I. Administrative

A. Roll & Enrollment: There should be no problem with this.

B. Books: Available?

C. Questions about the Syllabus?

D. Assignment Preview: Readings and an email message.

E. General Questions?

II. Philosophical Study

A. Theory Construction

1. What is a theory?

2. Stages of theory construction
   a. Starting points – intuitions (e.g.)
   b. Decision process – conceptual analysis (e.g.)
   c. Ending points – explain vs. explain away (e.g.)

B. Arguments

1. How they will figure into this class

2. Standard form

3. Look at Locke for examples
III. The Problem(s) of Language Study

A. General Problems

1. We are language speakers and have been since way back. Language is a ubiquitous part of our experience. As such, it forms a part of the background against which we conduct any investigation into language. As with other things that are part of the background, it is difficult to pick them out for observation and study.

2. A related concern: because we must use language to study language, there is a concern that we will be unable to gain the critical distance necessary to do our theory in an objective way. This problem of reflexivity also afflicts to consciousness studies (see the discussion of this topic by Colin McGinn), and it has been expressed in a strong form by Noam Chomsky.

B. Specific Problems

1. Sound: what are the sounds that constitute a language? Phonology is the sub-discipline that focuses on this.

2. Source: whence comes the capacity for language? Evolutionary linguistics. Whence come the varieties of languages? Historical linguistics. Whence comes the specific versions of languages that individuals speak? Language acquisition studies.

3. Structure: what is the structure (or grammar) of languages in particular, and language in general? Syntax.

4. Significance: what is the meaning of language? What is it that accounts for the meaningfulness of words, phrases, and sentences? The focus in semantics is on the lexicon and on the compositional rules that guide the construction of more complex meaningful units. Semantics

5. Signaling: what can be said in general about the nature of language use? How can meaning be added to utterances over and above the contributions made by the words uttered? Pragmatics.

6. Our primary concerns in here will be semantics and pragmatics.
IV. Early Returns

A. Acquisition

1. The Bible: the Genesis account and the Tower of Babel.

2. Augustine: the brief passage from Confessions supplies a rational reconstruction of his acquisition of language; the story makes it sound like the young Augustine is in total control, conducting a systematic set of experiments that result in his ability to speak a language.

B. Meaning

1. Carroll: the Humpty Dumpty chapter tells a story about how words acquire their meaning, viz., via speaker intentions that are unconstrained by conventional usage. Alice, who represents Carroll, remains unconvinced that you can make words do so many things.

2. Swift: the story of the Professors serves up a fully referential theory of meaning, where word meanings are just the objects in the world that those words stand for; thus, you could get by without words so long as you had access to all the things about which you wanted to talk.

3. Locke: this is similar to Swift in that it provides a thoroughgoing theory of meaning; for Locke, the meanings of words are ideas in the minds of speakers. One could argue that this is also a referential theory, with ideas as the referents, but that would imply that when I talk about, say, a soccer match, I’m really talking about an idea and not an event in the world. This seems problematic.