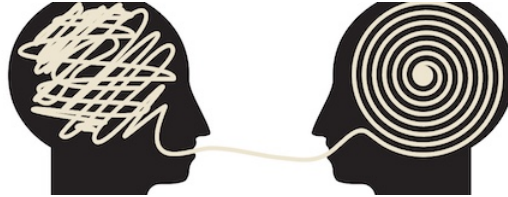


PHI 565: Philosophy of Language

Syracuse University, Spring 2026



Course Description

Many creatures have thoughts about the world, but as human beings we have a unique ability to express and communicate our thoughts using language. How does that work? What, after all, are thoughts, and how do the meanings of words determine which thought a given sentence expresses? And what, for that matter, are meanings? Are they in our heads, or out there in the world? What about all the other uses of language — to command, cajole, flatter, intimidate, praise, or demean — how do these fit into our overall picture of language? In this course we will investigate the theories philosophers of language have developed in their attempt to answer these and related questions.

Contact Information

Michael Rieppel

Email: morieppe@syr.edu

Office Hours: We 4–5pm, 523 Hall of Languages

Course Time: Mo/We 2:15 – 3:35 pm

Location: 538 Hall of Languages

Texts

All readings for this course will be made available as pdfs on Blackboard.

Grades

- **TWO EXAMS (50%):** we will have two in-class exams over the course of the semester. These will be a mix of short-answer and short-essay questions. I will distribute a study guide ahead of time.
- **WRITING ASSIGNMENT (25%):** you will complete a “scaffolded” writing assignment in several stages, building up to a professionally organized philosophy paper. Graduate students will instead write a term paper of around 4,000 words (due the last day of class, April 27th).
- **DISCUSSION TOPICS (15%):** you must submit a discussion topic 6 times over the course of the semester and present it in class. It should be clearly and briefly stated in about

3–6 sentences, and can be a question, objection, or thesis you want to defend, and must directly relate to that week’s reading. I will randomly assign 4 weeks to each of you to submit a topic, and you can choose the other 2 weeks based on your interests. Topics should be posted on Blackboard by 9am on Monday of the relevant week. You will receive full points for a topic that substantively engages with the reading, and half points if it displays only a cursory engagement.

- **ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (10%):** you are expected to arrive on time, have completed the readings, bring them to class, and contribute actively to class discussions (making at least one contribution per class meeting). You may miss 3 class sessions for any reason (including religious observances, conflicting appointments, illness etc.) and don’t need to notify me. Additional absences will negatively impact your grade.

Schedule of Topics

The following is a tentative schedule of the topics and readings we will cover. What we read when will depend on the pace at which we proceed. I’m also open to modifying or adding readings based on students’ interests!

I. Reference

- Frege (1892), ‘On Sense and Reference’
- Wittgenstein (1953), *Philosophical Investigations* (§79)
- Kripke (1972), *Naming and Necessity* (excerpts)
- Evans (1973), ‘The Causal Theory of Names’
- Putnam (1973), ‘Meaning and Reference’

II. Talk about Thoughts

- Kripke (1979), ‘A Puzzle About Belief’
- Schiffer (1992), ‘Belief Ascription’
- Fara (2015), ‘Names are Predicates’
- Schoubye (2020), ‘Names are Variables’

III. Language, Context, and ‘I’

- Kaplan (1977), ‘Demonstratives’ (excerpts)
- Perry (1979), ‘The Problem of the Essential Indexical’
- Magidor (2015), ‘The Myth of the *De Se*’

IV. Doing Things with Words

- Austin (1961), ‘Performative Utterances’
- Langton (1993), ‘Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts’
- Grice (1975), ‘Logic and Conversation’
- Stalnaker (1978), ‘Assertion’
- Langton et. al. (2013), ‘Language and Race’

- Nowak (2020), 'Language Loss and Illocutionary Silencing'

Course Policies

Electronic Devices

You may use a tablet or laptop to take notes and look at the class readings. Smart phones must be put away during class. You should not be using any devices for non-course-related activities during class.

Email Policy

I will do my best to reply to emails about brief administrative questions within 24 hours on weekdays. For substantive inquiries, come see me during office hours or schedule an appointment.

Attendance

You are expected arrive in class on time and remain until the end (unless you've made prior arrangements with your instructor). Arriving late or leaving early is disruptive and disrespectful to your instructor and classmates. Again, you can miss 3 class sessions for any reason (including religious observances, conflicting appointments, illness etc.) without notifying your instructor.

Deadline Extensions

To request an extension on an assignment you need to contact the instructor at least two days before the assignment is due. Unexcused late work will not be accepted.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Syracuse University values access and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to contact me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be necessary to ensure equitable access, and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process. If you would like to discuss disability-related accommodations or register with CDR, please visit [Center for Disability Resources](#). Please call (315) 443-4498 or email CDRspecialist@syr.edu for more detailed information. CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations are generally not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to initiate this process.

Health

Well-being and mental health are significant predictors of academic success. It is critical to take care of yourself physically and emotionally and to effectively navigate stress, anxiety, and depression. Please familiarize yourself with the range of resources the Barnes Center provides (<https://ese.syr.edu/bewell/>) and seek out support for mental health concerns as needed. Counseling services are available 24/7, 365 days, at 315-443-8000.

Academic Integrity

Don't cheat. It's unfair to your instructor and fellow students. All the work that you submit must have been written by you individually and reflect your own understanding of the material. Here is Syracuse University's official language:

As a pre-eminent and inclusive student-focused research institution, Syracuse University considers academic integrity at the forefront of learning, serving as a core value and guiding pillar of education. Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy provides students with the necessary guidelines to complete academic work with integrity throughout their studies. Students are required to uphold both course-specific and university-wide academic integrity expectations such as crediting your sources, doing your own work, communicating honestly, and supporting academic integrity. The full [Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy](#) can be viewed by visiting the Syracuse University Policies website.

Upholding Academic Integrity includes the protection of faculty's intellectual property. Students should not upload, distribute, or share instructors' course materials, including presentations, assignments, exams, or other evaluative materials without permission. Using websites that charge fees or require uploading of course material (e.g., Chegg, Course Hero) to obtain exam solutions or assignments completed by others, which are then presented as your own violates academic integrity expectations in this course and may be classified as a Level 3 violation. All academic integrity expectations that apply to in-person assignments, quizzes, and exams also apply online.

Students found in violation of the policy are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered. Students may not drop or withdraw from courses in which they face a suspected violation. Any established violation in this course may result in course failure regardless of violation level.

Artificial Intelligence

All generative-AI tools are prohibited in this course because their use inhibits achievement of the course learning objectives. This policy applies to all stages of project and writing processes including researching, brainstorming, outlining, organizing, and polishing. Do not use Generative-AI tools to create any content (i.e., images and video, audio, text, code, etc.). If you have any questions about a feature and whether it is considered Generative-AI, ask your instructor.

Turnitin

This class will use the plagiarism detection and prevention system Turnitin. You will have the option to submit your papers to Turnitin to check that all sources you use have been properly acknowledged and cited before you submit the paper to me. I will also submit all papers you write for this class to Turnitin, which compares submitted documents against documents on the Internet and against student papers submitted to Turnitin at Syracuse University and at other colleges and universities. I will take your knowledge of the subject matter of this course and your writing level and style into account in interpreting the originality report. Keep in mind that all papers you submit for this class will become part of the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers.