

# Phil 98 The Philosophy of J. L. Austin

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## 1 COURSE DESCRIPTION

In the course of your philosophical studies, you have probably come across a philosophical problem which you found ludicrous. You may have tried to diagnose why the problem seemed ill-formed. The course is an extended exercise in this activity.

[J. L. Austin](#) was perhaps the most radical proponent of *ordinary language philosophy*, a critical methodology which (i) identifies where philosophers go wrong in formulating the putative problems they are concerned with as the point at which their use of words departs from the everyday and (ii) emphasizes the particular circumstances in which linguistic expressions are used in order to ward off essentialist tendencies. As such, his is an anti-systematic philosophy which leverages amusing cases of language use to dispel grand philosophical theories and the grounds of the problems they are built to address.

We will read Austin on universals, truth, skepticism, action and freedom, sense perception, and speech acts.

Austin's style of philosophy can appear dismissive, even anti-philosophical, and it garnered detractors. We will read criticisms of ordinary language philosophy, especially those which charge Austin with confusing use and mention of expressions, and concern ourselves with the metaphilosophical question of what, if anything, Austin's methodology sanctions us to conclude about philosophical problems.

## 2 COURSE MECHANICS

### PRIMARY COURSE TEXTS (AVAILABLE ON CANVAS)

J. L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*.

J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*.

J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*.

Avner Baz, *When Words Are Called For*.

**REQUIREMENTS** I will use the following "levels system" for determining your course grade. You start at Level 1 in the following rubric and advance to Level 2 by getting a "Complete" grade on the Level 1 assignment, and so on.

- (Level 1) Insufficient Progress=F, Almost=F, Complete=F
- (Level 2) Insufficient Progress=D, Almost=C-, Complete=C
- (Level 3) Insufficient Progress=C+, Almost=B-, Complete=B
- (Level 4) Insufficient Progress=B+, Almost=A-, Complete=A

You have **seven** opportunities to progress through the four levels, which consist of the following assignments:

- Level 1** is an in-class presentation on a paper by Austin, to be given early in the semester,
- Level 2** is a 5-6 page paper based on one's presentation,
- Level 3** is a 5-6 page paper, and
- Level 4** is an 8-10 page term paper.

Your final course grade is determined by **in class participation** (10%) and your **level grade** (90%), the grade you get at whichever level you end up on before you run out of attempts.

### 3 SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

**Readings are available on Canvas.**

#### SEPTEMBER 8: MEANING, THE ANALYTIC-SYNTHETIC, AND REIFICATION

- Austin, "The meaning of a word"
- Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §66-67

#### SEPTEMBER 15: A WEAK CONCEPTION OF KNOWLEDGE

- Austin, "Other minds"
- Wisdom, "Other minds," §1
- Stroud, *Philosophical Skepticism*, ch. 2

#### SEPTEMBER 22

- Austin, "Other minds"
- Kaplan, *Austin's Way with Skepticism*, ch. 1-2

#### SEPTEMBER 29: TRUTH

- Austin, "Truth"
- Strawson, "Truth," in *Logico-Linguistic Papers*
- Strawson, "Truth: a reconsideration of Austin's views," in *Logico-Linguistic Papers*

## OCTOBER 6

Austin, "Ifs and cans"

Austin, "Three ways of spilling ink"

Chisholm, review of *Philosophical Papers*

## OCTOBER 13: PHILOSOPHY OF ACTION & SOME INFLUENTIAL CRITICISMS

Austin, "Plea for excuses"

Austin, "Pretending"

Mates, "On the verification of statements about ordinary language"

Fodor and Katz, "The availability of what we say"

## OCTOBER 20: PERCEPTION

Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, lectures 1-6

Ayer, *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*, ch. 1

Firth, "Austin and the argument from illusion"

## OCTOBER 27

Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, lectures 7-11

Austin, "Unfair to facts"

Ayer, as referenced

Cavell, "Austin at criticism"

Cavell, "Must we mean what we say?"

Leite, "Austin, dreaming, and scepticism"

## NOVEMBER 3: SPEECH ACTS

Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*

Austin, "Performative utterances"

## NOVEMBER 10: APPLICATIONS OF SPEECH ACT THEORY IN ETHICS

Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*

Rawls, "Two concepts of rules"

Hare, "The promising game"

Midgley, "The game game"

NOVEMBER 17: CRITICISMS OF ORDINARY LANGUAGE PHILOSOPHY

Baz, *When Words are Called For*, ch. 2

Grice, "The causal theory of perception"

Grice, "Logic and conversation"

Travis, "Annals of analysis"

DECEMBER 1

Baz, *When Words are Called For*