

Teaching Statement

Josh Armstrong

Learning flourishes in the context of discussion. This is not an empty platitude. For instance, studies conducted by the psycholinguist Herbert Clark and his collaborators (Clark and Schober (1989)) have shown that over-hearers in a conversation understand less of what is being said than those who can actively engage in a conversation by asking questions or by requesting clarification.

My approach to teaching centers on my desire to get students engaged. I aim for my students to leave my classes: better able to think and write, better able to ask hard questions and press for good answers, and better able to pursue the intellectual excitement and reward that comes from philosophy done well. In this model, learning becomes inextricable from learning-how to question and learning-how to disagree.

During my time at the University of Pennsylvania and, more recently, at UCLA, I have taught a diverse range of classes at all levels of the curriculum. Whether in the context of large (300 person) lectures, upper division courses, or graduate seminars, I have found that a discursive approach to teaching produces an exceptional solidarity among classmates in the midst of productive disagreement. Students learn to amplify, refine, and complicate the thoughts of their colleagues and to bring that same generous precision to their own analytic work. By understanding themselves as responsible for both their own and others' learning, students show curiosity about the ideas of others, as well as a healthy agnosticism regarding the stability of their own ideas.

An interactive classroom is a two-way street, requiring as much from me as from my students. As such, I begin each class by reminding students that our work together is both collaborative and cumulative. I often begin classes by raising simple questions, such as "How should we begin?" or "What should we be sure to discuss?" I invite students to identify and describe salient aspects of the material and to propose effective ways of managing class time. During discussion, I guide and shape the conversation by encouraging students to use one another as intellectual resources. Although interaction and discussion are often easier in smaller classes, it can also be achieved in large lecture classes.

My enthusiasm for teaching philosophy is rooted in my own passion for the subject. My interests in philosophy are broad, and they intersect with linguistics,

psychology, and biology. I thus emphasize to my students that philosophical problems typically cross departmental boundaries and methodologies. I firmly believe that a philosophy department's role in the life of the university is not simply to train philosophical experts. Rather, it is to help students recognize, confront, and think critically about the most difficult questions we face as individual agents and as part of a living community of human and non-human beings.

I am very proud of my record of teaching during my time at UCLA. Enrollment for my classes has consistently been high, and the scores for my teaching evaluations have consistently been above the average for my department. This is in spite of the fact that my classes are consistently hard, both in the sense of covering difficult and highly demanding material and in the sense of requiring that students do a heavy amount of reading and writing.

At the undergraduate level, I have taught a broad range of classes at UCLA—from regularly taught classes such as *Philosophy of Mind and Language and Communication*, to less frequently offered classes such as *Philosophy of Social Sciences* and *Philosophy of Biology*. I am particularly proud of my role in expanding the lower-division curriculum by helping to create two completely new lower-division courses. The first of these courses, *Meaning and Communication*, provided a much-needed lower-division course centered on issues in philosophy of language. Given the difficulty and abstractness of the subject matter of philosophy of language, the course presents something of a pedagogical challenge. However, I have found it rewarding to find ways of making highly complex aspects of my research accessible to students with no prior background in philosophy. The second of these courses, *Language and Identity*, is one of the few classes offered by the Philosophy Department that is cross-listed with any other Department on campus (Linguistics, in this case), and it was also the first course offered by the Department to satisfy the UC-wide Diversity Requirement. I have been extremely gratified and moved by students' deep engagement with this course.

At the graduate level, I have been extremely active in graduate teaching and training. My commitment to graduate instruction is perhaps best reflected in the large number of students I have advised, even while I was still an Assistant Professor. All told, I have served as dissertation chair or co-chair for four students and as a committee member for no fewer than fifteen students. These dissertations span a highly diverse set of topics, such as: game-theoretic approaches to social equality, the nature of language

revitalization, the ethics of profound intellectual disabilities, the nature of autobiography, the ethics of emotional labor, and the history of Aristotle.

Teaching is truly the lifeblood of the University, and teaching has been at the center of my own approach as a scholar. I look forward to continuing to play an active role as a teacher and advisor throughout my career.

Sample Syllabi

Phil M 24/M7: Language and Identity



Time: Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30—10:45 a.m.
Place: UCLA ONLINE
Professor: J. Armstrong
Email: jarmstrong@humnet.ucla.edu
Office: UCLA ONLINE
Office Hours: Thursdays, 11-Noon
TAs: Sev Gugumcu, sgugumcu@humnet.ucla.edu
Jacob Reid, jreid@humnet.ucla.edu

Course Overview

What is the relationship between language and our sense of ourselves as individuals? How do we use it to perceive or shape the identity of others? In this course, we will explore the impacts of language on both the individual and society. Specific attention will be paid to the role of language in the subordination of women, ethnic/racial minorities, and, in some cases, incitement to violence through hate speech. The course will serve as a good foundation for students of linguistic theory, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and communication studies.

Course Difficulty

While there are no prerequisites for this course, it will be intellectually demanding—requiring you to master novel theoretical concepts and critically engage with complex arguments in your own writing. In short: the class is not an easy A. As with many other courses, to do well in Phil M 24/M7 you will need to:

- Attend lectures/sections regularly *and take notes*;
- Complete *all* the course readings;
- Work hard on each of the exams, and *submit them on time*.

But although necessary, all of this is not sufficient for doing well. This class is not about memorizing facts or correctly reproducing slogans; this class is about developing your own opinions and critical perspective on the topics discussed and enriching your ability to articulate and defend those opinions in a written form. *Students who are prepared to work hard, challenge themselves, and attend lecture regularly will do well.*

Course Requirements

1. **2 Midterms** (4-6 pages each), 25% of final grade each.
2. **Cumulative Final Exam** (5-8 pages each), 35% of final grade.
3. **Attendance and Participation**, 15% of final grade.
4. **Be familiar with and abide by UCLA's policy on academic and intellectual integrity and their in-person COVID-19 protocols:**
<http://www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/dos/students/integrity/>
http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Code_choice.php

***Well-being always comes first.** We all go through challenging times during the quarter, and our current times are especially difficult. There is lots of help out there, both within the University and the wider community. Please get in touch with me if you would like more information about these resources

****Students needing an academic accommodation based on a disability should either contact me or the Office for the Center for Accessible Education located at (310) 825-1501 or A255 Murphy Hall. When possible, students should contact the CSA within the first two weeks of the term as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information visit www.cae.ucla.edu**

Learning Objectives

- Increased ability to think critically about intellectually and morally difficult arguments and ideas.
- Increased ability to interpret complex texts accurately and analyze them both logically and charitably.
- Increased ability to communicate precisely and concisely in both writing and speech.
- Familiarity with central concepts in the study of language and its use, such as *semantics, pragmatics, social convention, common ground, silencing*, etc.

Schedule of Readings

(subject to change; please check CCLE for the most up-to-date info on weekly readings)

Week 0: Introduction

Sept 23: Introduction
N. Chomsky, "Language and Freedom."

Week 1: The Human Linguistic Niche

Sept 28: A. Clark, "Word, Niche, and Super-Niche."

Sept 30: C. Hayes, "Language."

Week 2: The Interdependence of Thought and Language

Oct 5: D. Slobin "From "thought and language" to "thinking for speaking."

Oct 7: L. Gleitman and A. Papafragou, "Language and Thought."

Week 3: Communication in Language Games

Oct 12: J. Locke, "On Words"
P. Grice, "Meaning"

Oct 14: P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation"

Week 4: Context and Cultural Common Ground

Oct 19: H. Clark, "Communal Lexicons"

Oct. 21: H. Clark, "Communal Lexicons"

Oct. 22: MIDTERM DUE

Week 5: Language, Scorekeeping, and Sexuality

Oct. 26: C. Roberts, "Context in Dynamic Interpretation"

Oct 28: R. Langton and C. West Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game

Week 6: Discursive Injustice

Nov 2: Q. Kukla, "Performative Force, Convention, and Discursive Injustice."

Nov 4: I. Maitra, "Subordinating Speech."

Week 7: Postcolonial Pragmatics I

Nov 9: A. Cabral, "Identity and Dignity in the National Liberation Struggle."

L Kofi Bright and O. Taiwo, "Discourse Power"

Nov. 11: No Class

MIDTERM #2 DUE

Week 8: Postcolonial Pragmatics II

Nov 16: L. Tirrell, "Genocidal Language Games."

Nov18: L. Tirrell, "Genocidal Language Games."

Week 9: Free Speech

Nov 23: S. Schiffrin, "A Thinker Based Approach to Free Speech"

Nov 25: No Class

Week 10: Language Preservation

Nov 30: E. Nowak, "Multiculturalism and Language Preservation"

Dec 2: Review

Dec 10: FINAL EXAM DUE

Time: Mondays and Wednesdays, 11:00-12:15

Place: ZOOM

Professor: J. Armstrong (jarmstrong@humnet.ucla.edu)

Office: ZOOM

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 12:30—2:00 pm., and by appointment

Course Overview

The philosophy of biology is a foundational inquiry into the nature and scientific understanding of living systems and their evolution over time. Philosophy 137 provides students with an introduction to the themes and methods of contemporary philosophy of biology. In this class, in particular, we will focus our readings and discussions on philosophical questions concerning biological evolution in general, and human evolution in particular. More specifically, we will explore the status and implications of the so-called *extended evolutionary synthesis*. The extended evolutionary synthesis aims to understand evolutionary theory in a way that is integrated not only with modern genetics but also with more expansive objects of study such as *development, niche construction, phenotypic plasticity, and culture*. In the first half of the class, we will work toward an understanding of the main claims and motivations of the extended evolutionary synthesis in the general context of evolutionary biology. In the second half of the class, we will work toward applying the tools provided by the extended evolutionary synthesis to debates concerning the nature of human evolutionary history.

Course Materials

The textbook for this course is *Evolution in Four Dimensions* by Eva Jablonka and Marion Lamb (MIT Press, 2013). However, I plan to make all of the course readings available digitally through the course CCLE page. Please check the course CCLE page regularly for updates.

Course Difficulty

While there are no prerequisites for this course, it will be intellectually demanding—requiring you to master novel theoretical concepts and critically engage with complex arguments in your own writing. In short: the class is not an easy A. As with many other courses, to do well in Phil 137 you will need to:

- Attend lectures regularly *and take notes*;
- Complete *all* the course readings;
- Work hard on each of the exams, and *submit them on time*.

But although necessary, all of this is not sufficient for doing well. This class is not about memorizing facts or correctly reproducing slogans; this class is about developing your own opinions and critical perspective on the topics discussed and enriching your ability

to articulate and defend those opinions in a written form. *Students who are prepared to work hard, challenge themselves, and attend lecture regularly will do well.*

Course Requirements

5. **Eight Question Responses** (50% of final grade)
6. **The Cumulative Final Exam** (50% of final grade)
7. **Be familiar with and abide by UCLA's policy on academic and intellectual integrity:** <http://www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/dos/students/integrity/>
http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Code_choice.php

Weekly Question Responses are one-page (400-600 word) responses to a weekly question, designed to develop students' understanding of central concepts and arguments discussed in the readings and lecture. In order to get *feedback*, these responses must be submitted by Friday, before 5:00 pm via CCLE on the week they are posted. In order to get *full-credit*, all eight responses must be submitted by Friday, Dec. 11 before 5:00 pm via CCLE.

The Cumulative Final Exam is a longer (6-9 page) untimed exam in which students answer a series of questions concerning material discussed throughout the course.

***Well-being always comes first.** We all go through challenging times during the quarter, and our current times are especially difficult. There is lots of help out there, both within the University and the wider community. Please get in touch with me if you would like more information about these resources.

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Schedule of Readings

(Subject to change! Check the weekly readings on the CCLE page for the most up to date

indications of the syllabus. Readings marked with a double star are required those without it are suggested.)

Section I: Evolution and Inheritance

Week 1: Life, Biology, and Their Philosophies

Oct. 5: P. Godfrey-Smith, "Philosophy and Biology"
J. Radcliffe-Richards, "Human Nature after Darwin."

Oct 7: Carol Cleland and Christopher Chyba, "Does 'Life' Have a Definition?"

Week 2: Variations and Populations

Oct 12: E. Mayr, "Typological versus Population Thinking."

Oct 14: [Pre-Recorded Lecture]
E. Sober, "Evolution, Population Thinking, and Essentialism."

Week 3: Inheritance and Natural Selection

Oct 19: R. Lewontin, "Adaptation."
P. Godfrey-Smith, "Evolution and Natural Selection."

Oct 21: P. Godfrey-Smith, "Adaptation, Construction, and Function."

Week 4: Building a Modern Synthesis

Oct 26: **R. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Ch. 1-4).

Oct. 28: **E. Jablonka and M. Lamb, *Evolution in Four Dimensions*, Ch. 1.

Week 5: Updating the Modern Synthesis

Nov 2: **E. Jablonka and M. Lamb, *Evolution in Four Dimensions*, Ch. 2

Nov 4: **E. Jablonka and M. Lamb, *Evolution in Four Dimensions*, Ch.3.

Week 6: Inheritance Beyond the Genome—Development and Culture

Nov 9: **E. Jablonka and M. Lamb, *Evolution in Four Dimensions*, Ch. 4.

Nov 11: **E. Jablonka and M. Lamb, *Evolution in Four Dimensions*, Ch. 5.

Week 7: Humans, Hominids, and Evolution

Nov 16: R. Foley, *Humans Before Humanity*, Chs. 3-4.

Nov 18: R. Foley, *Humans Before Humanity*, Chs. 8-9

Week 8: Gene-Culture Co-Evolution

Nov 23: P. Richardson et al., "Gene-culture coevolution in the age of genomics."

Nov 25: A. Whiten and D. Erdal "The human socio-cognitive niche and its
Evolutionary origins

Week 9: Sex and Gender

Nov 30: J. Roughgarden, "Challenging Darwin's Theory of Sexual Selection."

Dec 2: Elisabeth Lloyd, "Pre-Theoretical Assumptions in Evolutionary Explanations of
Female Sexuality"

Week 10: Race

Dec. 7: John Dupré "What Genes Are, and Why There Are No Genes For Race."
Quayshawn Spencer, "A Radical Solution to the Race Problem."

Dec. 9: Review

Dec. 17: Final Exam Due

Phil 287: Holism and History

Fall 2020, UCLA

Time: Mondays, 2:00—3:50

Place: Dodd Hall, Seminar Room

Professor: Josh Armstrong
Email: jarmstrong@humnet.ucla.edu
Office: ZOOM
Office Hours: By ZOOM appointment

Course Description:

This seminar will explore recent work in the philosophy of language on the nature of linguistic meaning. Particular topics to be discussed include: motivations for semantic holism, historical constraints on linguistic meaning, the nature and philosophical significance of meaning change, and the intersectional character of linguistic communities.

Course Requirements:

All those wishing to participate in the course are expected to be familiar with and to abide by UCLA's policy on academic and intellectual integrity:

<http://www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/dos/students/integrity/>

http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Code_choice.php

Graduate or undergraduate students wishing to take the course for credit will be asked to (i) do the weekly readings and participate in the in-class discussions, (ii) submit a 2 page paper proposal by week 8 of the quarter, and (iii) submit a 8-15 page persuasive paper by the end of the quarter. I will also be holding an optional presentation session during week 11 for those interested.

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Tentative Schedule

(*' designates primary readings.)

October 5: Introduction and Background

*G. Frege, "The Thought"

*L. Michael, "Social Dimensions of Language Change"

October 12: Quine's Problem(s)

*W. Quine, "Two Dogmas"

*W. Quine, *Word and Object*

W. Quine, *The Pursuit of Truth*, Chapter 3

October 19: Meaning Change and Theory Change

*J. Fodor and E. Lepore, *Holism a Shopper's Guide*, Chapters 1-2

*T. Burge, "Concepts, Definitions, and Meaning"

P. Kitcher, "Theories, Theorists and Theoretical Change"

October 26: Rule Following and the Community

***S. Kripke, Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language**

*R. Millikan, "Truth Rules, Hoverflies, and the Kripke-Wittgenstein Paradox"

R. Millian, "Semantics/Pragmatics: Purposes and Cross-Purposes"

November 2: Idiolects and Communities

*N. Chomsky, *Language and Thought*

*D. Lassiter, "Semantic Externalism, Language Variation, and Sociolinguistic Accommodation"

P. Eckert, "Variation, meaning and social change"

November 9: Meanings as Species I

*M. Richard, *Meanings as Species* Chapters 1–3

November 16: Meanings as Species II

*M. Richard, *Meanings as Species* Chapters 4 and 6

November 23: Creoles and Homesign Languages

*S. Mufwene, "Creolization is a social, not a structural, process"

*M. DeGraff, "Creole Exceptionalism and the (Mis)Education of the Creole Speaker"

*L. Gleitman and B. Landau, "Every Child an Isolate: Nature's Experiments in Language Learning"

November 30: Meanings Without Species

*J. Armstrong, "Meanings Without Species"

December 5: Paper Presentations