

## PHIL 354: Philosophy of Language

Instructor: Dr. Audrey Yap ([ayap@uvic.ca](mailto:ayap@uvic.ca))

Office: CLE B307

Office Hours: Th 9:30am–11:20am on Zoom (sign up required)

Class Information: TWF 11:30–12:20, in CLE C112

Course Website: Through Brightspace. <http://bright.uvic.ca>

If you notice any general accessibility issues with respect to this class, please let me know and I will do my best to solve them, but I also encourage you to register with the Centre for Accessible Learning if you think you would benefit from their services:

<https://www.uvic.ca/services/cal/>.

**Course Description:** The philosophy of language is a wide ranging area covering many issues, including meaning, truth, presupposition, context, and reference, but also has a range of applications to how we actually communicate with each other and operate in the world. This class will introduce some commonly used frameworks and ideas in the philosophy of language, such as speech act theory, presupposition, and common ground. We will then see how philosophers have applied those ideas to the ways that language functions in the world.

As a result, while the topics for the first six weeks are set, the topics for the last six weeks will be decided by a(n anonymous) poll on Brightspace that will be open for the first two weeks of term. You will be given a list of possible topics to choose from, and will be allowed to choose up to six to cover during the term. The six topics that the class most wants to cover will be set for the last six weeks. You can find the list of possible topics and readings at the end of the course outline after the course schedule.

**Objectives:** This class will be a non-exhaustive survey of topics in the philosophy of language. My goal as your instructor is to help you achieve the following learning objectives during this semester together:

- Familiarity with a variety of philosophical positions in the philosophy of language and several applications.
- The ability to understand and clearly explain philosophical ideas and arguments.
- The ability to apply and evaluate the application of philosophical frameworks to the world.

**Communication:** Email is my preferred method of communication, especially for any official requests. If you ask me a question over email, you can expect a reply within about 1 working day. If you don't hear back from me after that time frame, feel free to try again in case your message went astray. If you are ever nervous about sending me an email, or asking a question, feel free to include a picture of a puppy with your request. This will not affect whether or not I will be able to help you with your request, but will give you an excuse to look for pictures of puppies. Finally, my pronouns are she/her/hers, and you can call

me Professor (Prof.) Yap, Dr. Yap, or Audrey. Please don't use any of Mrs/Miss/Ms/Mr, for a variety of reasons. If you think I am unlikely to know the name you would prefer to be called, or the pronouns I ought to use for you through the entry that I will see for you through Brightspace, please don't hesitate to make me aware.

**Office Hours:** I will be available for one-on-one or small group office hours on hurs-day mornings. My default platform for office hours will be Zoom, but if that does not work for you, please feel free to email me in advance to suggest an alternative. You will need to schedule an appointment beforehand using the following link: <https://calendly.com/ayap/office>. Appointments can be scheduled in 15 minute blocks but if you need more time, you are welcome to book something separately by emailing me.

**Course Logistics:** Philosophy isn't just something you learn by listening to a professor talk about it, or by reading a book, it's also something you need to *do*. As a result, your classes are going to be structured with a mixture of activities in mind. You can expect some classes to have more lecture-style content, while others will involve group activities, depending on what I think will help you best engage with the material. Room logistics allowing, I'll always record the lecture portions of class, but I won't record the in-class activities, so you won't have to feel like your questions and discussions are being recorded for posterity.

**Evaluation:** There will be two midterm assignments, each worth 25% of your grade, and a final assignment worth 40%. The remaining 10% will be based on regular engagement with the class material. This will typically take the form of in-class/synchronous activities, but there will always be a way to demonstrate your engagement even if you don't make it to class.

- Engagement: 10%

Each week you'll have the opportunity to earn an engagement point. Earning 10 of these points will get you full marks for engagement. There will always be an in-class/synchronous opportunity as well as an online/asynchronous opportunity, and you will only be given marks for one of these each week. The in-class/synchronous engagement points will be given for participation in specific in-class activities, such as small group discussion. Online/asynchronous engagement points will be given for participation in discussion boards about the course topics.

- Midterm Assignments: 25% (each)

Your midterm assignments will be primarily intended to help you practice and demonstrate your ability to understand and explain the philosophical arguments with which we will have been engaging. Several different assignment prompts will be given, and they will be released a minimum of 2 weeks before the due date for the assignment. Some of them will take the form of short explanatory essays (approx 1000-1250 words), while others will offer more creative options (such as video explainers or hypothetical dialogues), and specific grading criteria will be posted together with the lists of prompts.

- Final Assignment: 40%

Your final assignment, like the midterm assignments, will also be primarily intended to demonstrate your ability to understand and explain the philosophical arguments throughout the semester, but options for this assignment will be designed to allow you more of an opportunity to critically engage with them. This critical engagement might take the form of arguing for opposing positions, against the views we have read, but it might also take the form of applying the views, concepts, and frameworks, to novel situations or extending them to ordinary life. Some final assignment options will take the form of short essays (approx 2000-2500 words), but others will offer more creative options. Specific grading criteria will be posted together with the list of options. Assignment prompts for the final will be released a minimum of 3 weeks before the due date for the final assignment.

**Academic Integrity:** You are welcome and encouraged to discuss course material with others in your class, and work through material and ideas together. That's just part of the learning process. However, the grade I assign at the end of the semester is for your work only. As such, you are not allowed to provide answers to anyone else, or copy someone else's answers to any assignments. If you are ever unsure about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, more information is provided on the University Calendar: <http://web.uvic.ca/calendar/undergrad/info/regulations/academic-integrity.html>.

**Numerical and Letter Grades:** Grades will be given as percentile marks. The percentile mark for the course will be converted to a letter grade in the following manner: A+ = 90 - 100, A = 85 - 89, A- = 80 - 84, B+ = 77 - 79, B = 73 - 76, B- = 70 - 72, C+ = 65 - 69, C = 60 - 64, D = 50 - 59, F = 0 - 49. The A range means exceptional, outstanding and excellent performance. A grade in the B range means a very good, good and solid performance. A grade in the C+ or C range means satisfactory, or minimally satisfactory, performance. A grade of D or D- indicates merely passable or marginal performance. An F indicates unsatisfactory performance.

### Schedule:

- Week One Jan 9–15:  
Topic: Are We Doing Philosophy of Language Right Now?  
Reading: Andrea Sullivan-Clarke "Relations and How Decolonial Allies Acknowledge Land"
- Week Two Jan 16–22:  
Topic: Speech Acts  
Reading: J.L. Austin *How to Do Things With Words*, Lectures I–IV
- Week Three Jan 23–29:  
Topic: Speech Acts  
Reading: J.L. Austin *How to Do Things With Words*, Lectures VIII–X

- Week Four Jan 30–Feb 5:  
Topic: Language Games  
Reading: Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 1–38  
Marie McGinn, “Wittgenstein’s Critique of Augustine”
- Week Five Feb 6–12  
Topic: Presupposition and Common Ground  
Reading: David Lewis, “Scorekeeping in a Language Game”  
Sally Haslanger, “Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground”
- Week Six Feb 13–19:  
Topic: Pragmatism, Pragmatics, and Discourse  
Reading: Quill Kukla and Mark Lance, *‘Yo!’ and ‘Lo!’ The Pragmatic Topography of the Space of Reasons*, Chap 1  
Assignment One Due Feb 21
- Reading Break Feb 20–26
- Week Seven Feb 21–Mar 5:
- Week Eight Mar 6–12:
- Week Nine Mar 13–19:  
Assignment Two Due Mar 19
- Week Ten Mar 20–26:
- Week Eleven Mar 27–Apr 2:
- Week Twelve Apr 3–9 (no class Friday):  
Final Assignment Due Apr 16

### List of Optional Topics

- Analyticity:  
Gillian Russell, *Truth in Virtue of Meaning*, Chap 1  
Cory Juhl and Eric Loomis, “Analytic Truth”
- Countering Bad Speech:  
Daisy Dixon, “Artistic (Counter) Speech”  
Ten-Herng Lai, “Political vandalism as counter-speech: A defense of defacing and destroying tainted monuments”
- Ethical Issues in Language Preservation:  
Ethan Nowak, “Language Extinction” Shelbi Nahwilet Meissner, “Laxwalxwash Potamáay Súngaan ‘áawq // to be between the Blind Snake’s Teeth”

- Hate Speech and Propaganda:  
Lynne Tirrell, “Genocidal Language Games”  
Anne Quaranto and Jason Stanley, “Propaganda”
- Language and Thought:  
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “The Body as Expression, and Speech”  
Carl Te Hira Mika, “Worlded Object and Its Presentation”
- Lies and Bullshit:  
Jennifer Saul, *Lying, Misleading, and What is Said: An Exploration in Philosophy of Language and in Ethics*, Chap 1  
Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*
- Limits of Language:  
Eihei Dōgen, “Paradox and Poetic Expression”  
Bo Mou, “Eternal Dao , Constant Name, and Language Engagement: On the Opening Message of the Dao De Jing”
- Sex and Consent:  
Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa, “Presupposition and Consent”  
Quill Kukla, “That’s What She Said: The Language of Sexual Negotiation”
- Slurs:  
Rae Langton, Sally Haslanger, and Luvell Anderson, “Language and Race”  
Elisabeth Camp, “A Dual Act Analysis of Slurs”
- Subordination and Silencing:  
Ishani Maitra, “Subordinating Speech”  
Kristie Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing”
- Talking about Fiction:  
Amie Thomasson, “Speaking of Fictional Characters”  
Stacie Friend, “The great beetle debate: a study in imagining with names”