

# PHILO 268: PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Hunter College | Spring 2017 | Taught by Daniel Harris (danielwharris@gmail.com)

Course website: [danielwharris.com/teaching/268/](http://danielwharris.com/teaching/268/)

## About the Course

What is it to be an intelligent being that can think, sense, feel, and communicate with language? Philosophers and psychologists have answered this question in very different ways during the last century. And although the two disciplines have moved roughly in parallel through various theoretical trends, they articulated each trend in quite different ways.

In the first half of this course, we'll look at some ideas that have come and gone, paying attention to how they were expressed by both psychologists and philosophers. In the second half, we'll take a look at some of the

## Office Hours

My office is 1446HW. My official office hours are Mondays and Thursdays, 4:15–5:15, or by appointment.

## Grade Breakdown

40% Attendance, Participation, and Daily Questions  
30% Two Exams  
30% Research Paper

## Website and Readings

All of the required readings for this course will be posted on the course website:

<http://danielwharris.com/teaching/268>

If you want to know what's required reading for class, go to the website and look at what's posted under that day. You should read it before class, take some notes and formulate some questions about the reading (see below), and bring your copy of the reading to class in either physical or some convenient electronic form, prepared to discuss it.

There are two textbooks books of which we'll read large portions, and so you should probably get copies of them:

- André Kukla and Joel Walmsley (2006): *Mind: A Historical and Philosophical Introduction to the Major Theories*. Hackett Publishing. ISBN: 087220832X
- José Luis Bermúdez (2014): *Cognitive Science: An Introduction to the Science of the Mind*, Second Edition. Cambridge University Press. ISBN: 1107051622

## Attendance, Participation, and Questions

This course will be primarily a discussion course, and so you are required to attend each meeting and participate in the discussion. You should raise questions as they occur to you, and you should try to answer other students' questions before I do. The point of this isn't necessarily to be right every time, but to try out ideas, and to get better at thinking through complex lines of thought as a group.

Of the 40% of your grade that comes from participation, 30% will come from questions about the readings that you prepare before each class. Part of your job, in doing the readings, will be to take notes on which aspects you find confusing or unsatisfying. Before class, you should turn some of these notes into a page containing at least two written questions that you will be prepared to raise for discussion during class. The goal of this exercise is to focus all of our attention on the parts of the readings that are difficult to understand, or that

Each question can be either a comprehension question that points out something in the reading that you had trouble following, or a critical question that points out something about the reading that left you skeptical or intellectually unsatisfied. Either way, it should be the result of a careful attempt to think through something confusing about the reading. So, for example, the following question seems superficial and lazy:

What is the point of Descartes' idea of the evil demon?

On the other hand, the following version of the same question would show that you have taken some time to spell out what it is, more precisely, that is confusing or bothering you about the reading.

I find Descartes' discussion of the evil demon confusing for the following reasons. Evil demons don't exist, and it seems (from later in the *Meditations*) that Descartes doesn't believe in them either. So how can thinking about an imaginary creature that I don't believe in show me something about the way I actually am? Moreover, even if we ignore this problem, I don't see how the evil demon argument gives us reason to doubt anything that the dream argument didn't. So what does this argument show that hasn't already been shown?

Why is this a better question? Because it shows that the author has tried to understand what's going on in the text, and has taken the time to spell out exactly what's confusing them.

Sometimes going through the process of formulating a question like this can help one to come up with an answer. Indeed, the process of reading philosophy well is mainly a matter of stopping to ask oneself as many questions of this kind as possible during the reading process. This slows you down, but it also gives you a better and more critical understanding of the text as a result. And, even if formulating the question carefully doesn't help you to figure out the answer on your own, it will certainly make for a better class discussion.

I will give each your questions a grade of either 0 (fail), 1 (pass) or 2 (nice work!) based on the following criteria:

- Is your question the result of an earnest attempt to read and understand the text, or does it suggest that you have either not read the text carefully?
- Have you thought the question through and made an effort to articulate the source of your confusion, or is the question superficial?
- Is the question formulated in clear, grammatical English, and is it easy to read and understand, or is it unclear what you're asking?
- Did you raise the question and make it clear what was confusing at the appropriate point in class, and follow up with further engagement in the discussion?

You should either hand in a paper copy of your questions at the beginning of class (before we've discussed them), or email me a copy before class begins. Make sure to keep a copy for yourself, so that you can raise them during class.

## Exams

We'll have two exams during class time—one on about March 6th, and the other on May 15<sup>th</sup>. These tests will consist of questions in a variety of formats, including multiple choice, short answer, and short essay questions. Each of these tests will be worth 15% of your grade.

## Research Paper

At the end of the semester, you'll be expected to write a research paper. The purpose of this paper will be for you to take a deeper dive into a debate that we touch on in class, or that is related to something we'll study. Your job will be to find the major primary sources on this debate, read them, and explain how the arguments for both sides work. If you think that one side of the debate is winning, you should explain why. If you think the debate is unsettled, you should explain what kind of further evidence would help to settle it.

## Rough Schedule

During the first part of the course—until around the middle of March—we'll look at some of the ideas about what the mind is that were influential in the early 20th Century: Cartesianism, Introspectionism, Psychoanalysis, and Behaviorism. This will follow chapters 1–5 of Kukla & Walmsley's book, with some supplementary readings.

After that, we'll focus on the early development and central ideas of cognitive science, with particular attention to how it explains human language use. During this part of the course, we'll learn about functionalism, the computational theory of mind, levels of explanation, modularity, artificial intelligence, connectionism, and other related topics. These topics are covered in Chapters 6–8 of Kukla and Walmsley, and in the sections of Bermúdez that we'll read. We'll also look at various primary sources.

For a detailed schedule of readings (and to download them), look at the course website. And check back often, as the schedule may change a bit as we go.

## 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.