing them. Indeed, the connection between language and thought is often taken to be so significant that philosophy of language and philosophy of mind are grouped together as a single discipline.
- (b) It's also become much more common to study knowledge in terms of how it figures in social interactions. For this kind of *social epistemology*, it's crucial to explain what we do and express when making a claim or attribution of knowledge.
- (c) Often, rules of logic are justified through the meaning of the logical connectives (and, or, not, if ... then). That is, the introduction and elimination rules for, say, 'and' are simply a characterisation of what the word *means*.
- (d) Metaphysics is also tightly connected to questions about language. When we try to draw conclusions about what the world consists of, it's often by pointing to what states-of-affairs must hold in order to make certain claims true. Metaphysical thinking, then, is crucially concerned with the relation between a linguistic description of the world and how the world actually is.
- (9) Modern philosophy of language is also quite interdisciplinary. Many arguments and theories draw on mathematics, cognitive science, and neuroscience.
- (a) There is, of course, also a large intersection and cross-pollination with linguistics. The science of linguistics is largely born from and developed in parallel with 20th century philosophy of language.
- (b) The overlap between the subjects is very large and it's not always clear whether to characterise a particular theorist as a linguist or philosopher of language. The distinction between

the subjects is mostly social and concerns what topics are considered most interesting.

- (c) Philosophers of language are usually interested in the most theoretical parts of linguistics. Questions like ‘How should we structure theories of meaning?’ are more central than ‘How should we map the developmental history of this particular dialect?’.
 - (d) Philosophy of language is also more interested in the conclusions we can draw from our linguistic practice and how it affects the structure of our philosophical concepts.
- (10) It’s standard to divide the study of language into three main parts: *Grammar*, *semantics*, and *pragmatics*.
- (a) Grammar, or syntax, is about rules for how we can combine linguistic symbols. Why is ‘Coffee gives me energy’ a well-formed sentence while ‘Gives coffee energy me’ is not?
 - (b) Semantics is concerned with the connection between symbols and their content. Topics of interest are questions like ‘What does a particular word or sentence mean?’ and ‘What makes a sentence mean what it does and not something else?’
 - (c) Pragmatics is about what we can do by using linguistic expressions. What makes promises different from assertions? And how does context affect what certain expressions mean?
- (11) In this course we won’t discuss grammar very much, but there are some notions we will make extensive use of.
- (a) A *term* is a noun or noun-phrase which can be placed in subject or object position in a sentence. Standard examples are names, descriptions, sorts, or pronouns. If a term stands for a unique object or person, then we call it a *singular term*.
 - (b) A *predicate* is the part of a sentence which expresses what’s being ascribed to the person or object that the term stands for. Examples are verbs and verb-phrases but also ascriptions like ‘is tall’ or ‘is located in Lund’.
 - (c) We will have to keep track of the distinction between a *type* and a *token*. This is the kind of difference that there is between a sentence and an utterance of a sentence. One easy way to think of it is as the difference between a type of car, say a Ferrari, and a particular car (a token) of that type, your Ferrari.
 - (d) Finally, we need to make a distinction between *use* and *mention* of an expression. When an expression occurs normally, we say that it’s being used. When it occurs in way that makes it a term, we say that it’s mentioned. One common way to show that an expression is being mentioned is to put quotation marks around it.

Niklas teaches this course.

‘Niklas’ is made up of six letters.

We mention expressions in order to say something *about them* instead of *with them*. If we add quotes to the first or remove them from the latter, we would make them false instead of true.

- (12) The course has three main parts:
- Theory of reference (3 lectures)

- Theory of meaning (4 lectures)
- Pragmatics (2 lectures)

Both reference and meaning are subtopics within semantics.

- (13) The theory of reference is about how linguistic expressions are connected to things in the world.
- (a) The link between terms, such as names, and the things they stand for is usually called the *reference relation*.
 - (b) When discussing singular terms we call the object that they designate their *referent* and when discussing general terms we call the collection of such objects its *extension*.
 - (c) In contemporary philosophy of language there are two main kinds of views on reference: *descriptivism* and *direct reference*. We will work with some of the classic texts which have set the stage for this debate and use the course book as a source for how the views have developed.
- (14) The theory of meaning is, surprisingly, about what meaning is and how it relates to different expressions.
- (a) The meaning of an expression is sometimes described as the information we need in order to understand an utterance of the expression.
 - (b) We will begin by considering early theories of meaning and the *verificationism* which was dominant during the first half of the 20th century.
 - (c) Then we will discuss *use-theories*, *truth-conditional theories*, and *psychological theories*.
 - (d) All of these have left a mark in the debate and most contemporary theories can be placed in one or other of these camps, although with some concessions to the others.
- (15) The final part of the course is about how language can be used to act and how it depends on context. Here, we will discuss three main questions:
- (a) In what way does the context of utterance impact what the utterance means? Which expression are particularly dependent on contextual information to be understood?
 - (b) What characterises *performative* language, that is the use of utterances to perform acts? For example, 'I promise to buy you dinner tomorrow'.
 - (c) How do we recognise and understand the implicit information which we sometimes convey with an utterance? For example, when someone says 'I accept that I'll be placed next to him at dinner' we can draw the conclusion that the speaker is not very enthusiastic about that prospect.

Then, at the very final lecture, we will use all of these tools to consider non-literal uses of language and a particularly live debate in contemporary philosophy of language: namely, politically significant speech and slurs.