

PHILO 268: MIND, LANGUAGE, AND COGNITION

Hunter College | Spring 2019 | Taught by Daniel Harris (danielwharris@gmail.com)

Course website: 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 take a historical tour of ways that we have thought about the human mind over the last 100 years. Topics will include Cartesian dualism, introspectionism, psychoanalysis and behaviorism. In the second half of the course, we'll consider some of the main ideas that have guided the turn toward cognitive science, including functionalism, the mind-brain identity theory, the computational theory of mind, artificial intelligence, and deep learning. Throughout both halves of the course, we'll continually return to language as an example of a psychological capacity that a good theory of the human mind should explain.

Office Hours

My office is 1446HW. My official office hours are Tuesdays, 3:30–4:30, or by appointment.

Grade Breakdown

10% Participation
30% Daily Questions
30% Two Take-Home 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 is one textbook that we'll read all (or nearly all) of, and you may want to buy a copy of that. It's about \$12 on

Amazon, or \$5 used. You can also just get a PDF on the website if you'd like.

- André Kukla and Joel Walmsley (2006): *Mind: A Historical and Philosophical Introduction to the Major Theories*. Hackett Publishing. ISBN: 087220832X

Attendance, Participation, and Questions

Although I will do some lecturing, this course is meant to be 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. It's not possible to learn philosophical concepts without practice applying them yourself. Class is your chance to do that.

30% of your grade 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 you find intellectually unsatisfying. I expect you to raise these questions at the appropriate times during class discussion, so that we can all learn from a discussion about them.

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 is 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?

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 you 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 help you to raise it in class in a way that will lead us all to an answer.

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 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 take-home example—one due on March 8th, and the other on May 14th. These tests will consist of short essay questions about topics covered in the readings and in class. Each of these 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.

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.

	TUESDAYS	FRIDAYS
1	(no class)	January 25 Introduction
2	January 29 Kukla and Walmsley: <i>Mind</i> , ch.1 Optional Secondary Reading: Descartes: <i>Meditations</i> 1+2	February 1 Kukla and Walmsley: <i>Mind</i> , ch.2
3	February 5 Kukla and Walmsley, ch.3	February 8 Kukla and Walmsley, ch.4 Popper: 'Conjectures and Refutations', §§1-2
4	February 12 No Class (Lincoln's Birthday)	February 15 Rudolf Carnap: 'Psychology in Physical Language'
5	February 19 Hilary Putnam: 'Brains and Behavior'	February 22 Kukla and Walmsley, ch.5
6	February 26 Kukla and Walmsley: §§6.1-6.2 Noam Chomsky: Review of <i>Verbal Behavior</i> by B. F. Skinner (excerpt)	March 1 Kukla and Walmsley: §6.3 J. J. C. Smart: 'Sensations and Brain Processes'
7	March 5 Kukla and Walmsley: §§6.4-6.5 Hilary Putnam: 'The Nature of Mental States'	March 8 Kukla and Walmsley: §§7.1-7.2 Daniel Dennett: True Believers First Take-Home Exam Due
8	March 12 Kukla and Walmsley: §§7.3-7.4 Andy Clark: <i>Mindware</i> , ch.1	March 15 Kukla and Walmsley: §§7.5-7.6 Janet Dean Fodor: Comprehending Sentence Structure
9	March 19 Lila Gleitman and Elissa Newport: The Invention of Language by Children	March 22 Stephen Laurence and Eric Margolis: The Poverty of the Stimulus Argument
10	March 26 Justin Garson: Evolution and Psychology	March 29 Justin Garson: Nature and Nurture
11	April 2 Kukla and Walmsley: §7.7 Gideon Lewis-Kraus: The Great A.I. Awakening	April 5 Kukla and Walmsley: §§7.8-7.9 John Searle: Minds, Brains, and Programs
12	April 9 Kukla and Walmsley: §8.1 José Bermudez: Cognitive Science, ch.8	April 12 Kukla and Walmsley: §8.2 Gary Marcus: Artificial General Intelligence: Why Aren't We There Yet?
13	April 16 TBD	
April 19-28: Spring Break		
14	April 30 Jonathan Haidt: The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail	May 3 Tamar Szabo Gendler: Alief in Action
15	May 7 TBD	May 10 TBD
16	May 14 TBD Second Take-Home Exam Due	