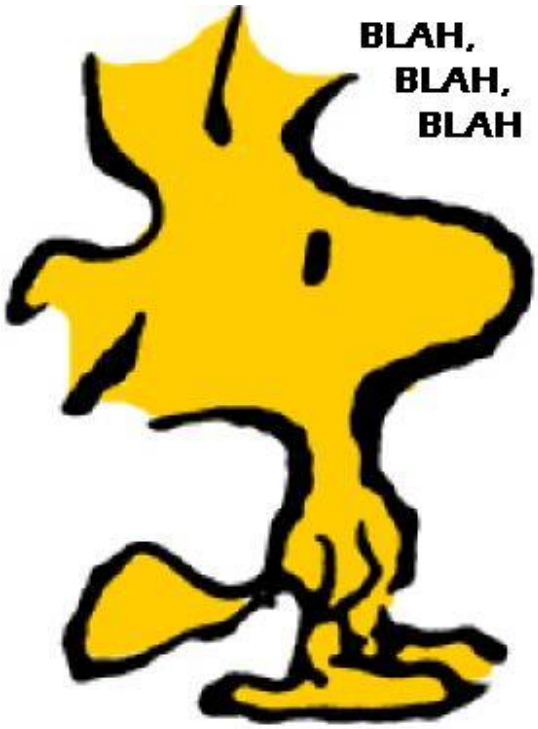
HUM 2044
Philosophy of Language



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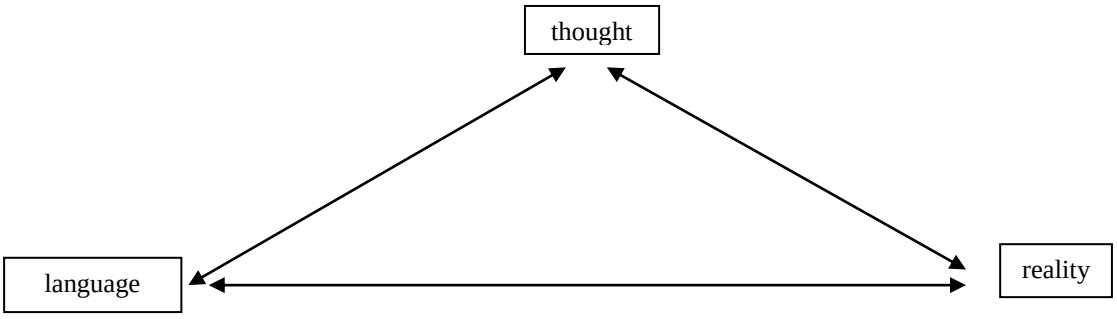
GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Introduction

The philosophy of language is concerned with the role that language plays in thinking, or more specifically, in *knowing*. As such it is closely related to epistemology and truth-theory. But ultimately, the role of language also turns out to be essential when we make the transition from judgements *about the world* to moral judgements, i.e. the judgements that express how we should *act within that world*. As such it is closely related to ethics and aesthetics.

In this course we will show you how the study of language has been at the focus of interest of philosophers throughout the history of western philosophy, and that the way in which they interpret the function of language is intimately connected with their world view in general.

We shall explore the fundamental properties of language[1] that allow it to be a medium of thought and knowledge. Among these properties are *truth*, *meaning* and *reference*. Consider someone saying, "My mother has taken a turn for the worse." The speaker has uttered a linguistic expression, i.e. he has uttered something that can be taken as part of the English language. Now what does that expression *mean*? What is it, exactly, that the speaker *said*? And furthermore, how would you be able to tell that what the speaker told you is true? It is these considerations about the essentials of linguistic expressions that can be tied together in the 'triangle of linguistic meaning':



In this course we shall present a brief history of the philosophy of language, and study a number of more recent contributions by the major thinkers on these topics. Issues we will consider include the following: Can the fundamental properties of language be understood in terms of relations between words and the (physical) world? Or must we instead posit the existence of abstract, non-physical entities such as 'senses' and 'propositions'? What is involved in grasping or understanding a language? To what degree does it involve knowledge about the world?

[1] Please note that the philosophy of language under scrutiny presupposes a specific structure of language, which is common to Indo-European languages (esp. Latin, English, French and German).

These questions have been what analytic philosophy has focussed on, and what eventually led to what has become known as the 'linguistic turn'.[2]

Developing the skills of thinking philosophically about language will have an impact beyond the immediately related philosophical topics. It will make you a more powerful thinker, and enable you to be more critical of what others are ready to present to you as definitive answers about the nature of reality.

2. Course Objectives

The primary goal of this course is to introduce you to the basic topics in the philosophy of language. The specific objectives are:

1. to show you the relevance of the study of language in philosophy in particular, and in any kind of critical analysis in social and academic contexts in general;
2. to make you understand the basic aspects of language that allow it to be (understood as) a medium for the transmission of information and the encoding of knowledge, particularly the properties of truth, reference and meanings of linguistic expressions;
3. to familiarise you with historical theories connected with the philosophy of language, including the way these theories evolved during the twentieth century;
4. to show you how the examination of intuitions about the meaning of linguistic expressions could lead to a deeper understanding of the nature of philosophical problems in general.

3. Contents of the course

The present course aims to give you an idea of why and how philosophers became interested in language as the way to uncover truth. An outline of the history of this particular interest is necessary, not only to help you understand the background of this area in philosophy, but also because many of the issues (a significant part of which are quite technical and therefore not suitable for a more general philosophy course at UCM) are very similar to the ones that were discussed in the past, and can sometimes directly be traced back to them.

The first part of the course, entitled "The nature of language" starts with an assignment about the mystery of language in general. What is it about language that enables us to communicate with one another? We shall introduce you to questions like these by asking you to reflect upon an excerpt from a famous children's book, *Alice in Wonderland*, by Lewis Caroll. This story will help you get a feel for the kinds of problems any person who attempts to define the "essence" of language can run into. You are invited to gather your thoughts about what it is that makes language an instrument of communication. The second and third assignments of this part of the course will delve more deeply into the relationship between language, truth and knowledge. The focus is upon ways in which philosophers from the outset began to formulate the necessary conditions for the use of language as an instrument to uncover truth.

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[2] For a detailed account of the phases in analytic philosophy and the linguistic turn, see P.M.S. Hacker (2007), 'Analytic Philosophy: Beyond the linguistic turn and back again', in M. Beaney ed., *The Analytic Turn: Analysis in Early Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology*. London: Routledge (2007). Available at: http://info.sjc.ox.ac.uk/scr/hacker/docs/Beyond%20the%20linguistic%20turn%20.pdf

In the second part of the course, "Meaning and Reference", we will take a closer look at different philosophers' attempts to bring language in line with scientific method. In this part we shall pay attention to the topic of linguistic meaning; it features two classic authors in the philosophy of language, Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell, who, each in their own way, dealt with puzzling linguistic expressions, and provided solutions for a correct interpretation in order to determine their truth value. The views of Frege and Russell had quite an impact on the philosophers united in the movement of Logical Positivism.

In the final part of the course, "Re-defining meaningfulness", we turn to another famous hero of the logical positivists, Ludwig Wittgenstein. What the former saw in Wittgenstein's early work was an important move in the philosophic quest for a language free of metaphysical assumptions. We shall consider the consequences of and objections against this narrow outlook upon linguistic meaningfulness. Our course ends with alternative directions in the philosophy of language, and devotes attention to a particularly interesting linguistic phenomenon, viz. that of metaphor.

4. Course material

The following books specifically devoted to the philosophy of language are available in the Reading Room:

William G. Lycan (2008; orig. 2000). *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*. 2nd rev. ed. London/New York: Routledge.

A.P. Martinich and David Sosa (eds.) (2013). *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th ed. Oxford: OUP.

Rob Hale and Crispin Wright (eds.) (2005). *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*. Malden/Oxford: Blackwell.

A wonderful book for you to use regularly to help you understand the issues raised in this course is also available in the Reading Room:

Norman Melchert (2014). *The Great Conversation.* Volume II: Descartes through Derrida and Quine. New York: McGraw-Hill.

There are two copies of each book in the reading room (RR). **Please make sure you always return the material to their proper spot in the reading room!!!** The remainder of the course material is available online or will be handed out to you during the course. (See the assignments for references). For a complete bibliography, please consult the appendix (bibliography) at the end of the course manual.

Some of the literature presupposes you are familiar with the symbols of propositional logic. To help you with that you might wish to consult an article included in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at:
http://www.iep.utm.edu/prop-log/
You also might need some help with the symbols of predicate logic, for which you can consult a list compiled by Peter Suber (1997), available at:
http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/courses/log/terms3.htm

Background material is readily available online in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.* The online database of the *Project Gutenberg* contains a wealth of older source material.

Literature:

Required readings are listed at the end of the assignments, under "Literature". Occasionally you will find a suggestion for further reading. The complete bibliographical information, including references to online sources, is listed at the end of the course book (see Bibliography).

Reading guide:
The literature at the end of each assignment is arranged in reading order; so it is best to start with the first title, and finish with the last one. In some cases suggestions for further reading have been added to accommodate students who wish to delve more deeply into a subject.

5. Lectures

The course will offer four lectures:
Lecture I: Introduction to the Philosophy of Language.
Lecture II: Language and Science: A Brief History.
Lecture III: The project of Logical Positivism.
Lecture IV: Ludwig Wittgenstein

6. Examination

You will receive one essay-style assignment half way during the course, aimed at assessing your ability to explain and apply the concepts and theories introduced during the various stages thus far. At the end of the course you will write another essay, addressing the relevance and applicability of the material from the course to a social/moral, and/or scientific issue. Each paper is worth 50% of the final grade for the course.

Please note: Students who have not met the attendance requirement but have missed no more than 30% of the group meetings, will be given a provisional overall grade; they will not receive credits for the course until they have successfully completed an additional assignment.

7. Resit

For the resit you are required to rewrite one of your two papers. You are entitled to a resit if the average of the two papers is lower than 5.5.

8. Coordination

Dr J. Spruyt
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Dept. of Philosophy
joke.spruyt@maastrichtuniversity.nl

9. Schedule* (*Please note that the course schedule outlined below is subject to change. Make sure to check the Student Portal regularly.)

Week 1 **(05-09 Febr.)**
Lecture:
Introduction to the Philosophy of Language. (Dr J. Spruyt)

Assignments:

1. What do you mean?
2. Aristotle: Language, truth and reality.

12-16 Febr. CARNIVAL

Week 2 **(19-23 Febr.)**

Lecture:

Language and Science: A Brief History. (Dr J. Spruyt)

Assignments:

3. Linguistic ambiguity: the medievals' solution.
4. The quest for an ideal language.

Week 3 **(26 Febr. - 02 March)**

Lecture:

The Project of Logical Positivism. (Dr J. Spruyt)

Assignments:

5. Language and scientific knowledge: getting rid of ambiguity.
6. Definite descriptions.

Week 4 **(05-09 March)**

Assignments:

7. Cognitive meaningfulness: "The world is everything that is the case."
8. The problem of ethics.

Midterm Paper:

Language as the vehicle of truth.

Week 5 **(12-16 March)**

Lecture:

Ludwig Wittgenstein. (Dr René Gabriëls)*

* provisional

Hand in Midterm Paper

Assignment:

9. Much ado about nothing.

Week 6 **(19-23 March)**

Assignments:

10. Language and use revisited.
11. Language, thought and metaphor.

Week 7 **(26-29 March)**

Paper:

Relevance of the philosophy of language.

ASSIGNMENTS

Part I

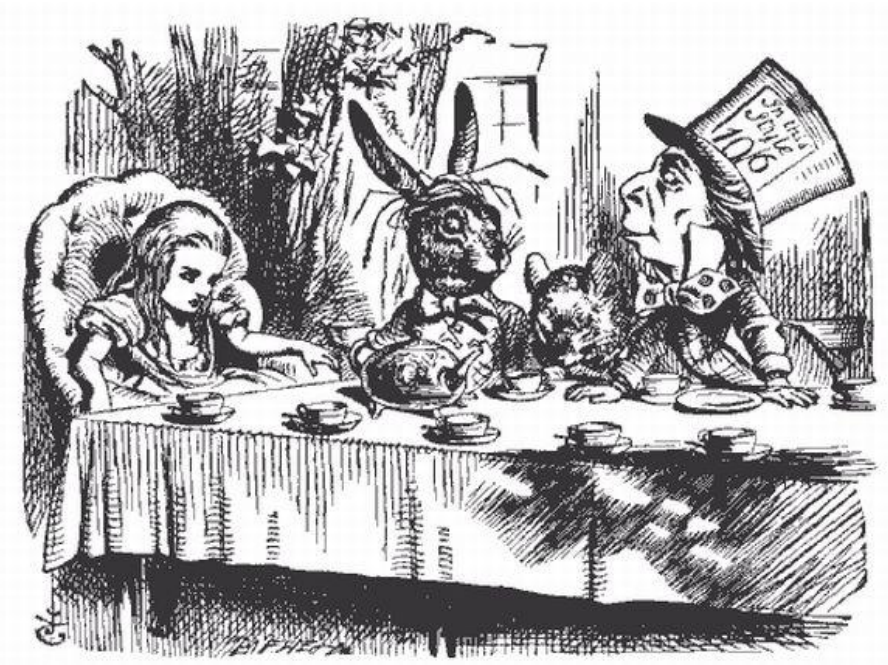
The nature of language

ASSIGNMENT 1: WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* is one of the best examples of a work of literature that derives its inner structure from utter chaos — or does it? The many conversations and plot-turns seem to hinge on a constant questioning of the way we communicate and try to make ourselves be understood; they also make us wonder about the nature of language and the things we take for granted when we use it.

Take for instance the episode quoted below. Alice approaches a large table set under the tree outside the March Hare's house and comes across the Mad Hatter and the March Hare, who are having tea. They rest their elbows on a sleeping Dormouse who sits between them. They tell Alice that there is no room for her at the table, but Alice sits anyway. The March Hare offers Alice wine, but there is none. Alice tells the March Hare that his conduct is uncivil, to which he retorts that it was uncivil of her to sit down without being invited. Then the Mad Hatter enters the conversation, opining that Alice's hair "wants cutting."

"You should learn not to make personal remarks", Alice said with some severity: "It's very rude."
The Hatter opened his eyes very wide on hearing this; but all he *said* was, "Why is a raven like a writing-desk?"
"Come, we shall have some fun now!" thought Alice. "I'm glad they've begun asking riddles—I believe I can guess that," she added, aloud.
"Do you mean that you think you can find out the answer to it?" said the March Hare.
"Exactly so," said Alice.
"Then you should say what you mean," the March Hare went on.
"I do," Alice hastily replied; "at least—at least I mean what I say—that's the same thing, you know."
"Not the same thing a bit!" said the Hatter. "Why, you might just as well say that 'I see what I eat' is the same thing as 'I eat what I see'!"
"You might just as well say," added the March Hare, "that 'I like what I get' is the same thing as 'I get what I like'!"
"You might just as well say," added the Dormouse, which seemed to be talking in its sleep, "that 'I breathe when I sleep' is the same thing as 'I sleep when I breathe'!"
"It *is* the same thing with you," said the Hatter, and here the conversation dropped, and the party sat silent for a minute, while Alice thought over all she could remember about ravens and writing-desks, which wasn't much.
The Hatter was the first to break the silence. "What day of the month is it?" he said, turning to Alice: he had taken his watch out of his pocket, and was looking at it uneasily, shaking it every now and then, and holding it to his ear.
Alice considered a little, and then said, "The fourth."
"Two days wrong!" sighed the Hatter. "I told you butter wouldn't suit the works!" he added, looking angrily at the March Hare.
"It was the *best* butter," the March Hare meekly replied.
"Yes, but some crumbs must have got in as well," the Hatter grumbled: "you shouldn't have put it in with the bread-knife."
The March Hare took the watch and looked at it gloomily: then he dipped it into his cup of tea, and looked at it again: but he could think of nothing better to say than his first remark, "It was the *best* butter, you know."
Alice had been looking over his shoulder with some curiosity. "What a funny watch!" she remarked. "It tells the day of the month, and doesn't tell what o'clock it is!"
"Why should it?" muttered the Hatter. "Does *your* watch tell you what year it is?"
"Of course not," Alice replied very readily: "but that's because it stays the same year for such a long time together."
"Which is just the case with *mine*," said the Hatter.
Alice felt dreadfully puzzled. The Hatter's remark seemed to her to have no sort of meaning in it, and yet it was certainly



English. “I don’t quite understand you,” she said, as politely as she could.
“The Dormouse is asleep again,” said the Hatter, and he poured a little hot tea upon its nose.
The Dormouse shook its head impatiently, and said, without opening its eyes, “Of course, of course: just what I was going to remark myself.”
“Have you guessed the riddle yet?” the Hatter said, turning to Alice again.
“No, I give it up,” Alice replied. “What’s the answer?”
“I haven’t the slightest idea,” said the Hatter.
“Nor I,” said the March Hare.
Alice sighed wearily. “I think you might do something better with the time,” she said, “than wasting it in asking riddles that have no answers.”
“If you knew Time as well as I do,” said the Hatter, “you wouldn’t talk about wasting *it*. It’s *him*.”
“I don’t know what you mean,” said Alice.
“Of course you don’t!” the Hatter said, tossing his head contemptuously. “I dare say you never even spoke to Time!”
“Perhaps not,” Alice cautiously replied; “but I know I have to beat time when I learn music.”
“Ah! That accounts for it,” said the Hatter. “He won’t stand beating. Now, if you only kept on good terms with him, he’d do almost anything you liked with the clock. For instance, suppose it were nine o’clock in the morning, just time to begin lessons: you’d only have to whisper a hint to Time, and round goes the clock in a twinkling! Half-past one, time for dinner!”
(“I only wish it was,” the March Hare said to itself in a whisper.)

Literature:

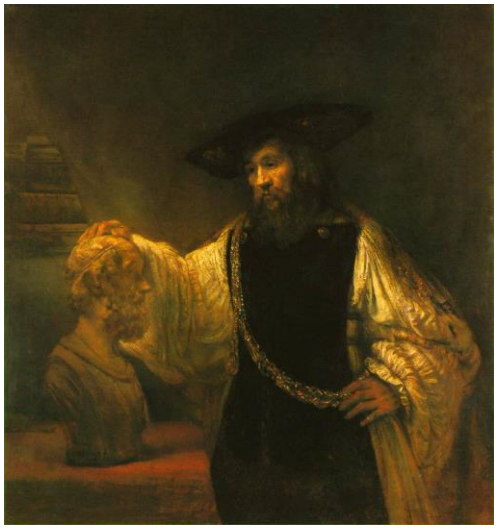
(1) Thomas Nagel (1987). *What does it all mean?* A very short introduction to philosophy. Oxford: OUP. Chapter 5.*
(2) Martinich & Sosa (eds.) (2013), Part VIII — Language, the introductory text (starts with: “The issue of what the nature of language is (...)”), preceding chapter 43. [Martinich (ed.) (2001), pp. 501-508 (= Part VIII — The Nature of Language, the introductory text, (starts with: “The issue of what the nature of language is (...)”), preceding chapter 36).]

ASSIGNMENT 2: ARISTOTLE: LANGUAGE, TRUTH AND REALITY

Philosophers have always known that there is something rather complicated about the relation between our thoughts, objects and situations in the world, and the language we use to communicate (about) them. Aristotle (384-322 BC), for example, set out to reconcile a seemingly straightforward and powerful conception of truth, with the fact that neither ideas in themselves nor objects can necessarily be expressed in terms of truth or falsehood:

De int. 1, 16a3-8: "Spoken utterances are tokens of 'affections in the soul' [i.e. thoughts], and written marks are tokens of spoken utterance. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken utterances. But what these [viz. utterances] are in the first place significative of — affections of the soul — are the same for all people; and what these affections are 'likenesses' of — things — are the same for all people."

De int. 1, 16a9-16: "Just as in the soul there sometimes is a thought without being right or mistaken, while at other times there is one to which it necessarily applies that one or the other is the case, so too with spoken utterances; for falsehood and truth are to do with combination and separation. Thus names, and attributes as well, when taken by themselves, represent a combination or separation, for instance 'man' or 'pale' when nothing further has been added. But so far, such a thought is not yet false or true, although it is significative of something definite — even the notion 'goat-stag' signifies something, albeit not, as yet, anything true or false — unless 'to be' or 'not to be' is added, either simply, or with reference to time."



Metaphysics 1011b25: "To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true."

Literature:
(1) William G. Lycan (2000). Chapter 1.
(2) Aristotle, excerpts from *De interpretatione*, parts 1, 2, 3 and 4.*
Also available online.
(3) Matthew McGrath, 'Propositions', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
(see esp. parts 1 and 3.1)
(4) Marian David, 'The Correspondence Theory of Truth', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Suggestion for further reading:
Gabriël Nuchelmans (1973). *Theories of the Proposition.* Ancient and medieval conceptions of the bearers of truth and falsity. Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company. Chapter 3.*

ASSIGNMENT 3: LINGUISTIC AMBIGUITY — THE MEDIEVALS' SOLUTION

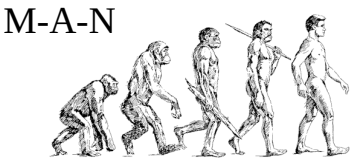
Aristotle formulated a potential research agenda that allowed for a juxtaposition of empirical investigation and logical analysis. In the Middle Ages, huge progress was made in clarifying the logical structure of language so that it could become a reliable instrument for studying the world. The highly *semantic* theory of properties of terms (*proprietates terminorum*) formed the basis of linguistic theory. It inquired into those properties of linguistic expressions that are necessary to explain truth, fallacy and inference, the three central concepts of logical analysis. The theory evolved out of the work of Anselm and Abelard at the turn of the twelfth century, developed steadily through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and was still undergoing changes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is generally agreed that its early stages were closely bound up with the theory of fallacies, but as a general semantic theory, it developed in response to a variety of needs.

One of the main properties assigned to terms is that of *suppositio*. Throughout the period described above, philosophers disagreed as to what kinds of *suppositio* a term could have, depending on their philosophical (metaphysical/ontological) outlook. As such the theory of supposition can be connected to the debate on universals in the Middle Ages.

In general, the *suppositio* of a term can roughly be understood as that for which some term stands when it is used in a proposition.

Consider the following examples:

1. The man is white.
2. Man is a species.
3. Man is a three-letter word.



The term 'man' features in all three examples, but in each proposition it has its own *suppositio*.

One of the uses of distinctions between different kinds of *suppositio* was that they could help solve problematic sentences. These so-called *sophismata* became a particularly important area of study in the thirteenth century.

Literature:

(1) Sten Ebbesen, 'Early supposition theory (12th-13th Century),' *Histoire, Épistémologie, Langage* 3/1: 35-48 (1981). Available online.
(2) L.M. de Rijk (1982). 'The Origins of the Properties of Terms', in Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.*
(3) E.P. Bos (1997). 'Speaking About Signs: Fourteenth-Century Views on *Suppositio Materialis*'. *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik,* no. 48, pp. 71-86. Available online, open access:
https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/10182/9_62_40.pdf?sequence=1
(4) Fabienne Pironet and Joke Spruyt, 'Sophismata' in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*

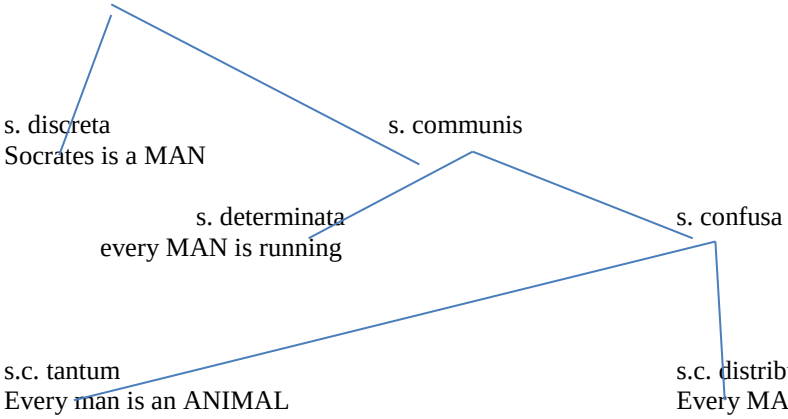
Suggestions for further reading:
Stephen Read, 'Medieval Theories: Properties of Terms', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (concentrate on *suppositio* and *significatio*)
Joke Spruyt, 'Peter of Spain', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Schema of *suppositio*

suppositio simplex
MAN is an animal

suppositio materialis
MAN is a noun

suppositio personalis



Part II

Meaning and reference

ASSIGNMENT 4: THE QUEST FOR AN IDEAL LANGUAGE

In Part I of this course, we briefly explored the possibilities and limitations of language, in light of a *purpose* it apparently needs to fulfil, viz. to allow for a simple expression and exchange of ideas or knowledge, and in a *truthful* manner at that. The idea that language should do both at once is not as straightforward as it may seem, and has occupied the minds of philosophers from the early days on.

Incidentally, in one of Plato's later dialogues, the *Sophistes*, Plato includes a passage in which he explains how linguistic expressions can be combined to form a statement. A statement is an expression that is informative. It tells us something about the world. One of the things Plato makes clear is that an expression does not form a statement unless it is a combination of a nominal and a verbal expression. For example, if I utter "the sun", it is not a statement yet, but it needs to be combined with a verbal expression, such as "is shining". The resulting expression would be "The sun is shining".

Plato was actually one of the first philosophers who systematically attempted to define the criteria for linguistic expressions that could qualify as meaningful in an epistemological way. In other words, what criteria should a linguistic expression meet, in order for it to be able to contribute to our knowledge?

The demarcation of cognitively meaningful expressions has remained an issue throughout western philosophy. One pertinent problem is to decide on the things we can even speak about in a meaningful way. It was William of Ockham (1285-1347) in the Middle Ages (often affectionately referred to as the medieval David Hume) who tried to limit meaningful language to talk about individual entities only. His assumption is that there are no such things as essences or universal natures: the world consists of individuals only. Hence his strict views about what we mean by terms of first and second intention.

Later on, David Hume (1711-1776), whom we have already found to be highly sceptical about certain knowledge, established an empiricist criterion for cognitively meaningful language.

Literature:
(1)William G. Lycan (2000), Chapter 5.
(2) Paul Vincent Spade, 'William of Ockham', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
(3)William of Ockham, *Summa Logicae*. Cc. 4 and 5. Available on EleUM.
(4) David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Sections 2 and 3.
Available online.

Suggestion for further reading:
Carl Hempel, 'Empiricist Criteria of Cognitive Significance: Problems and Changes' [in A.P. Martinich (ed.) (2001), pp. 34-47], in Martinich (ed.) (2012), ch. 45, paragraphs 1 and 2.
Also available online.

ASSIGNMENT 5: LANGUAGE AND SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE: GETTING RID OF AMBIGUITY

As we have seen, a very important question in the philosophy of language is about *meaning*. But again, what is the meaning of 'meaning'?

In line with what we have discussed in the previous assignment, there is one quite appealing, common-sense account of the meaning of linguistic expressions. It claims that linguistic expressions have precisely the meanings they have because they stand for things. So the meaning of a linguistic expression would be the same as what it stands for.

In this view, linguistic expressions can be compared with labels. Each expression is like a name tag, which attaches to something in the outside world.

As we said this idea has its advantages: it provides a clear link between language on the one hand, and the things that are brought up in language on the other. But on closer scrutiny it runs into serious difficulties.

The famous mathematician, Gottlob Frege (1848-1925), disagreed with the claim that the meaning of linguistic expressions is confined to its reference. One of his arguments is the following. If the meaning of a proper name were exactly the same as the object it refers to, and if 'a' and 'b' are names for exactly the same objects, then the identity statements 'a = a' and 'a = b' would have to *mean* exactly the same. Contrary to John Stuart Mill for example, Frege thinks that the two identity statements are distinct. To account for the difference between the two he makes a distinction between the 'sense' and 'nominatum' (*'Sinn' und 'Bedeutung'*) of an expression. This distinction applies not only to proper names, but to complex linguistic

expressions as well. The sense of a (specific kind of) sentence, he calls a 'thought'. In his famous essay 'Über Sinn und Bedeutung' (tr.: 'On Sense and Nominatum'), Frege introduces many examples of puzzling linguistic expressions to explain why such a distinction is necessary.

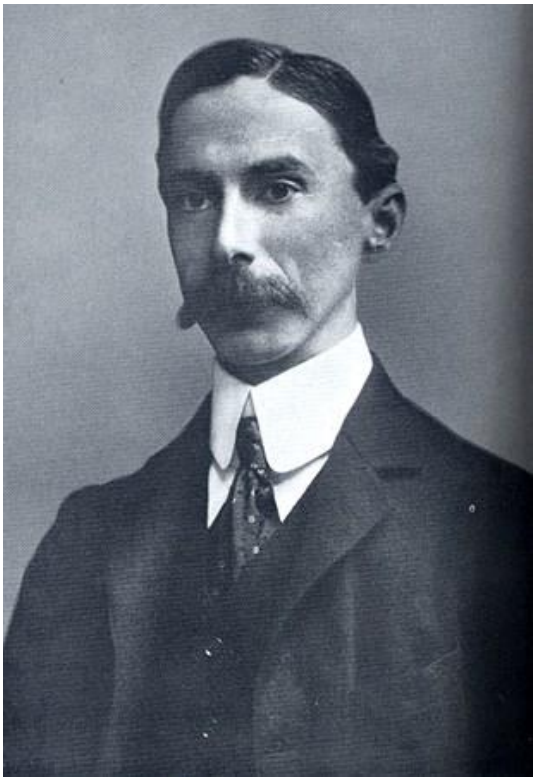
Literature:

(1) William G. Lycan (2000), pp. 12-21.
(2) Kevin C. Klement, 'Gottlob Frege', in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
(3) Gottlob Frege, 'The Thought: A Logical Inquiry'. Author(s): Gottlob Frege. Source: *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 65, No. 259 (Jul., 1956), pp. 289-311. Available online.
(4) Gottlob Frege, 'On sense and Reference', in Martinich (ed.) 2012, ch. 2 [Gottlob Frege, 'On sense and Nominatum', in Martinich (ed.) (2001), ch. 13]. Also available online.
(5) A.P. Martinich (ed.) (2001), pp. 191-198. (= Part III — Reference and Descriptions, the introductory text (starts with: "There is a long philosophical tradition (...)"), preceding chapter 13); (in Martinich 2012, Part II — Descriptions, the introductory text, preceding chapter 8).

Suggestion for further reading:

David Wiggins, 'Meaning and truth conditions: from Frege's grand design to Davidson's', in Bob Hale and Crispin Wright (eds.) (2005). *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*. Malden/Oxford/Carlton: Blackwell; pp, 3-28 (relevant reading: pp. 3-9) (RR).

ASSIGNMENT 6: DEFINITE DESCRIPTIONS



Frege had realised that the 'meaning' of linguistic expressions is not identical to its reference. We can talk about things that do not exist for example. Moreover, expressions in oblique contexts cannot always be substituted by their synonyms *salva veritate*. Finally, he claimed that not every linguistic expression that looks like an assertion is really an assertion.

Bertrand Russell was intrigued by Frege's puzzling sentences but disagreed with the latter's suggestion that some singular expressions do not have a referent.

Compare the two sentences:

1. The president of Japan has recently visited Europe to discuss the economic crisis.
2. The king of France is not bald.

To deal with expressions like these, and to tackle other linguistic puzzles, Russell introduced his theory of *definite descriptions*. By carefully analysing the problematical sentences Frege had dealt with, he came to the conclusion that in many cases they could be assigned a truth value, something Frege had denied.

Russell's theory of *definite descriptions* can be seen as the formalised counterpart of his theory of truth. This theory of definite descriptions, which Bertrand Russell presented in 'On Denoting' one hundred years ago, was instrumental in defining the then newly emerging philosophy of language, and is still the *currently* dominant theory of definite descriptions.

Literature:

(1) Bertrand Russell, 'On denoting', in A.P. Martinich (ed.) (2001), pp. 212-220.
(2) Bertrand Russell, *The Analysis of Mind*, lectures X and XI.
Available online.
(3) William G. Lycan (2000), pp. 1-8; chapter 2.

ASSIGNMENT 7: COGNITIVE MEANINGFULNESS:
"THE WORLD IS EVERYTHING THAT IS THE CASE"

Russell and (the early) Wittgenstein share the view that the world consists of very small atomic units, that each exist independently of one another. Together these discrete entities form a complex. This complex entity is called fact; it owes its existence to the more simple components it is made up of.

In accordance with his empiricist outlook, Russell claims that the constituents of the most simple, atomic facts, or states of affairs, are the particulars and universals (i.e. either qualities or relations) we are directly acquainted with in experience. These atomic facts are either combinations of one particular with a quality, as is expressed in a sentence like 'This is red', or combinations of more than one particulars with a relation, such as expressed in 'This is larger than that'.

Wittgenstein's account of the precise connection between linguistic expressions and states of affairs is less explicit than Russell's. All the same, when he wrote the *Tractatus*, he agreed with Russell that language, thought and reality share a common structure, which can be fully expressed in logical terms. The conception of language he describes in the *Tractatus* is also known as the 'picture theory'.

Hence he assumes that there are limits to what we can say and think.

Literature:

(1) Quite a few commentaries on Wittgenstein and his early work are available at the university library. A very readable introduction to Wittgenstein and his environment is Allan Janik and Stephen Toulmin (1973), *Wittgenstein's Vienna*. New York: Simon and Schuster (also available at the university library).
(2) Other useful sources to consult before embarking on Wittgenstein's own writings are the entry on Ludwig Wittgenstein in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (for this assignment, see the section on the *Tractatus*) and *the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (for this assignment, see the section on the *Tractatus*).
(3) Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.
Available online.

Part III

Re-defining meaningfulness

ASSIGNMENT 8: THE PROBLEM OF ETHICS

One of the difficulties with the rigid kind of referential analysis of language Russell and the early Wittgenstein were committed to is how we should explain the meaningfulness of linguistic expressions that seem to defy such an account. Early in his career Wittgenstein says that ethics is like aesthetics and religion, and cannot be spoken about (*Tractatus*, 6.421). It belongs to that realm where, as he says, things cannot be *said* but only *shown* (*Tractatus*, 4.1212). His *Lecture on Ethics* reasserted this basic view of inexpressibility, again connecting ethics with religion: "Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural and our words will only express facts".

Yet his personal writings and correspondence with friends make it clear that he was highly concerned with being ethical himself. Indeed, as his friend Paul Engelmann put it, Wittgenstein believed that it was precisely those things about which one could not speak (within the strictly limited propositional discourse of the *Tractatus*) that were the most important things in life, including ethics.

But then what is it that constitutes the meaningfulness of such language?

Team Ethics
At one point during a game, the coach said to one of his young players,
"Do you understand what co-operation is? What a team is?"
The little boy nodded in the affirmative.
"Do you understand that what matters is whether we win together as a team?"
The little boy nodded yes.
"So," the coach continued, "when a strike is called, or you're out at first, you don't argue or curse or attack the umpire. Do you understand all that?"
Again the little boy nodded.
"Good," said the coach. "Now go over there and explain it to your mother."

Literature:
(1) Once again you can find a great deal of literature on Wittgenstein's later work. You can also consult Norman Melchert (2002). *The Great Conversation.* Volume II: Descartes through Derrida and Quine. McGraw-Hill (see the chapters on Wittgenstein).
Other useful sources to consult are the entry on Ludwig Wittgenstein in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (for this assignment, see the section on the *Philosophical Invesgtigations*) and the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (for this assignment, see the section on the *Philosophical Investigations*).
(2) Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Lecture on Ethics.*
Available online.
(3) Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical investigations* I.1-86.
Available online.

ASSIGNMENT 9: MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Any theory of meaning that tends to emphasise the role of reality is bound to run into difficulties when it comes to explaining discourse about fictitious entities, like chimeras.

David Hume argued that all language not empirically grounded should be "committed to the flames for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion". Hence language that brings up concepts that have no provable basis in reality is irrelevant.

Later on, in the early twentieth century, neo-positivists claimed that unless a statement can at least in principle be empirically verified by scientific testing, it is meaningless. Karl Popper realised that it is not so much the verification, but the possibility of falsification that makes a statement meaningful.

These rigid criteria for 'cognitive' meaningfulness, based upon the original starting point for the moderns' interest in language as a tool to identify reality, have led people to believe that ethical, aesthetic and religious language cannot be meaningful. Moreover, it has led to a profound suspicion of (the existence of) mental phenomena.

Many people are dissatisfied with the rigidity of the scientific worldview and its reductionist programme, and have pointed out its flaws. On the other hand, the mission of logical positivism has given rise to alternative ways to describe the meaningfulness of language, viz. in terms of 'use'. We should make a distinction between expressions that describe something on the one hand, and expressions that may seem as if they do, but instead are other forms of communicative action.

Literature:
(1) William G. Lycan (2000), chapter 6.
(2) J. L. Austin (1975). *How To Do Things with Words*. Edited by J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.*
(3) David Schalkwyk, 'Fiction as "Grammatical" Investigation: A Wittgensteinian Account', in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 53, no. 3 (Summer 1995), pp. 287-298.
[(4) Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* I.1-86.]

Suggestions for further reading:
Sten Ebbesen (ed.) (1986), 'The chimaera's diary', in S. Knuuttila and J. Hintikka (eds.), *The Logic of Being*, Dordrecht (Reidl), pp. 115-143.* (discusses a notorious non-entity)
Mary Midgley, 'One World but a Big One', in Steven Rose (ed.), *From Brains to Consciousness*: Essays on the New Sciences of the Mind, London (1999); pp. 246-270. (RR) (discusses the usefulness of different types of linguistic expressions to talk about the world)

ASSIGNMENT 10: LANGUAGE AND USE REVISITED

As we have seen, philosophers of language have tended to focus on what could be called the 'literal' meaning of expressions, presupposing, of course, that there is such a thing. However, linguistic competence comprises much more than the ability to identify literal meaning.

Recently, more attention has been given to pragmatics. E.g., some philosophers have focussed more on the conventional sides of language, by trying to uncover the basic conditions for language as a vehicle of communication. In a previous assignment we saw concentrated on Austin's suggestion that in speaking, we perform actions of some kind. In this assignment we will look at Paul Grice's analysis of linguistic meaning, which centres round the notion of 'speaker's intention'.

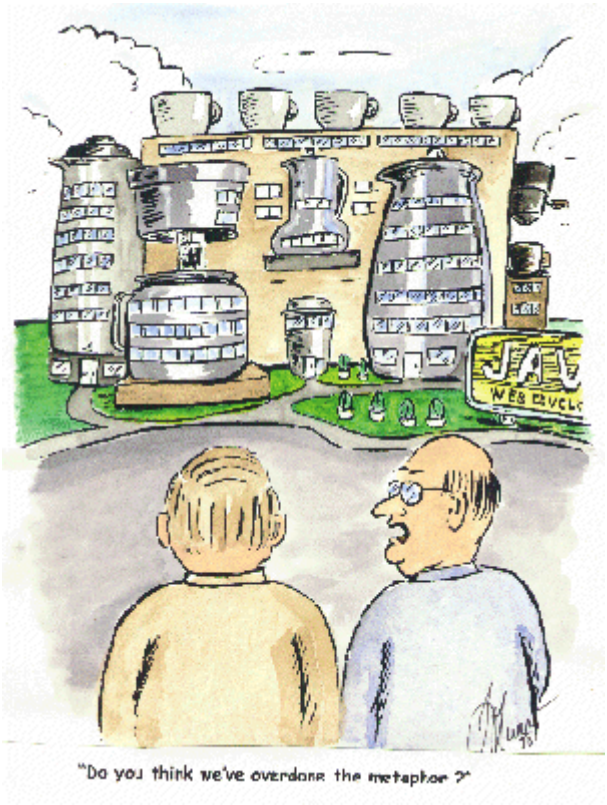
Turning once again to *Alice in Wonderland*, how could a pragmatic approach to language help us make sense of literary fiction?

Literature:

(1) Richard E. Grandy and Richard Warner (2006), 'Paul Grice', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
(2) J.P. Grice, 'Logic and Conversation', in Martinich (ed.) 2001, ch.11. Also available online.
(3) Hale & Wright (eds.) 2005, ch. 3 (par. 1-9).
(4) Laura Hidalgo Downing (2000), 'Alice in pragmaticland: Reference, deixis and the delimitation of text worlds in Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books'.
Available online.

ASSIGNMENT 11: LANGUAGE, THOUGHT AND METAPHOR

Another domain that has caught the attention of philosophers of language is the use of metaphors. There are different ways of looking at metaphors; theories about this phenomenon can be divided into three main strands (i) The most simple view is that metaphors are a specific form of simile. (ii) Another way of explaining a metaphor is that they are a kind of analogy. (iii) Finally, a metaphor can be interpreted in terms of the use of language. This view comes down to a pragmatic view of metaphor.



Literature:

Max Black, 'More About Metaphor', in Andrew Ortony (ed.) (1998), pp. 19-41.*
William G. Lycan (2000), chapter 13-14.
John R. Searle, 'Metaphor', in Andrew Ortony (ed.) (1998), pp. 83-111.*

APPENDIX

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