

PHIL 364 | SPRING 2019 | HUNTER COLLEGE
PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE
TAUGHT BY DANIEL HARRIS | TUESDAY+FRIDAY | 2:10-3:25

course website: danielwharris.com/teaching/364/

office: 1446HW hours: after class or by appointment

ABOUT THE COURSE

Language has been a central topic in philosophy since the turn of the 20th Century. We will study the development of this field in roughly chronological order, beginning with Frege in the 1870's and continuing up until (almost) the present.

Rather than try to give a comprehensive overview of every issue and debate (impossible!), our approach will be to do a weekly collaborative close reading of one seminal text, supplemented by lectures about the texts' historical context.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Participation: 25%

Weekly Summaries and Questions: 25%

Expository Paper: 20%

Critical Paper: 30%

READINGS AND WEBSITE

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

danielwharris.com/teaching/364

username: hunter

password: language

CLASS STRUCTURE AND MATERIALS

The course is divided into approximately 13 units, each taking up two days of class time. Each unit focuses on a main reading, and will have several additional readings available as well.

PARTICIPATION

This is a seminar-style class. Most of each session will be taken up by a detailed, section-by-section discussion of the main reading. I anticipate that it will take us most of two sessions to get through each of these readings.

You are expected to arrive to the first session on each unit having carefully studied the main reading, 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. If you come to class ill-prepared, or do not participate in class discussion, your participation grade will suffer.

Each unit's additional readings play several roles. Some are there to help you to understand the more difficult main readings. Others give important philosophical or historical context. These readings will not be the focus of our intensive discussions, but I will sometimes reference them in brief lectures at the beginning or end of units in order to show how the main readings fit into the broader context of the course.

Attendance is mandatory. If you miss more than two classes without a very good excuse, your participation grade will be affected.

WEEKLY SUMMARIES AND QUESTIONS

On the day before we begin each unit, you are required to submit:

1. A summary of the readings, with an emphasis on what you take to be their main theses and arguments.
2. A list of questions about points in the readings that you find confusing or philosophically unmotivated.
3. Answers to your previous week's questions, based on what you've learned from class discussion.

Your summary and questions should be emailed to me no later than noon on the day before our first day of the unit. (For example, we will begin discussing Frege on Tuesday, January 29th, and so your summary and questions are due by noon on Monday, January 28th.)

The point of these weekly assignments is twofold: (i) if done well, it will force you to study and engage with the readings very carefully; and (ii) it will encourage you to formulate clear questions about the readings and to use class discussion to find answers. This means that your questions should be the result of an honest and extensive attempt to understand the readings, not just whatever confused you on a first pass. I will grade your weekly assignments based on the evidence they give that you are doing these things. I will grade each one on a scale from A to F.

EXPOSITORY PAPER

Your job in the expository paper is to clearly explain the arguments and philosophical context of one of the main readings. This means that you will have to (i) clearly explain the reading's main thesis or theses, (ii) explain the author's arguments, (iii) explain how defending this thesis fits into the author's broader philosophical project and theoretical viewpoint. The first two of these aims requires that you have a deep understanding of the reading that you choose. The third requires that you go beyond the main reading into the additional readings and perhaps further primary and secondary sources in order to understand the author's broader aims.

The expository paper should be approximately 3000 words long. It will be due in class on Monday, March 26th.

CRITICAL PAPER

Your critical paper should be a sustained criticism of one of the claims that we have encountered in the course. To do this well, you will have to carefully explain the claim, clearly explain the arguments for it that we've encountered, critique these arguments, and also give your own argument for that the claim is false.

In addition to having read all of the relevant required readings for class, you'll be responsible for understanding some of other philosophical literature that's relevant to your topic. This means that you should research what authors other than those we've read in class have to say about a topic. There is no specific number of works you need to cite, but you should talk to me about whether you've covered enough of the bases well before the due date.

This essay should be approximately 4000 words long. It will be due by email one week after the last class, on May 21st.

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 SCHEDULE, MAIN READINGS

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

Jan 29 (T) & Feb 1 (F)

Unit 1. Frege on Sense and Reference

Frege: 'Sense and Reference'

Feb 5 (T) & Feb 8 (F)

Unit 2. Russell's Theory of Descriptions

Russell: 'On Denoting'; 'Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description'

Feb 15 (F) & Feb 19 (T)

Unit 3. Verificationism and Logical Positivism

Ayer: *Language, Truth, and Logic* (excerpt)

Feb 22 (F) & Feb 26 (T)

Unit 4. Quine

Quine: 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'; *Word & Object* (excerpt)

Mar 1 (F) & Mar 5 (T)

Unit 5. Wittgenstein 1: Language Games

Wittgenstein: *Philosophical Investigations* (excerpt)

Mar 8 (F) & Mar 12 (T)

Unit 6. Wittgenstein 2: Rule Following

Kripke: *On Rules and Private Language* (excerpt)

Mar 15 (F) & Mar 19 (T)

Unit 7. Austin on Speech Acts

J. L. Austin: *How to do Things with Words* (excerpt)

Mar 22 (F) & Mar 26 (T)

Unit 8. Strawson on Referring

P. F. Strawson: 'On Referring'

Mar 29 (F) & April 1 (T)

Unit 9. Grice on Meaning

H. P. Grice: 'Meaning'

April 5 (F) & April 9 (T)

Unit 10. Grice on Implicature

H. P. Grice: 'Logic and Conversation'

April 12 (F) & April 16 (T)

Unit 11. Kripke on Reference

Saul Kripke: *Naming and Necessity* (excerpt)

April 30 (T) & May 3 (T)

Unit 12. Generative Linguistics

Noam Chomsky: *Knowledge of Language* (excerpt)

May 7 (T) & May 10 (T)

Unit 13. Compositional Semantics

Reading TBD