

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

TAUGHT BY DANIEL HARRIS | danielwharris@gmail.com

course website: danielwharris.com/teaching/364/

username: hunter

password: language

ABOUT THIS COURSE

Language has been a central topic in philosophy since the start 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 survey what I think are some of the most interesting and important contributions. We'll read a mix of classic and contemporary texts about how language is processed by the human mind, how meanings arise out of social interaction, how we manage to convey things that go beyond the literal meanings of our words, some of the differences between animal and human communication, and recent developments in artificial intelligence.

WEBSITE AND READINGS

All of the required readings will be available on the course website:

danielwharris.com/teaching/364/

username: hunter

password: language

We won't be using Blackboard for this course.

OUR DISCORD SERVER

I have created a Discord server for our class, which you can get to by clicking on this link:

<https://discord.gg/tKNbPuRpmz>

I recommend installing the Discord app on your computer and turning on notifications for our server.

Discord is a free tool for group communication. We will use it as a place where you will submit assignments and communicate with me and other members of the class. You must have access to Discord in order to participate in the course.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation: 20%

Critical-feedback assignments: 40%

First paper: 15%

Second Paper: 25%

CRITICAL-FEEDBACK ASSIGNMENTS

You will be expected to submit a critical-feedback assignment by 11:59pm on the night before each class. You will submit it via Discord, in the appropriate channel for that day. For example, for the class on January 29th, you should post it by 11:59pm on January 28th in the #jan29 channel in our Discord server.

Your critical feedback should take the form of a paragraph in which you engage critically with the required reading. This could mean several things: you could pose a detailed question about something that confused you or that you found intellectually unsatisfying in the reading. You could raise an objection to something that you read. Or you could find and link to a piece of research that undermines or adds a further source of support to something in the reading, and explain how what you're linking to could improve our understanding of the day's text. In general, I will evaluate these assignments by looking for evidence that you have carefully read and thought about the required readings, including what is confusing or unconvincing about them.

If you have submitted a critical-feedback assignment on time and it meets the required standards, I will mark it as completed in order to indicate that you have completed the assignment and received full credit. (If your assignment is below the standard to receive credit, I will let you know why privately.) I will sometimes respond with written comments, but the main venue in which you should seek responses to your critical feedback is during class discussion.

Part of the purpose of the critical-feedback assignments is to encourage you to read in a critical way, continually asking yourself whether you understand and are convinced by what you are reading, and to articulate whatever skepticism and criticisms you might have of it. It would be a good idea to take notes as you go. A second purpose of the assignment is to encourage you to show up to class prepared to raise questions about and criticisms of the reading. I will sometimes show portions of your feedback on the projector screen and ask you to elaborate on what you said.

There will be approximately 23 of these assignments in total. Each one is worth ~2% of your overall grade in the course. However, I will drop your lowest three grades, so you can miss

three before this will affect your grade in the course. In total, these critical-feedback assignments will make up 40% of your grade in the course.

PARTICIPATION

This is a discussion class. Most of each meeting will be taken up by a conversation about that day's required reading, together with your critical-feedback assignments. You are expected to arrive to each class having read the text, and prepared to summarize, ask questions about, and critique it during class.

Some of the main readings are very difficult, and you should expect them to take a long time to read per page. But struggling through the readings is your most important duty in this course. Do not take it lightly.

PAPERS

40% of your grade will be based on two papers that you write during the semester, one due about halfway through the semester and the other due at the end. Your goal in these assignments will be to critically engage in a deeper way with the material that we cover in class, and also with some of the other literature on the topic that you choose.

LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY

Assignments will lose 10% of their value for every day that they are late.

HOW TO CONTACT ME

Always check the website for information about what to do before each class. Also please turn on notifications for Discord, and ask questions in the #general channel there that I or the other members of the class might answer. If you have an urgent question or concern, it's best to email me.

UPDATE YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS

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.bcc.cuny.edu/campus-resources/bursar/update-your-information/>

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.

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>

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

This schedule will definitely change! Always check what to read on the course website, and don't rely on this.

Mondays	Thursdays
	January 25th Introduction
January 29th Language as a psychological structure Chomsky, Syntactic Structures (excerpt) Chomsky, Aspects of the Theory of Syntax (excerpt)	February 1st Formal Semantics Larson and Segal, "The Nature of Semantic Theory"
February 5th Reference as a conceptual capacity Frege, <i>On Sense and Reference</i> (excerpt) Russell, <i>Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description</i>	February 8th Language as an innate structure Gleitman and Newport, "The Invention of Language by Children"
February 12th No Class (Hunter College Closed)	February 15th Animal Syntax and Semantics Hurford, <i>The Origins of Grammar</i> , pp.1-24
February 19th No Class (Hunter College Closed)	February 22nd Language as a Social Activity Wittgenstein, <i>Philosophical Investigations</i> , §§1-38
February 26th Language as a Social Activity Kripke, Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language	February 28th (Wednesday) No Class (Professor Away) February 29th No Class (Professor Away)
March 4th Performativity Austin, <i>How to do Things with Words</i> (excerpt)	March 7th Speech Acts Austin, <i>How to do Things with Words</i> (excerpt)
March 11th Reference as a Social Activity Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i>	March 14th Meaning and Use Grice, "Meaning" Scott-Phillips, <i>Speaking our Minds</i> (excerpt)
March 18th Formal System *and* Social Activity Lewis, "Languages and Language"	March 21st Language as a Game with Rules Lewis, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game"
March 25th Animal Pragmatics Armstrong, "Provincialism in Pragmatics"	March 28th Animal Pragmatics Tomasello, <i>Origins of Human Communication</i> (excerpt)
April 1st Insinuation Camp, "Insinuation, Common Ground, and the Conversational Record"	April 4th Bullshit 1 Frankfurt, "On Bullshit"
April 8th Bullshit 2 Cohen, "Complete Bullshit"	April 11th Metaphor and Ineffability Camp, <i>Metaphor and that Certain 'Je Ne Sais Quoi'</i>
April 15th The Limits of Effability Buchanan, <i>A Puzzle about Meaning and Communication</i>	April 18th Meaning Negotiation 1 Ludlow, <i>Living Words</i> (excerpt)
April 22nd No Class (Spring Break)	April 25th No Class (Spring Break)
April 29th No Class (Spring Break)	May 2nd Meaning Negotiation 2 Fricker, <i>Hermeneutic Injustice</i>
May 6th Language and Artificial Intelligence 1 TBD	May 9th Language and Artificial Intelligence 2 TBD
May 15th TBD TBD	