PHIL 154: Philosophy of Language  
MW 1:30-2:45  
Douglass Hall 110

Human language is like a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, when all the time we are longing to move the stars to pity.  
--Flaubert, Madame Bovary

Instructor: Thomas F. Pyne

Office Hours: M 11:00-12:00; T 2:00-3:00; By Appointment  
In addition I will conduct ‘virtual’ office hours via SacCT ‘Discussions’.  
Office Location: Mendocino 3000.

Phone: 916-278-7288

Email: pynetf@csus.edu

Website: http://www.csus.edu/indiv/p/pynetf/

SacCT: https://online.csus.edu/


Course Description

Study of philosophical issues concerning language: theories of the nature of linguistic meaning, in particular those involving the concepts of sense, reference, truth conditions, intention, convention, speech act, and force.  
Topics include the relation between meaning and reference to objects, and between meaning and mental processes. Emphasis on contemporary views, including views on the promise of a theory of language to shed light on fundamental philosophical problems in metaphysics and the philosophy of mind.

Course Objectives

This course is a systematic introduction to current theories of linguistic meaning with a view to deciding which (if any) should be adopted.

Topics will include:  
– syntax, semantics, and pragmatics;
candidates for the fundamental concept of a theory of meaning: mental representation, sense, denotation, truth, force, intention, convention, and cause;
– the scope of a theory of linguistic meaning and its relation to other disciplines: epistemology, metaphysics, cognitive psychology, and sociolinguistics.

The course will prepare students to adopt a reasoned and informed position on requirements for a fundamental theory of linguistic meaning.

Course Delivery Method – Hybrid

While PHIL 154 will be in most ways a standard lecture/discussion class, it will be ‘web-assisted.’ That is, we will be using some features of the SacCT course management system. SacCT is a program designed for on-line college courses. Among other things, it serves as a location for course material, lecture notes, tests, papers, and discussions.

I will make important course content available online, including lecture notes and other supplementary material. You will be taking quizzes and exams, participating in discussions, and submitting papers through SacCT. In addition, you may communicate with me, as well as with other students in the class, through the SacCT Mail facility.

Access the Course

Use your Saclink account to log into the course from the SacCT Login page (https://online.csus.edu).

If you do not have a Saclink account yet, please refer to the Setting Up a Saclink Account webpage (http://www.csus.edu/saclink/settingUp.stm) to create a saclink account online.

To get started using a SacCT course please visit the Student Resources webpage (http://www.csus.edu/webct/student/) where you can access Online Tutorials, Frequently Asked Questions, and other help resources.

Communications

The course will use the communication tools built into SacCT:
– Announcements: It’s a good idea to check for announcements from time to time during the semester
– Mail: You may send me (or classmates) a message via the ‘Mail’ function. I will respond promptly. (I can’t vouch for the classmates.)
– Discussions: You will be expected to participate in discussions, whether in class or through the ‘Discussions’ function in SacCT.
– Calendar: Exams and due dates for papers will all appear in the Calendar.

I will be lurking in the ‘Discussion’ section, usually in the evenings.
Technical Requirements

To access a course on SacCT you will need access to the Internet and an internet browser (Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari). To ensure that you are using a supported browser and have required plug-ins please run the Check Browser from your SacCT course. Refer to the SacCT Browser Tune-up page for instructions.

For help or to report a problem with SacCT you can:
- Visit the Student SacCT FAQ’s webpage
- Submit a SacCT Problem Form
- Contact the University Help Desk at (916) 278-7337

Work for the Course

1. Quizzes on Reading Assignments (10%)
   You will be responsible for the readings assigned for a particular class day. While you will be responsible for the whole reading, I may indicate in the ‘Schedule’ (below) that you should pay particular attention to some part of it. As a result, it may happen that other parts will not be treated in class. You will be responsible for them anyway, and I will respond to questions regarding them. The quiz for a given reading assignment must be taken by the beginning of the class period for which it is assigned. I will open the window for the reading assignment a week in advance; the window will close at class time.

2. Exam on Concepts and Methods in Philosophy of Language (10%)

2. Midterm Exam (15%) The midterm will be combination of multiple-choice, fill-in, true/false questions, plus some essay questions. The questions will be on the readings, lectures, and discussions up to that point.

3. Final Exam (15%) Same as the midterm. The final will cover all the readings, lectures, and discussions since the midterm.

4. First Paper (4-6 pages) (15%)
   See ‘Paper Topic’ below.

5. Second Paper (6-12 pages) 20%
   Your choice of topic (consult with me first).

6. Discussion Contributions (15%)
   You will be expected to make regular contributions to discussion, either in the class period itself or in the online ‘Discussion’ conducted in SacCT.
Assignment Submission Instructions

Papers

Papers will be submitted in SacCT.
In writing the paper, follow the instructions for argumentative papers found in the “Guidelines for Writing Philosophy Papers” at the Philosophy Department website: http://www.csus.edu/phil/WritingGuidelines&GradingStandardsforPapers.htm

To submit a paper in SacCT:

- Enter SacCT at https://online.csus.edu.
- Open the main page for PHIL 154.
- Open ‘Assignments’ (under ‘Course Tools’ on the left margin).
- Open the correct assignment; you will see the text of the assignment itself as well as the due date and time.
- You will see a space for the paper – don’t use that because you’ll lose formatting. (Some students, operating on the ‘belt and suspenders’ principle, paste their paper into that space just in case. That’s fine. But you don’t have to.)
- Click on the ‘Attachment’ button.
- Attach your paper as an editable file that will open in Microsoft Word (not a .pdf or .htm file); if you’re unsure, attach it as a ‘text’ (.txt) or ‘rich text’ (.rtf); those options are available in all word-processing programs.
- Late papers will be lowered a grade increment for every day past the due date. I leave the window open for submitting a paper for five days after its due date. After that the paper will not be accepted.

Discussions

Philosophy involves discussion and argument. It’s the best way to explore philosophical questions, the best way to learn how to philosophize. So I will expect you to participate in the discussions. You will either receive full credit for participation (15%) or no credit, depending on how seriously you take your responsibility to make contributions. If I notice that you are not participating, I will let you know that I expect more.

To participate in an online discussion:

- Enter SacCT;
- Open ‘Discussions’ (under ‘Course Tools’ on the left margin);
- Click on one of the topics; you will be able to read the other contributions;
- You can contribute to the discussion by clicking ‘Create Message’.

Online Quizzes/Exams

Reading Quizzes

There will be a reading quiz on every assignment. A reading quiz will consist of five to ten multiple-choice questions designed so that a careful reader should be able to answer them. The quiz will
‘open’ a week before it is due; it will ‘close’ at the beginning of the first class period in which the reading will be discussed.

To take a reading quiz in SacCT:
Enter SacCT at https://online.csus.edu;
– Open the main page for PHIL 154;
– Open ‘Assessments’ (under ‘Course Tools’ on the left margin of the main page);
– Answer the questions (make sure you ‘submit’ each question as well as the entire exam).
You will have only one chance to take the quiz, so make sure to ‘save’ each answer and check your answers before submitting.
I will not reset an untaken quiz, or one with unsaved answers. It’s your responsibility to get it right.

Exams
The exam window will open about five days before it is due. You must take the exam during that time.

To take an exam in SacCT, follow the instructions for taking a reading quiz. The difference between an exam and a quiz will be length, difficulty, and time. You will have 75 minutes to take the ‘Concepts and Methods’ exam and the Midterm, two hours (120 minutes) to take the Final.

Grading

Exams
Exams will receive numerical grades; the score will be ‘out of’ 100.

Papers
Papers will receive letter grades. To determine your final grade, I will convert those letter grades into the highest number in the grade range under ‘Grading Criteria’ below. (For example, a grade of ‘B’ on a paper converts to ‘89’.)

Reading Quizzes
Reading quizzes will receive a grade of 2 (full credit), 1 (inadequate comprehension), or 0 (not taken). An average of 1.7 or above will receive full credit for the this component of the final grade. Lower scores will be prorated.

Discussion
Discussion participation will receive either complete credit or none. Twice during the semester I will let you know how you are doing, to warn you if I deem your discussion contribution inadequate.

Grading Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scaled</th>
<th>Letter Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100-94</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93-92</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91-90</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89-84</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83-82</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81-80</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79-74</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73-72</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71-70</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69-64</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63-62</td>
<td>D-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61- F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Viewing Grades in SacCT**

For reading quizzes you will be able to see your score as soon as you have submitted your quiz. For exams, and papers I will post the grades as soon as I have finished grading them. You can see your grades during the semester by going to ‘MyGrades’ in SacCT.

**Course Policies**

**Attendance**

I expect attendance at every class meeting. If for some excellent reason you cannot make class, let me know – preferably in advance. If this is impossible, let me know by 5:00 on the day you miss, preferably by an e-mail message within SacCT. I will lower you a grade increment for every absence in which you fail to contact me the same day.

Class meetings will begin at 1:30 am with a roll call. Be on time. Anticipate. Excuses don’t cut it: I will treat a pattern of late arrival as an unexcused absence.

I expect attention to the material during class periods. If there is a class discussion, I will serve as moderator.

If you wish to ask a question, answer a question, or make a contribution to the class, please ask to be recognized. There is no excuse for conducting a private discussion during class time. I will treat a pattern of talking in class as an unexcused absence.
Make-Up Exams
Since you may take exams at your convenience, there will be no make-up exams. Period. The opening and closing dates and times for exams will be listed in the calendar.

Late Work
For papers, I will leave the assignment window open for five days after the due date. The grade will be lowered a grade increment for every day it’s late.

University Policies

Academic Honesty
Students are expected to be familiar with the University’s Academic Honesty, Policy & Procedures. The policy on Academic Honesty and other information regarding student conduct can be accessed from the University Policy Manual (http://www.csus.edu/umanual/index.htm).

The University Library has a helpful treatment of plagiarism at http://library.csus.edu/content2.asp?pageID=353.

The University has very helpful information on plagiarism at the Library’s Plagiarism Website.

Reasonable Accommodation Policy
If you have a disability and require accommodations, you need to provide disability documentation to Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD). For more information please visit the SSWD website (http://www.csus.edu/sswd/). They are located in Lassen Hall 1008 and can be contacted by phone at (916) 278-6955 (Voice) (916) 278-7239 (TDD only) or via email at sswd@csus.edu.

Please discuss your accommodation needs with me after class or during my office hours early in the semester.

University Resources

The CSUS Writing Center
The Writing Center provides encouraging, focused, and non-judgmental one-to-one tutorials in writing. Their tutors can help with writing at all points in the process, from initial planning and organizing through developing and revising a paper. You can bring the assignment to them for help.

Sac State Library
The Sac State Library’s webpage is http://library.csus.edu. To find a book or periodical, click on “Eureka: Library Catalogue” under “Resources and Collections or go directly to http://eureka.lib.csus.edu/
For a largely undergraduate institution, the Sac State library’s holdings and resources in philosophy are pretty good. I particularly recommend Sac State librarian Lisa Roberts’ website “Philosophy: Resources.” Two ways to find it: through “Research Guides” under “Resources and Collections”, or go directly to http://library.csus.edu/guides/robertsl/phialoguide.htm

**Student Computing Labs**

To access SacCT from campus, or use any of the other campus online resources, you can use the IRT managed student computer labs on campus. See University Labs website, that is, http://www.csus.edu/uccs/labs/generalinfo/about.stm for information about locations, hours, and resources available.

**SacCT**

SacCT is the course management system used on the Sac State campus for web-assisted courses. To access a course on SacCT, you must login from the SacCT Login Page (https://online.csus.edu).

To learn more about SacCT visit the Student Resources webpage (http://www.csus.edu/WebCT/student/) where you can view online Tutorials, FAQ’s and other help resources.
Course Schedule

Introduction

Everything starts somewhere, though many physicists disagree. But people have always been dimly aware of the problem with the start of things. They wonder how the snowplough driver gets to work, or how the makers of dictionaries look up the spelling of words.

-- Terry Pratchett, *Hogfather*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 1 M 8/29</th>
<th>Week Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Due Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Part I: The ‘Standard View’ (and Its Problems)

The truth may be out there, but lies are inside your head.

-- Terry Pratchett, *Hogfather*

|--------|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|

Part II: Language as a System

It became apparent that one reason why the Ice Giants were known as the Ice Giants was because they were giants.

The other was that they were made of ice.

-- Terry Pratchett, *Sourcery*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 2 M 9/5</th>
<th>Week Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Due Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
**Linguistic Relativity, or the “Prison House of Language”**

- "It’s called the Vieux River."
- "Yes?"
- "Know what that means?"
- "No."
- "The Old (Masculine) River."
- "Words have sex in foreign parts?"

  -- Terry Pratchett, *Witches Abroad*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>M 9/12</th>
<th>W 9/14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>M 9/19</th>
<th>W 9/21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

---

**Part III: Alternatives to the Standard View (1): Meaning as ‘Sense’**

“(A)s a result of these two magnificent achievements, Frege’s and Tarski’s, we have gained a deep insight into the structure of our mother tongues.”

--Donald Davidson

---
**Part IV: Alternatives to the Standard View (2): Meaning as Reference**

Most people in Lancre, as the saying goes, went to bed with the chickens and got up with the cows.

[Footnote: That is to say, they went to bed at the same time as the chickens went to bed, and got up at the same time as the cows got up. Loosely worded sayings can really cause misunderstandings.]

-- Terry Pratchett, *Maskerade*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 5</th>
<th>M 9/26</th>
<th>W 9/28</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Quiz 5: Russell, “On Denoting” (All)</td>
<td>First discussion progress report posted in ‘Gradebook’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Part V: Alternatives to the Standard View (3): Meaning as Truth-Bearing**

Truth is female, since truth is beauty rather than handsomeness. This would certainly explain the saying that a lie could run around the world before Truth has got its, correction, *her* boots on, since she would have to choose which pair – the idea any woman in a position to choose would have just one pair of boots being beyond rational belief.

Indeed, as a goddess she would have lots of shoes, and thus many choices: comfy shoes for home truths, hobnail boots for unpleasant truths, simple clogs for universal truths and possibly some kind of slipper for self-evident truth.

-- Terry Pratchett, *Unseen Academicals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>M 10/3</th>
<th>W 10/5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Quiz 7: Davidson, “Truth and Meaning”</td>
<td>First Paper due Wednesday, October 5, 11:30 pm.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part VI: Alternatives to the Standard View (4): Meaning as Intending

Asking someone to repeat a phrase you'd not only heard very clearly but were also exceedingly angry about was around Defcon II in the lexicon of squabble.

-- Terry Pratchett, Witches Abroad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 7</th>
<th>M 10/10</th>
<th>W 10/12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W: Grice’s Own Theory on How Conventions Figure In</td>
<td>W: [Essay 11: “Logic and Conversation” (1781-181)]</td>
<td>W: Reading Quiz 9: Grice, “Logic and Conversation”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part VII: Alternatives to the Standard View (5): Linguistic Conventions

Like an apprentice staring at the work of a master, he read Reacher Gilt’s words on the still-damp newspaper.

It was garbage, but it had been cooked by an expert. Oh yes. You had to admire the way perfectly innocent words were mugged, ravished, stripped of all true meaning and decency, and then sent to walk the gutter for Reacher Gilt, although ‘synergistically’ had probably been a whore from the start.

-- Terry Pratchett, Going Postal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 8</th>
<th>M 10/17</th>
<th>W 10/19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 9</th>
<th>M 10/24</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M: Another Theory on How Conventions Figure In</td>
<td>M: [Essay 45: “Languages and Language,” David Lewis (656-674)]</td>
<td>M: Reading Quiz 12: Lewis, “Languages and Language”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part VIII: Alternative (2) Further Elaborated: Reference and Semantic Externalism

- "There's a door."
- "Where does it go?"
- "It stays where it is, I think."

-- Terry Pratchett, Eric
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 10</th>
<th>M 10/31</th>
<th>W 11/2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M: The ‘Twin-Earth’ Argument (cont.)</td>
<td>W: ‘Denotation’ vs Reference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 11</th>
<th>M 11/7</th>
<th>W 11/9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M: Names as Paradigms of Reference</td>
<td>W: Kripke (cont.): the ‘Historical Chain’ Theory of Names</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 12</th>
<th>M 11/14</th>
<th>W 11/16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M: Revisions to Kripke’s Theory of Reference</td>
<td>W: Evans’s ‘Information’ Theory of Reference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part IX: Pragmatics - Introduction

Using a metaphor in front of a man as unimaginative as Ridcully was like a red flag to a bull-- was like putting something very annoying in front of someone who was annoyed by it.

-- Terry Pratchett, *Lords and Ladies*
## Week 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M 11/21</th>
<th>R 11/23</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M: Russellian Reference Renewed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W: Reference Refined: Kaplan on ‘Direct Reference’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M 11/28</th>
<th>W 11/30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M: Indexicals: Indispensable or Just Handy?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W: Indexicals as Essential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part X: Pragmatics - Indexical Expressions

"That's right," he said. "We're philosophers. We think, therefore we am."

-- Terry Pratchett, *Small Gods*

### Part XI: Intentionality - A Tentative Conclusion

This is very similar to the suggestion put forward by the Quirmian philosopher Ventre, who said, "Possibly the gods exist, and possibly they do not. So why not believe in them in any case? If it's all true you'll go to a lovely place when you die, and if it isn't then you've lost nothing, right?"

When he died he woke up in a circle of gods holding nasty-looking sticks and one of them said, "We're going to show you what we think of Mr Clever Dick in these parts..."

-- Terry Pratchett, *Hogfather*

## Week 14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M 11/28</th>
<th>W 11/30</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Part XI: Intentionality - A Tentative Conclusion

This is very similar to the suggestion put forward by the Quirmian philosopher Ventre, who said, "Possibly the gods exist, and possibly they do not. So why not believe in them in any case? If it's all true you'll go to a lovely place when you die, and if it isn't then you've lost nothing, right?"

When he died he woke up in a circle of gods holding nasty-looking sticks and one of them said, "We're going to show you what we think of Mr Clever Dick in these parts..."

-- Terry Pratchett, *Hogfather*

## Week 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M 12/5</th>
<th>W 12/7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M: Representation, Reference, and ‘Aboutness’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W: Intentionality – A Tentative Conclusion?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Finals Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M 12/12</th>
<th>W 12/14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The descriptions and due dates are subject to change for pedagogical reasons.*
**Paper Topics**

1. **First Paper**  *Due Wednesday, October 5, 11:30 pm*
   You are an amateur astronomer who believes (correctly) of Saturn that it has prominent rings.

   However, you also believe (incorrectly) of Saturn that it is the largest planet in the Solar System.

   You say to someone:
   
   \[(S) \text{ The largest planet in the Solar System has prominent rings.}\]

   Having read the selection from Locke, and followed the debate on meaning as mental representation, discuss the following issues:
   A. According to Locke, does this utterance express your (true) thought that Saturn has prominent rings?

   B. If your answer to (A) is yes, then explain why the utterance is false.

   If your answer to (A) is no, then what content is there to Locke’s claim that words stand for nothing but ideas in the mind of him that uses them, *“how imperfectly soever or carelessly those ideas are collected from the things which they are supposed to represent.”*

   C. Take a side. Is the Standard View correct? If not, then how else can we explain meaning?

2. **Second Paper:**  *Due Wednesday, December 14, 11:30 pm.*
   Your choice of topic. Consult with me first.

*The descriptions and due dates are subject to change at the discretion of the Instructor.*

**Have a good semester.**