

# Syllabus: Introduction to the Philosophy of Language and Mind

Daniel Drucker

## I Overview

In this course we will explore a person's inner world, their attitudes and experiences, and how they make that inner world accessible to others in language. As an organizing principle, we will examine mental and linguistic phenomena according to how *subjective* or *objective* they are. Often this will be a matter of dispute, and we will dispute about it. Along the way, a third category, the *intersubjective*—the social—will also be relevant. A principal question we will examine will be to what extent *individual*, subjective thought and experience depends on the objective world around the individual, and to what extent it depends on their not-quite-objective social world. Throughout, we will read what philosophers have had to say on these subjects, but we'll also look at some art on these themes, too.

## 2 Prerequisites

There are officially no prerequisites, but having an introduction to philosophy and/or an introduction to formal logic under your belt would ensure that you are sufficiently prepared.

## 3 Aims

- To learn how to read both historical and contemporary philosophy, i.e., how to extract arguments, formulate objections, and see influence and inspiration.
- To learn how to engage in respectful, argumentative discussion with one another.
- To provide basic tools for thinking about mental and linguistic phenomena, including understanding of genres of theories of the attitudes and consciousness, of semantics, pragmatics, and internalism and externalism.
- To allow students to make more sense of their own mental and linguistic experiences, and to see how they fit in with a broader conception of the world.

## 4 Schedule<sup>1</sup>

We will begin with a science-fiction cartoon, *Fantastic Planet (La Planète Sauvage)*. This will provide an introduction to many themes: the importance of sociality to understanding, the difficulty of interpretation, and the relation between inner thought and outer representation. After that, we will go from *inner* to *outer*, in four sections: consciousness, the attitudes, “literal” meaning, and pragmatics.

You can think of this as the most ambitious version of the class, the class I would teach if I were teaching myself and in advance of meeting any one of you. Depending on class interest, these readings are subject to change—please let me know if there is something you’d like to read about and discuss that isn’t on here! Or it might be that we will need to slow down. Revisions are possible, even likely.

### 4.1 Consciousness and Sensations

We start with the innermost world: sensations and what is causally downstream of them. We’ll look at what might be called a “classical” theory of these things, and then we’ll start to note difficulties for it, and attempts to overcome them.

- David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, part 1 section 1, “Of the Origin of Our Ideas”
- Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, chapter 1, “Appearance and Reality”, and chapter 2, “The Existence of Matter”
- Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?”
- Daniel Dennett, “Quining Qualia”
- Elizabeth Anscombe, “The Intentionality of Sensation”
- David Lewis, “Mad Pain and Martian Pain”

### 4.2 The Attitudes

The attitudes are peculiar in that, though they are mental items, they are *about* things in the world. They are also a relentless source of philosophical perplexity; we’ll look at just a couple of the ways this has happened. We’ll look in particular at the relation between belief, desire, and the emotions, and how perception-like or not they may be.

- Gottlob Frege, “The Thought” (two classes)
- Robert Stalnaker, *Inquiry*, chapter 1
- Kendall Walton, “Fearing Fictions”
- Tamar Gendler, “Alief and Belief”

---

<sup>1</sup> I am assuming a roughly thirteen-week course with twenty-six meetings, where each bullet point represents a meeting.

- Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought* (selections)
- Dennis Stampe, “The Authority of Desire” (selections)

### 4.3 Meaning

In this section, we’ll ask how what someone says is determined by their own attitudes and psychology, to what extent by the community in which the person is embedded, and to what extent the external environment. Along the way we will ask to what extent the study of meaning might be studied scientifically.

- H.P. Grice, “Meaning”
- David Lewis, *Convention* (selections)
- Irene Heim and Angelika Kratzer, *Semantics in a Generative Grammar* (selections) (two classes)
- Hilary Putnam, “Is Semantics Possible?”
- Ruth Millikan, “Truth Rules, Hoverflies, and the Kripke-Wittgenstein Paradox” (two classes)

### 4.4 Pragmatics

We will end with an exciting area at the border between philosophy and linguistics: pragmatics. It is the way in which attitudes and worldly facts combine to generate meanings beyond the semantic (literal) meaning of what someone says. Without even realizing it, what is in someone’s head can become part of our social reality.

- Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (selections)
- H.P. Grice, “Logic and Conversation”
- Robert Stalnaker, “Pragmatic Presupposition”
- Rae Langton, “Beyond Belief”
- Sally Haslanger, “Ideology, Generics, and the Common Ground”

## 5 Assignments

Class participation is worth a fixed 15%, and attendance is mandatory. Beyond that, there are *three possibilities*. Each will be worth 55% of the rest of the grade.

1. You and another student might decide you are or will be most interested in one particular topic. Then you may both write a 5–7 page paper, followed by a 3–5 page *reply* to your friend’s paper in which you raise the strongest objections you can, followed by a 3–5 page *response* to your friends objections.

2. You may write *four small papers* (3–5 pages) on an issue raised in each section.
3. This option will be limited, depending on the size of the class: you may help to maintain a detailed class *text*, mostly a detailed glossary of terms and ideas. This text will eventually be used to study for the final exam.

The final exam will be worth 30% of the grade and will ask short essay questions about all the material from the class.

## 6 Odds and Ends

Regarding plagiarism and other sorts of academic dishonesty, [insert the university's academic dishonest policy here].

This class will require *respectful* participation; in discussion, you will be expected to respond politely to one another and engage one another's points in an open and intellectually honest way. Any sort of insulting or demeaning language will not be tolerated. You will also be expected to pay attention. For some, that means not using laptops, and for others it doesn't. Because I don't want to single anyone out either way, I will rely on your self-knowledge to know which class you're in, and to not distract anyone else in class with them.

And please do come to me with any questions or concerns you have at any point, either by email or by office hours!