

PHIL 201 | FALL 2014 | HUNTER COLLEGE | DANIEL HARRIS  
**KNOWLEDGE AND REALITY**  
TUESDAY+FRIDAY | SECTION 01: 9:45-11 | SECTION 02: 3:45-5

### **ABOUT THE COURSE**

This course is an introduction to metaphysics and epistemology as those subjects have played out over the last 100 years. We'll trace a narrative through several of the classic works of 20th Century analytic philosophy in an effort to get a sense of what some influential philosophers have thought about the fundamental nature of the reality and how we get our knowledge.

Since we can only fit so much into a single semester, our coverage will necessarily be limited. But the narrative will go something like this: For the first half of the 20th Century, anglophone philosophers pursued scientifically-informed and linguistically-couched forms of empiricism that involved suspicion of overt metaphysical claims. These views started out in relatively commonsensical places, but led them to some surprisingly strange ideas. The more empiricist and anti-metaphysical philosophers tried to be, the weirder things got. This led to a rebellion: toward the end of the century, the ideas of their students had grown far away from their empiricist roots and become much more friendly to metaphysics.

If all goes well, you'll end the semester with a good sense of at least one path through 20th-Century analytic philosophy, though with plenty of gaps left to fill in.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Daily Five-Minute Quizzes — 20%

First Writing Assignment — 25%

Office Visit — 10%

Second Writing Assignment — 30%

Final Exam — 15%

### **DAILY FIVE-MINUTE QUIZZES**

We'll begin every class with a five minute quiz consisting of two or three short questions about that day's reading and/or the previous day's discussion. You should be able to answer the questions in a sentence or two.

Quizzes will be graded on a pass/fail basis. The quizzes are worth 20% of your total grade, and we'll have something like 25-28 quizzes in total. Here is how I will calculate your final quiz grade out of 20:

$$\text{quiz grade} = 20 \times \frac{\text{number of quizzes you passed}}{\text{total number of quizzes} - 3}$$

This means that you can miss or fail up to three quizzes before it will begin to have a negative impact on your grade; after that, each quiz that you miss or fail will lower your final grade by a bit less than one percentage point.

### **FIRST WRITING ASSIGNMENT**

For your first writing assignment, you will write a 750-word paper in which you choose a philosophical problem we've studied in class, explain why the problem is important and difficult, and explain how one of the authors we've studied attempts to solve the problem. This assignment is all about showing that you know how to charitably explain what's at stake with a philosophical issue in your own words.

### **SECOND WRITING ASSIGNMENT**

For your second writing assignment, you'll write a 1500-word essay in which you reconstruct the position of an author we study in class and then articulate a single, convincing objection to that position.

## OFFICE VISIT

At least two weeks before handing in your term paper, you should come to my office to pitch your paper topic to me.

When you come to this meeting, you should bring a typed-up short summary of your paper, including your thesis and a summary of your main argument. This may be in point form, but should be clear and well-thought-out.

At the meeting, you should be prepared to answer a few questions about your paper. The purpose of this meeting is not to test your knowledge of the topic before the paper is written. Rather, its purpose is to encourage you to get started on the paper early, to help make sure that you've chosen a suitable topic, and to head off any false starts before they become a problem I may make some suggestions about how to focus the paper topic, or about additional things you should read. The whole thing should last about ten minutes.

## FINAL EXAM

The final exam will consist of short essays on topics we cover in class. You'll have a choice of questions to answer, and I will share the questions with you at least a few days in advance.

## READINGS AND WEBSITE

All of the readings will be made available to you in electronic form, and you needn't buy a textbook. Here's the course website information:

[danielwharris.com/teaching/201/](http://danielwharris.com/teaching/201/)

If you prefer paper books, we'll be reading substantial portions of the following books, which can be easily found new or used on Amazon.com:

- Bertrand Russell: *The Problems of Philosophy*
- A. J. Ayer: *Language, Truth, and Logic*
- W. V. O. Quine: *Ontological Relativity*
- Nelson Goodman: *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*
- Saul Kripke: *Naming and Necessity*
- David Lewis: *On the Plurality of Worlds*

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

If all goes well, here's what will happen this semester:

- You'll learn about some central metaphysical and epistemological questions and the ways that some influential analytic philosophers have tried to answer them.
- You'll get better at thinking like a philosopher. This means thinking clearly about hard questions, taking a rationally critical atti-

tude toward your own and others' answers to those questions, and being willing to go where the best reasons and arguments lead.

- You'll get better at reading like a philosopher. This means identifying what's important and controversial in an author's claims, distinguishing between rational and irrational support for those claims, and noticing the weak spots in their arguments.
- You'll get better at writing like a philosopher. This means being clear about what you're trying to say, giving the best possible rational support for your claims, and anticipating the objections of those who disagree.
- Since these ways of thinking, reading, and writing are useful for dealing with issues outside philosophy, you'll gain some skills that you can use in other courses, and in your everyday life.

## HOW TO GET A GOOD GRADE

Getting an A in this course will require you to do all of the following:

- Do all of the readings before we discuss them in class, and in most cases again afterward.
- Attend class and display your knowledge of the readings on the quizzes and in class discussion.
- Regularly engage in class discussion. Visit my office hours or email me if there's something you'd like to talk about more.
- Work hard at understanding and thinking critically about the theories we discuss.
- Learn to write in the clear, concise, and convincingly argumentative style that philosophers prefer.
- Ruthlessly revise and proofread your essays until they are written in clear and grammatical English.

## 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.

## TENTATIVE READING SCHEDULE

Note: this schedule is subject to change. The course website will contain a current version.

	TUESDAYS	FRIDAYS
1		Aug 29 <i>Introduction</i>
2	Sept 2 Bertrand Russell: <i>The Problems of Philosophy</i> , chs.1-2	Sept 5 Russell, chs. 3-4
3	Sept 9 Russell, chs. 5-6	Sept 12 Russell, chs. 7-8
4	Sept 16 Russell, chs. 9-11	Sept 19 CLASS CANCELLED
5	Sept 23 Russell, chs. 12-15	Sept 26 NO CLASSES CUNY
6	Sept 30 A. J. Ayer: <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i> , chs.1-2	Oct 3 NO CLASSES CUNY
7	Oct 7 Ayer, Ch.3	Oct 10 Ayer, Ch.4
8	Oct 14 Ayer, Ch.5	Oct 17 Ayer, Ch.6
9	Oct 21 Ayer, Ch.7 (optional: Ch.8)	Oct 24 W. V. O. Quine: 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'
10	Oct 28 Quine: 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' (continued)	Oct 31 Quine: 'Ontological Relativity'
11	Nov 4 Quine: 'Ontological Relativity' (continued)	Nov 7 Quine: 'Epistemology Naturalized'
12	Nov 11 Nelson Goodman: <i>Fact, Fiction, and Forecast</i> , ch.1	Nov 14 Goodman, Ch.2
13	Nov 18 Goodman, Ch.3	Nov 21 Saul Kripke: <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , Lecture 1
14	Nov 25 Kripke, ch.2	Nov 28 THANKSGIVING BREAK
15	Dec 2 Kripke, ch.3	Dec 5 David Lewis: <i>On the Plurality of Worlds</i> , ch.1
16	Dec 9 Spillover, Review	Dec 12 Spillover, Review