

NYU Paris

PHIL-UA 9085

Philosophy of Language

Instructor Information

- Instructor name and title: Dr Inés Crespo
- Meeting outside office hours is possible, students are always welcome to contact me to set up an appointment.
- Email address: inescrespo@gmail.com
- Course website: <http://inescrespo.altervista.org/nyu.html>

Course Information

- Course number and section: PHIL-UA 9085
- Course Title: Philosophy of language
- Course Description: The course provides an introduction to contemporary philosophy of language, mainly but not exclusively in the analytic strand. The course is taught in a seminar, discussion-based style, and offered to undergraduate students. The course is envisaged to cover the following topics:
 - Proofs, types of reasoning, language and thought.
 - The arbitrariness of the linguistic sign.
 - Conventionalism vs. naturalism.
 - Logic and the mechanics of deductive reasoning: Aristotelian syllogistics, Boolean algebra, propositional and first-order logic.
 - Proper names. Sense and reference (*Sinn und Bedeutung*).
 - Proper names and definite descriptions. On denoting.
 - Indeterminacy of translation and inscrutability of reference.
 - Rule-following and knowledge of language.
 - Conversation as rational behaviour.
- Co-requisite or prerequisite, if any: None, but students having taken a first course in logic or a first course in philosophy will find it valuable for this class.
- Class meeting days and times: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9h00 (sharp) till 10h30. Classes start on Tue 5 Feb and end on Thu 16 May.
 - Class room number and building: NYU Paris Campus. 57, bv Saint-Germain, 75005 Paris. Room **#NN**.

Course Overview and Goals

The course will allow students to:

- Understand different problems and positions in philosophy of language concerning, i.a., argumentation and proof; linguistic sign; *langue vs langage vs parole*; conventionalism vs naturalism; mathematical idealisations of natural language; sense vs reference; denoting, naming, and describing; radical translation; rule-following; communicative action.
- Acquire an overview of how topics and positions in philosophy of language relate to considerations made in linguistics and psychology.
- Grasp and analyse the consequences that a view on language and meaning may have on neighbouring aspects of philosophical reflection, such as metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.

Students will develop skills in:

- understanding philosophical texts,
- producing and assessing philosophical arguments,
- formulating a research question, a hypothesis, and a methodology in a research project,
- executing a research project in a long essay.

Course Requirements

Class Participation

Students are expected to come to all lectures. Students are expected to read in advance so that they can meaningfully participate in the discussions in class. Students are expected to actively participate in class.

Assignments

There are three (3) homework assignments and a final assignment consisting of two parts: (a) a research project and (b) an argumentative essay based on that project. Assignments should be submitted by email as a PDF by the deadline indicated in the Course Schedule (see below). Assignments you fail to submit get 1 point out of 20.

Homework 1

Study questions on Glymour (2015), part I, ch.1, Plato's *Cratylus* and F. de Saussure (1916). Answers should be given in well-constructed paragraphs of 300-500 words each (not inc. ref. and fn.)

Homework 2

Aristotelian syllogistics, Boole's logical theory, and Frege's first-order logic are artificial devices, mathematical idealisations of natural language, designed to study deduction. The study questions in this guide should help you write a short essay of around 1000 words (not inc. ref. and fn.) in which you discuss the motivations and the limitations you see in this enterprise.

Homework 3

Frege (1892), (1918) and Russell (1905), (1919) are challenging philosophical pieces. Russell (1905) can be seen as a reaction against the Fregean distinction between sense and reference. In class we will discuss Russell (1919), which is a somewhat clearer account of his theory of descriptions originally developed in his (1905). (Russell (1905) will be optional reading.) The study questions in this guide should help you write a short essay of around 1500 words (not inc. ref. and fn.) in which you delve into their discussion. Your essay should present the main tenets of their respective views, motivate them by making explicit the way Russell's theory is a critical reaction on Frege's, and discuss them by assessing the virtues or flaws of their views.

Final assignment: (a) research project and (b) long essay

The final assignment requires you to set up a research project and then write an argumentative essay of 2500-3000 words, based at least one of the following 6 topics related to Quine (1992) (a more concise presentation of radical translation and inscrutability of reference, first presented in Quine (1960)) and Wittgenstein (1953):

1. Radical translation
2. Indeterminacy of translation
3. Inscrutability of reference
4. Practices and meaning
5. Semantic normativity
6. Private language argument

(Here the topics appear in a list, but they are actually intertwined.)

You are allowed and encouraged to relate this topic with other authors, questions, and problems studied in the course.

(a) research project

Submit a research project for the final paper of up to 1000 words, in which you will set up the research plan for the final essay for the course. Bear in mind that the final paper will be 2500-3000 words long. In the project, you will:

- formulate a research question related to one of the topics seen in the course, or to some point of contact between two topics;
- provide arguments that motivate the initial question;
- narrow down this initial question and motivate the choices you make in order to sharpen it;
- formulate an adequate hypothesis;
- elaborate a sketch of a methodology—the concatenation of arguments—by which you can establish the hypothesis;
- provide annotated bibliographic references for three sources you will rely on in your research.

A special requirement for this assignment is that you come at least once to office hours with a (partial) draft of your project. Make an appointment with me by 15 February. The date of the appointment can be any time between 19 February - 26 April.

(b) long essay

Long argumentative essay of 2500-3000 words (not inc. ref. and fn.). The essay's structure will be fixed by in the instructions for the assignment.

Assigned Readings

1. C. Glymour (2015) *Thinking Things Through, An Introduction to Philosophical Issues and Achievements*. Second Edition, 2015. A Bradford Book. Part I, ch. 1, pp. 3-32.
2. F. de Saussure (1916) [1959]: *Course in general linguistics*. C. Bally and A. Sechehaye (eds.), in coll. with A. Reidlinger.. W. Baskin (trans.). Philosophical Library. Introduction: ch. I-V (pp. 4-23). Part 1: ch. 1-II, pp. 65-78. Part 2: ch. I-IV, pp. 101-122.
3. Plato [1997]: *Complete works*. J.M. Cooper (ed.) D.S. Hutchinson (ass.ed.) C.D.C. Reeve (trans. Cratylus) Hackett Publishing Co. Pp. 141-196
4. Glymour (2015), part I, ch. 2, pp. 33-62.
5. Glymour (2015), part I, ch. 4, pp. 91-110 and part III, ch. 12, pp. 287-310.
6. Glymour (2015), part I, ch. 5, pp. 111-134.
7. [G. Frege \(1918\) \[1956\]. The Thought: A Logical Inquiry](#). *Mind, New Series*, Vol. 65, No. 259, pp. 289-311.
8. G. Frege (1892) [1952]: On sense and reference. In *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*. P. Geach and M Black (eds.) M. Black (trans.) Blackwell Publishing. Pp. 56-78.
9. B. Russell (1919) Descriptions. An extract from Chapter XVI of his *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*. London: Allen & Unwin. Reprinted in A.W. Moore, (ed.), *Meaning and Reference*, Oxford University Press, pp. 46-55.
10. W.V.O. Quine (1992): *Pursuit of Truth*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2003. Ch. III. Meaning. Reprinted in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The philosophy of language*. Oxford University Press, 3rd ed. Part VII, ch. 8, pp. 446-455.
11. L. Wittgenstein (1953) [2009]: *Philosophical investigations*. G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker, and J. Schulte (trans.) Rev. 4th ed. by P.M.S. Hacker and J. Schulte. §§138-142: an anti-mentalist argument; §§143-155: what is it to understand the meaning of an utterance?; §§179-202: rules and their application.
12. H.P. Stein (1997). *The fiber and the fabric. An inquiry into Wittgenstein's views on rule-following and linguistic normativity*. University of Amsterdam, ILLC Dissertation Series. Ch. 5.
13. H.P. Grice (1975) [1996] Logic and Conversation. In *Syntax and Semantics*, volume 3, Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan, eds. (New York: Academic Press), pp. 41-58. Reprinted in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The philosophy of language*. Oxford University Press, 3rd ed. Part II, ch. 8, pp. 156-182.
14. J.L. Austin (1961) [1996] Performative utterances. In *Philosophical papers*, J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnock (eds.) 3rd ed. Oxford University Press. Reprinted in A.P. Martinich (ed.) *The philosophy of language*. Oxford University Press, 3rd ed. Part II, ch. 8, pp. 120-129.

Grading

The grade for this course will be determined according to the following formula:

Assignments/Activities	% of Final Grade
Avg Homework assignments	75.00%
Avg Final assignment (a)-(b)	25.00%

A bonus on the final grade—it will be increased by half a letter grade—will be granted to students who sustain

- excellent participation in class during the semester &
- excellent engagement in the discussion during the concluding exercise

Letter Grades

Letter grades for the entire course will be assigned as follows:

Letter Grade	Points	Description
A	16-20	Outstanding
A-	15	Excellent
B+	14	Very Good
B	13	Good
B-	12	Satisfactory
C+	11	Above Average
C	10	Average
C-	9	Below Average
D+	8	Unsatisfactory
D	7	Low Pass
D-	6	Low Pass
F	5	Fail

Course Schedule

Topics and Assignments

Nr.	Week/Date	Topic	Basic Reading	Assignment Due
1	Week 1, Tue 5 Feb 2019	Course intro	This syllabus	
2	Week 1, Thu 7 Feb 2019	Proofs and reasoning	Glymour part I, ch. 1	
3	Week 2, Tue 12 Feb 2019	Linguistic signs	FdS CLG excerpts	
4	Week 2, Thu 14 Feb 2019	The arbitrariness of the sign	FdS CLG excerpts	
	Week 2, TBD	Co-curricular activity	Film N. Aviv	<i>Signer</i>
5	Week 3, Tue 19 Feb 2019	Conventionalism vs. naturalism 1	Cratylus	
6	Week 3, Thu 21 Feb 2019	Conventionalism vs. naturalism 2	Cratylus	
	Week 3, Fri 22 Feb 2019			HW1 by 12h00
7	Week 4, Tue 26 Feb 2019	Aristotle's syllogistics	Glymour part I, ch. 2	
8	Week 4, Thu 28 Feb 2019	Reasoning as the mechanics of thought	Glymour part I, ch. 3	
9	Week 5, Tue 5 Mar 2019	Boole and the algebra of logic	Glymour part I, ch. 4 and 12	
10	Week 5, Thu 7 Mar 2019	Boole and propositional logic	Glymour part I, ch. 4 and 12	
11	Week 6, Tue 12 Mar 2019	Frege, first-order logic and model theory	Glymour part I, ch. 5,	
	Week 6, Wed 13 Mar 2019			HW2 by 12h00
12	Week 6, Thu 14 Mar 2019	Frege, The Thought, propositions	Frege (1918)	
13	Week 7, Tue 19 Mar 2019	Sense and reference: compositionality	Frege (1918)/Frege (1892)	
14	Week 7 Thu 21 Mar 2019	Sense and reference: opaque contexts	Frege (1892)	

Nr.	Week/Date	Topic	Basic Reading	Assignment Due
15	Week 8, Tue 26 Mar 2019	Sense and reference: equality	Frege (1892)	
	Week 6, TBD	Co-curricular activity	Film Truffaut	<i>L'enfant sauvage</i>
16	Week 8, Thu 28 Mar 2019	Definite vs indefinite descriptions	Russell (1919)	
17	Week 9, Tue 2 Apr 2019	Definite descriptions and compositionality	Russell (1919)	
18	Week 10, Thu 4 Apr 2019	Analysis of definite descriptions	Russell (1919)	
	Week 10, Fri 5 Apr 2019			HW3 by 12h00
19	Week 10, Tue 9 Apr 2019	Quine's behaviourism	Quine (1992)	
20	Week 10, Thu 11 Apr 2019	Indeterminacy of translation and of reference	Quine (1992)	
21	Week 11, Tue 16 Apr 2019	Consequences of indeterminacy	Quine (1992)	
22	Week 11, Thu 18 Apr 2019	§§138-142: an anti-mentalist argument	Wittgenstein (1953)/Stein (1997)	
23	Week 12, Tue 23 Apr 2019	§§143-155: what is it to understand the meaning of an utterance?	Wittgenstein (1953)/Stein (1997)	
24	Week 12, Thu 25 Apr 2019	§§179-202: rules and their application	Wittgenstein (1953)/Stein (1997)	
	Week 12-13, TBD	Co-curricular activity	Film M. Apter	<i>Nell</i>
	Week 12, Sat 27 Apr 2019			Final assignment (a) by 12h00
25	Week 13, Tue 30 Apr 2019	Implicatures, formal devices and natural language counterparts	Grice (1975)	

Nr.	Week/Date	Topic	Basic Reading	Assignment Due
26	Week 13, Thu 2 May 2019	The Cooperative Principle and the Maxims.	Grice (1975)	
27	Week 14, Tue 7 May 2019	Calculating implicatures	Grice (1975)	
28	Week 14, Thu 9 May 2019	Performative utterances	Austin (1961)	
29	Week 15, Tue 14 May 2019	Performative utterances vs. descriptions?	Austin (1961)	
	Week 15, Thu 16 May 2019			Final assignment (b) by 9h00
30	Week 15, Thu 16 May 2019	Concluding exercise	All readings, in particular Grice (1975) and Austin (1961)	

Course Materials

Required Textbooks & Materials

- **Reader:** available as a PDF on the course website, might be updated as we move along.
- **Textbook:** Clark Glymour (2015) *Thinking Things Through, An Introduction to Philosophical Issues and Achievements*. Second Edition, 2015. A Bradford Book. ISBN 978-0-262-52720-0. Ideally, you should have the book by 5 February. You can buy it online, or at *Eyrolles* (55-57-61 Boulevard Saint-Germain, 75005 Paris), or during the book sale at NYU Paris. N.B.: We will not be using the entire book, just a some chapters.

Optional Textbooks & Materials

- Optional materials will be posted on the course website. Here is a non-exhaustive list:
 - D. Holdcroft (1991). *Saussure: Signs, System and Arbitrariness*. Cambridge University Press.
 - Aristotle [1989]: *Prior Analytics*. translated, with introduction, notes, and commentary by Robin Smith. Hackett Publishing Company Indianapolis | Cambridge
 - B. Russell (1905): *On denoting*. *Mind*, Vol. 14, No. 56, pp. 479-493
 - W.V.O. Quine (1960): *Word and Object*. MIT Press. Ch.II. Pp. 26-79.
 - W. Aspray (1990). *Computing Before Computers*. Iowa State University Press, Ames, 1990. Ch. I.

- L.T.F. Gamut. *Logic, Language and Meaning, Volume I: Introduction to Logic*, University of Chicago Press, 1991. Translation and revision of *Logica, taal en betekenis I*. Ch.2-3

Resources

- **Access your course materials:** [NYU Classes](https://nyu.edu/its/classes) (nyu.edu/its/classes)
- **Databases, journal articles, and more:** [Bobst Library](https://library.nyu.edu) (library.nyu.edu)
- **Assistance with strengthening your writing:** [NYU Writing Center](https://nyu.mywconline.com) (nyu.mywconline.com)
- **Obtain 24/7 technology assistance:** [IT Help Desk](https://nyu.edu/it/servicedesk) (nyu.edu/it/servicedesk)

Co-curricular Activities

We will watch three films:

- *Signer*, by N. Aviv (2018).
- *L'enfant sauvage*, by F. Truffaut (1970).
- *Nell*, by M. Apted (1994).

Attendance is strongly encouraged but not mandatory, since these activities will be scheduled outside normal class time. A date/time will be collectively decided for each film.

Course Policies

Attendance and Tardiness

- Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student's final course grade for every week's worth of classes missed. Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in harsher penalties including failure.
- Unexcused absences affect students' grades: unexcused absences will be penalized with a 2% deduction from the students' final course grade.
- Absences are excused only for illness, religious observance, and emergencies.

Illness: For a single absence, students may be required to provide a doctor's note, at the discretion of the Associate Director of Academics. In the case of two consecutive absences, students must provide a doctor's note. Exams, quizzes, and presentations will not be made up without a doctor's note.

Religious Observance: Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their instructor and the Academic Office in writing via email one week in advance before being absent for this purpose. If exams, quizzes, and presentations are scheduled on a holiday a student will observe, the Associate Director, in coordination with the instructor, will reschedule them.

Please note: if you are unable to attend class, you are required to email your professors directly to notify them.

Late Assignment

Late submissions will be accepted only with justifiable reasons of health or family emergency.

Academic Honesty/Plagiarism

At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community.

Plagiarism: *presenting others' work without adequate acknowledgement of its source, as though it were one's own. Plagiarism is a form of fraud. We all stand on the shoulders of others, and we must give credit to the creators of the works that we incorporate into products that we call our own. Some examples of plagiarism:*

- *a sequence of words incorporated without quotation marks*
- *an unacknowledged passage paraphrased from another's work*
- *the use of ideas, sound recordings, computer data or images created by others as though it were one's own*
- *submitting evaluations of group members' work for an assigned group project which misrepresent the work that was performed by another group member*
- *altering or forging academic documents, including but not limited to admissions materials, academic records, grade reports, add/drop forms, course registration forms, etc.*

For further information, students are encouraged to check www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

Disability Disclosure Statement

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Class Etiquette

Class starts at 9h00 sharp. This means you are expected to be in the classroom by 9h00.

No cell phones in class. Phubbing is completely unacceptable.

No eating in class.

Laptop computers are admitted in class but only to read texts or take notes. Leisurely use is not admitted. Students will be asked to shut down their laptop immediately if it is apparent that they do not make proper use of it.

Leaving class to go to the bathroom without asking permission or yawning in class is considered rude in France.

Some related academic activities in Paris

Students are encouraged to attend seminars held at different research institutes & departments in Paris. See the programs, for instance, of:

- Parcours philosophique de l'Institut Jean-Nicod (many courses are taught in English):

<http://www.institutnicod.org/etudier-a-l-ijn/parcours-philosophique/>

Other seminars at the Institut Jean-Nicod:

- <http://www.institutnicod.org/seminaires-colloques/>
- The Paris-Diderot LingLunch: http://www.linguist.univ-paris-diderot.fr/lin_glunch.html
- The Wittgenstein seminar at Paris 1: <http://execo.hypotheses.org/3709>
- Different seminars at IHPST: <http://www.ihpst.cnrs.fr/en>

Instructor Bio

- I am an associate member of the Institut Jean-Nicod (CNRS-ENS-EHESS), and a global lecturer at NYU Paris. I am interested in the normative constraints on the linguistic expression of human agents, and in the epistemology of disciplines that are concerned with natural language.