

**Language and Reality Spring 2009**  
**PHIL139 CM**  
**Claremont McKenna College**  
**Mondays and Wednesdays 9:35-10:50**  
**Location: BZ CLS**

**Instructor: Endre Begby**  
**Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursday 10:00-12:00**  
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### **Course description**

This is an upper-level undergraduate course designed to familiarize students with some central themes in 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of language. Among the questions we will consider along the way are linguistic relativity, the nature of communication, the social dimension of language, the relation between language and mind, and the role of our physical and social environment in giving meaning to our words.

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### **Readings**

There is no textbook for this class. All readings will be distributed via email and Sakai.

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### **Requirements**

Your grade for this class will be based on three papers (first paper, 4-5 pp, papers 2 and 3, 6-8 pp. each), and participation in class. The breakdown is as follows: 1<sup>st</sup> paper 25%, 2<sup>nd</sup> paper 30%, 3<sup>rd</sup> paper 30%, Participation 15%. See below for tentative paper deadlines.

An important additional requirement: *before* each meeting, each of you must come up with one question or discussion point regarding the readings. These might take the form of an argument or claim in the readings that you are uncertain about, or anything that interests you and which you think might provide a fruitful basis for classroom discussion. These questions/topics should be emailed me *no later than 8PM the night before the class meets* (i.e., Sundays and Tuesday). I will then collate the questions, and distribute them so that everyone has a chance to look them over and think about them before we meet.

This is a vital part of your work for this class, as each seminar meeting will be structured around these questions and discussion points. I plan on spending about 15-20 minutes at the start of each meeting, introducing the topic and situating it in the context of our other readings. The rest of our time will be devoted to discussion of these questions / topics. I will bring the questions on a handout, and we will jointly decide which questions to discuss and in what order

You will not receive a final grade in this class if you do not complete all the written requirements. You will be graded along the familiar scale from A to F. I expect the average grade in the class to

around B, but I reserve the right to employ the entire scale. In other words, you should not expect an A (or a B) in this class unless you do all the work, and do it well.

Papers that are turned in late without a valid excuse will be penalized by one-third of a letter grade per day. That is, a paper turned in one day late can at best achieve an A-, a paper turned in two days late can best achieve a B+, and so on. All calendar days count. This entails that no unexcused late assignment will be given higher than an F if it is turned in more than ten days after the assigned due date, and that late penalties continue to accrue over weekends and holidays.

Late work is not penalized if you have a College-recognized excuse—e.g., illness, family or personal emergency. I reserve the right to request proof of any such excuse. Always keep any documentation—e.g., plane tickets, doctors notes, traffic tickets—that can verify your excuse. Actively seek out such documentation (e.g., by doing to a doctor when sick) if you wish to ensure that your excuse will be accepted.

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## Other

Academic dishonesty: The college policies on cheating and plagiarism will be followed strictly. These policies – particularly the policies on plagiarism – may be more complex than you realize, and you are responsible for familiarizing yourself with them. Note that I count as plagiarism not just word-for-word copies of other people’s writings, but also unthinking paraphrases of such sources. I reserve the right to consult plagiarism-detecting software such as turnitin. A single paragraph lifted or paraphrased from an outside source can be enough to get you into trouble, so if you are at all uncertain whether you are about to turn in a plagiarized paper, you should ask me first.

This class has a Sakai page (log on through *sakai.claremont.edu*). This page will be my main venue for disseminating messages, assignments, syllabus updates, comments on the readings, and so on. It is your responsibility to make sure that you receive these messages. The Sakai page also has a discussion board, which I strongly encourage you to use for sharing questions, concerns, and insights about our readings and classroom discussions. I will monitor this forum and post as needed. Thoughtful contributions to the Sakai discussion forum will count toward your participation grade for this class.

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## Tentative schedule

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| 1. Wed. Jan. 21 | Introductory: no readings                                      |
| 2. Mon. Jan. 26 | Plato. <i>Cratylus</i> (383a-387d).<br>John Locke. “Of Words.” |
| 3. Wed. Jan. 28 | B .L. Whorf. “Science and Linguistics.”                        |
| 4. Mon. Feb. 2  | <i>No class.</i>   |

5. Wed. Feb. 4 Ludwig Wittgenstein. *Philosophical Investigations*
6. Mon. Feb. 9 Wittgenstein, cont'd
7. Wed. Feb. 11 Wittgenstein, cont'd
8. Mon. Feb. 16 Gottlob Frege. "On Sense and Reference."
9. Wed. Feb. 18 Frege, cont'd

*(1<sup>st</sup> paper due Monday February 23)*

10. Mon. Feb. 23 W.v.O. Quine. "Two Dogmas of Empiricism."
11. Wed. Feb. 25 Quine, cont'd
12. Mon. Mar. 2 W.v.O. Quine. *Word & Object*, pp. 28-30.  
Donald Davidson. "Radical Interpretation."
13. Wed. Mar. 4 Davidson, cont'd
14. Mon. Mar. 9 Saul Kripke. *Naming and Necessity* (excerpts).
15. Wed. Mar. 11 Kripke, cont'd

*Spring break week*

16. Mon. Mar. 23 Hilary Putnam. "The Meaning of 'Meaning'."
17. Wed. Mar. 25 Putnam, cont'd
18. Mon. Mar. 30 Tyler Burge. "Individualism and the Mental."
19. Wed. Apr. 1 Burge, cont'd
20. Mon. Apr. 6 Burge, cont'd

*(2<sup>nd</sup> paper due Wednesday April 8)*

21. Wed. Apr. 8            B.L. Whorf. "An American Indian Model of the Universe."  
                                 B.L. Whorf. "The Relation of Habitual Thought and Behavior to  
                                 Language."
22. Mon. Apr. 13           Whorf, cont'd
23. Wed. Apr. 15           Laura Martin, "Eskimo Words for Snow."  
                                 Steven Pinker, excerpts from *The Stuff of Thought*
24. Mon. Apr. 20           Pinker, cont'd
25. Wed. Apr. 22           Donald Davidson. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme."
26. Mon. Apr. 27           Davidson, cont'd
27. Wed. Apr. 29           Thomas Kuhn. "Commensurability, Comparability, Communicability."
28. Mon. May 4            Kuhn, cont'd

*(3<sup>rd</sup> paper due Wednesday May 6)*

29. Wed. May 6            Richard Rorty. "The Contingency of Language."