PHIL 364 | FALL 2020 | HUNTER COLLEGE
PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE
TAUGHT BY DANIEL HARRIS | ONLINE & ASYNCHRONOUS

course website: danielwharris.com/teaching/364online/

username: hunter   password: language

THIS COURSE'S TOPIC

Language has been a central topic in philosophy since the turn of the 20th Century. We will study a variety of topics that have arisen in this field. Rather than try to give a comprehensive overview of every issue and debate (impossible!), our approach will be to dip into a series of topics in order to get a sense of some of the issues that have occupied philosophers of language.

ONLINE & ASYNCHRONOUS

This is a fully online course: we won't have any in-person meetings. It is also fully asynchronous, which means that there are no specific times when you have to participate. In particular, we will not be using video-conferencing software (like Blackboard Collaborate or Zoom) to hold synchronous discussions with the whole group.

Instead, there will be readings and assignments that you will be expected to complete by Wednesday of every week, and I have set up a Slack workplace in which we can have asynchronous discussions as the semester goes on.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Weekly Assignments: 60%

Term Paper: 40% in total, broken into these components:
  • Abstract: 5%
  • Meeting: 5%
  • Penultimate Draft: 5%
  • Peer feedback: 10%
  • Final Draft: 15%

COURSE WEBSITE

All of the required readings and assignments will be posted on the course website:

danielwharris.com/teaching/364online

To access some of the readings, you will need to use the following username and password:

username: hunter
password: language

READING REQUIREMENTS

The course is divided into 15 units, one per week. Each unit focuses on one or two required readings. I expect everyone to read these texts closely and carefully before completing the weekly assignments. I will also post optional supplementary readings. These are designed to help you to understand the main readings, or to further flesh out some of their claims. Although they are optional, I think that you will find them useful if you take the time to read them.

OUR SLACK WORKPLACE

Slack is a tool that is commonly used by teams in workplaces to to communicate. It allows groups to leave messages for each other, to send direct messages to other individuals in the group, to post videos, to have one-on-one video calls, and much more. We will use it for all of these things

I have created a Slack workplace for the class. To get to it, you can open slack and join the room philosophy-364.slack.com. You can also click this link to be taken there. Slack can be used in a web browser without downloading an app, but I highly recommend that you download the Slack app to your phone and/or computer, adding the workspace, and turning on notifications so that you will get messages. (It's free!)

BLACKBOARD?

I will use Blackboard to post your grades, but not for any other purpose.

HOW TO CONTACT ME

Our main ways of communicating with each other will be the course website and Slack (both explained below). But there are several other options as well. You can email me at the address at the top of this page. You can also arrange (via Slack or email) to have a private videoconference with me. I should have time available on most weekdays. One component of your term-paper project will be a requirement that you have a brief, private video call with me.

It is important that you can regularly receive emails from me. When I email you, I will use whichever email address is

listed for you in CUNYfirst. So it is very important that the email listed there is one that you regularly check. If you would like to change the email listed for you in CUNYfirst, it is easy to do so. Just click this link and follow the steps described there:

http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/cunyfirst/repository/files/CUNYfirst_Email_Address.pdf

This is your responsibility. If you are late with an assignment because an email from me went to the wrong address, you will not receive credit for the assignment.

WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS

You will be expected to complete an assignment of some kind by the end of each Wednesday evening. The assignment will involve some writing, and will presuppose that you have completed the required reading(s). Some assignments may also ask you to do some additional reading or research.

The nature of these assignments will vary from week to week, but you will always be asked to submit a paragraph or two of critical feedback about the required readings. This critical feedback can take many forms. For example, you can pose a detailed question about something that puzzled you or that you found intellectually unsatisfying. You can raise an objection to something that you read. Or you could find a piece of research that undermines or adds a further source of support to something in the reading. Every Thursday, I will post written and video responses to your critical feedback on the page for that week. I encourage you to read through other students' feedback and my responses, and to further discuss them on Slack.

Each of these assignments is worth 4% of your overall grade in the course. In total they are worth 60%.

TERM PAPER

Your term paper will be a chance to delve deeper into one of the topics that we explore in this course. Your job will be to clearly explain a debate in the philosophy of language and, if one position in that debate appeals to you, explain what you take to be the decisive argument for it. (If you think that the debate is unresolved, you should explain the best arguments on either side, and why they aren't decisive.) In order to do this, you will have to read more of the relevant literature than we can get to in class, and this will require independent research in order to find and read the major primary sources on your topic. The final draft of your term paper should be about 2000–2500 words (around 8–10 pages, double spaced), and will be worth 15% of your grade.

ABSTRACT, MEETING, DRAFT, COMMENTS

You will be graded on your term paper in stages, each of which will be important to your grade.

- First you will create a 1-page **abstract** in which you'll explain your plan for writing the paper (thesis, argument outline, and sources).

- Next we'll have a one-on-one **office-hours meeting** to discuss your plan. I will give you some feedback and suggestions for how to proceed.

- Next you will hand in a **penultimate draft** of your paper. This should not be a rough and sloppy first draft. You should have already spent time editing and revising it by this stage. The draft should be about 1500–2000 words (about 6–8 pages).

- Next you will read and provide **peer feedback** on the essays of two other students. (I will also give feedback to everyone on their drafts.) The purpose of this is for you to help each other to see which parts of your papers are unclear or unconvincing, so that they can improve these points in the final drafts.

STAY CONNECTED!

Since this is a fully online course, there is considerable risk that some students will fail because they fall out of the routine of participating in the course. Knowing this can help you to avoid a bad outcome. The most important thing for you to do is to get into a weekly routine of doing the readings and assignments, and to make sure that you don't skip any. If you are having trouble doing this, or if you miss a week for some reason, please reach out to me to let me know what's going on. I will do my best to help you get caught up. I really don't want to lose track of anyone!

LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY

Assignments will lose 10% of their value for every day that they are late. If your penultimate draft it late, you forfeit your ability to participate in the feedback assignment (and so automatically lose 10% from your final grade).

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE & READINGS

Note: this schedule is subject to change. The course website will contain a current version, and you should always check it before beginning each week's work.

Week 1 (31 Aug – 4 Sept)
The uniqueness of human communication
Harris: 'What Makes Human Communication Special?'

Week 2 (7–11 Sept)
What is it for a word to be about something? Part 1
Frege, 'Sense and Reference' (excerpt)
Russell, 'Knowledge by Acquaintance and by Description'

Week 3 (14–18 Sept)
What is it for a word to be about something? Part 2

Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (excerpt)
Putnam, 'Meaning and Reference'

Week 4 (21–25 Sept)
Semantics: Sentence structure and meaning
Larson and Segal, *Knowledge of Meaning* (excerpt)

Week 5 (28 Sept – 2 Oct)
Generative grammar
Chomsky, *'On the Nature, Use, and Acquisition of Language'*
Gleitman and Newport,
'The invention of language by children'

Week 6 (5–9 Oct)
Meaning and Language Use: Wittgenstein
Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (excerpt)
Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (excerpt)

Week 7 (12–16 Oct)
Speech Acts
Austin, How to do Things with Words (excerpt)

Week 8 (19–23 Oct)
Two models of communication
Grice, 'Meaning'
Scott-Phillips, *Speaking Our Minds* (excerpt)

Week 9 (26–30 Oct)
Indirect communication and cooperation
Grice, 'Logic & Conversation'

Week 10 (2–6 Nov)
Metaphor and the limits of effability
Camp, 'Metaphor and that certain *je ne sais quoi*'
Buchanan, 'A puzzle about meaning and communication'

Week 11 (9–13 Nov)
Negotiating word meanings
Miranda Fricker, Epistemic Injustice (excerpt)
Peter Ludlow, *Living Words* (excerpt)

Week 12 (16–20 Nov)
Slurs and hate speech
Nunberg, 'The social life of slurs'
Waldron, *The Harm in Hate Speech* (excerpt)
Tirrell, 'Genocidal Language Games'

Week 13 (23–25 Nov)
Sense and Nonsense 1: Verificationism
Ayer: *Language, Truth, and Logic* (excerpts)

Week 14 (30 Nov – 4 Dec)
Sense and nonsense 2: Bullshit
Frankfurt: 'On Bullshit'
Cohen: 'Complete Bullshit'

Week 15 (7 Dec – 9 Dec)

Does the language we speak shape how we think?
Boroditsky, 'How language shapes the way we think'
McWhorter, *The Language Hoax* (excerpt)

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

ADA STATEMENT

In compliance with the ADA and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational access and accommodations for all its registered students. Hunter College's students with disabilities and medical conditions are encouraged to register with the Office of AccessABILITY for assistance and accommodation. For information and appointment contact the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room E1214 or call (212) 772-4857 /or VRS (646) 755-3129.

POLICY ON SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

In compliance with the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Hunter College reaffirms the prohibition of any sexual misconduct, which includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment retaliation against students, employees, or visitors, as well as certain intimate relationships. Students who have experienced any form of sexual violence on or off campus (including CUNY-sponsored trips and events) are entitled to the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights for Hunter College.

a. Sexual Violence: Students are strongly encouraged to immediately report the incident by calling 911, contacting NYPD Special Victims Division Hotline (646-610-7272) or their local police precinct, or contacting the College's Public Safety Office (212-772-4444).

b. All Other Forms of Sexual Misconduct: Students are also encouraged to contact the College's Title IX Campus Coordinator, Dean John Rose (jtrose@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-650-3262) or Colleen Barry (colleen.barry@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-772-4534) and seek complimentary services through the Counseling and Wellness Services Office, Hunter East 1123.

CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct Link: http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/la/Policy-on-Sexual-Misconduct-12-1-14-with-links.pdf