

# Philosophy of Language- Meaning

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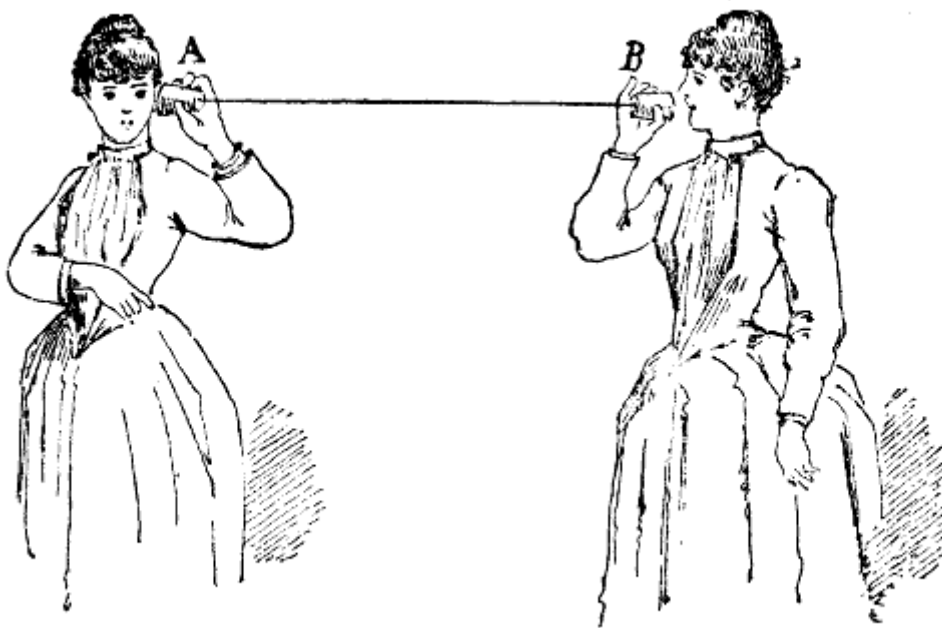


FIG. 76. Trådtelefon.

## Course Overview

Most things in the world are *meaningless*. That is, they do not portray the world as being a certain way. Language is one of the very few exceptions to this: words and sentences *mean* things. That is, they are *about* things: the word ‘dog’ is about/means/refers to dogs. The sentence “dogs bark” says that dogs bark. These word-world connections are unrestricted by spatial and temporal constraints: while I can’t see or touch Confucius, I can talk about him. How is this possible?

This course will provide an overview of philosophical theories of linguistic meaning. We will center our course around two questions. The *semantic* question: What do words mean? And the *meta-semantic* question: What makes words mean what they do? We will look at a variety of classical and contemporary answers to these questions. Along the way, we will consider some of the deepest topics in philosophy: the relations between language, mind, and the world.

## Reading Schedule

Readings marked with a ‘\*’ are recommended, not required.

- **Week 1: Introduction: What Makes Meaning Puzzling?**
  - Lycan, W. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction* (Chapter 1)
- **Week 2: Reference and Association: A Simple Theory of Meaning**
  - Locke, J. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding: Book III* (Excerpts)
  - Mill, J.S. *A System of Logic* (Excerpts)
- **Week 3: Problems for this Simple Theory**
  - Frege, G. *On Sense and Nominatum*
  - Chomsky, N. *A Review of B.F. Skinner’s Verbal Behavior*
- **Week 4: Meaning vs. Reference I**
  - Frege, G. *On Sense and Nominatum*
- **Week 5: Meaning vs. Reference II**
  - Russell, B. *On Denoting*
- **Week 6: Externalism I**
  - Kripke, S. *Naming and Necessity* (Excerpts)
- **Week 7: Externalism II**
  - Putnam, H. *The Meaning of “Meaning”*
  - Burge, T. *Other Bodies*
  - \* Burge, T. *Individualism and the Mental* (Excerpts)
- **Week 8: Convention**
  - Lewis, D. *Convention* (Excerpts)
  - \* Lewis, D. *Languages and Language*
- **Week 9: Problems for Externalism**
  - Chomsky, N. *Language and Nature* (Excerpts)
  - \* Jackendoff, R. *A User’s Guide to Thought and Meaning: Part 3*
  - \* Fodor, J. *It’s All in the Mind*
- **Week 10: Meaning and Use**
  - Grice, H.P. *Logic and Conversation*
  - Davidson, D. *What Metaphors Mean*
  - \* Davidson, D. *A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs*