

**Great Philosophers of the 20th Century:
Noam Chomsky
Mind, Language, Politics
DRAFT Syllabus: Subject to Change
Fall 2019**

Gabe Dupre

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Office Hours: 12-2pm Wednesday
Lecture Times: 2-3.50pm Monday and Wednesday
Lecture Location: Public Affairs 2270

Course Overview

Noam Chomsky is, on any metric, one of the most influential thinkers of all time. His earliest work provided the foundations for modern linguistic theory, steering the field away from the then-dominant behaviorist/structuralist approaches to language. This work also provided empirical motivation and a conceptual framework for the fledgling field of cognitive science. In subsequent years he has been responsible for a series of minor revolutions within linguistics, revising and updating our understanding of human natural language. Outside of his core fields, he has also made important contributions to various other fields, from mathematics to philosophy. Alongside his academic career, he has also served as one of the world's leading public intellectuals. He is perhaps as (in)famous for his criticisms of American foreign and domestic policy as he is for his theoretical work.

In this course, we will take a synoptic look at some central themes from Chomsky's thought, focusing on those aspects of his work with the deepest philosophical significance. We will also look at various philosophical criticisms of aspects of Chomsky's program. We will begin by investigating his theory of human language, including his notorious idea of Universal Grammar. We will then turn to his more general understanding of the human mind, and what a scientific account of such an entity must look like. Finally, we will turn to his analysis of geo-politics, focusing on his criticisms of the mutually distorting influence of money and media. I hope, along the way, to convey not merely a series of deep and important ideas, but a coherent, unified picture of humanity and its place in nature.

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 185 you will need to:

- Attend lectures regularly and take (mental or physical) notes;
- Complete all the course readings, slowly and carefully, typically multiple times;
- Work hard on your papers, including proof-reading and re-drafting multiple times, and submit them on time.
- **Optional, but highly recommended:** Meet with me to discuss questions regarding the course material or your paper topics.

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 and section

regularly will do well.

For pro-tips on reading and writing philosophy:

<https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy/>

If you would like further help with writing, please visit the UCLA Undergraduate Writing Center. This service provides free one-to-one feedback on any written assignment. They are excellent, and many previous students have improved their writing drastically with their help.

Course Materials

There will be no official textbook for the course. All of the required readings will be available digitally through the course webpage. Please check the course website regularly for updates.

There are, however, several good books presenting an overview of Chomsky's thought available. Best among them are: John Collins *Chomsky: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Neil Smith *Chomsky: Ideas and Ideals*, and James McGilvray *Chomsky: Mind, Language, and Politics*.

Course Requirements

1. **Paper 1:** 10% of final grade.
2. **Paper 2:** 30% of final grade.
3. **Final Paper Essay Plan:** 10% of final grade.
4. **Final Paper:** 45% of final grade.
5. **Attendance and Participation;** 5% of final grade.
6. **Be familiar with and abide by UCLA's policy on Academic Integrity:** This policy can be found at <http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Academic-Integrity>
 - Students needing an academic accommodation based on a disability should notify the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) located at (310) 825-1501 or A255 Murphy Hall. When possible, students should contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the quarter, as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information visit <https://www.cae.ucla.edu/>
 - Unless requested by the Office for Students with Disabilities, ***The use of computers, phones, and tablets is not allowed in lecture.*** This component of the course's requirements is not intended to be mean or punitive, but rather to aid your understanding — and the understanding of those around you — of the contents of the lectures.

7. **Late assignments:** Late papers will be docked by 1/3 of a letter grade for every 24 hour period after the due date. There will be no credit for late essay plans. Extensions may be granted if you have a valid reason.

Waitlist

In order to keep the class size manageable, and ensure that each enrolled student receives the attention to which they are entitled, I will not be giving out PTE numbers. If you are on the waitlist, the only way for you to get into the class is for someone to drop the class; you are thus advised to find a back-up class as soon as possible.

Classroom Etiquette

Classroom participation is strongly encouraged. The best way to learn philosophy is to *do* philosophy, and this involves discussion and argumentation, in the flesh as well as in written work. Such discussion may get heated and this is OK. However, what is not OK is behavior that discourages other students from engaging. Finding the line between passionate debate and personal attack is a vital skill for anyone in or outside of academia.

All other students in the classroom must be treated respectfully, as peers engaged in a collective activity. Behavior that will not be tolerated includes, but is not limited to: dismissing another student's opinion, talking over another student, personal attacks etc. In short: Don't be a jerk. Class discussion is every student's opportunity to engage with the material, and behavior which impedes this will not be tolerated.

Course Papers

You will be assigned three papers, in increasing order of length and difficulty. The idea is that you will gradually build up your philosophical skills of exegesis, argumentation, and novel contribution to philosophical inquiry. I will provide detailed feedback. In order to do well in this course, you will need to incorporate this feedback into later work.

Paper 1

A prompt for paper 1 will be assigned in the second lecture of week 3, to be submitted by Midnight on Wednesday of Week 4. This paper will be purely exegetical. You will describe a position or argument we have looked at in as clear terms as possible. This paper will be 1-2 pages long double-spaced.

Paper 2

A prompt for paper 2 will be assigned in the first lecture of Week 5, to be submitted by midnight on the Sunday of Week 5. This paper will involve both explaining a particular

debate we have examined, and explaining in detail which side of the debate you find most plausible. This paper will be 3-4 pages long, double-spaced.

Final Paper

For the final paper, the topic will not be assigned (although I am willing to help you find one). Once you have settled on a topic, you must check with me that this topic is suitable. You may choose any topic relevant to the issues we have discussed in this course. As this paper is the largest chunk of your grade of any single piece of work, it is highly recommended that you start thinking about this paper fairly early in the course, and begin discussions with me no later than week 7. An essay plan, of about 1 page, must be submitted by Midnight on Monday of Week 9. This paper should be 5 pages long, double-spaced, and should contribute to the debates we have been discussing in a novel and informed way.

Reading Schedule

Readings marked with a “*” are recommended, but not required. Readings are to be read before lecture.

Week 1: Introduction.

30 September No Required Reading

* Pullum, G. *Ideology, Power, and Linguistic Theory* (2004)

2 October Chomsky, N. *Verbal Behavior: A Review of B.F. Skinner* (1959)

* Collins, J. *Meta-Scientific Eliminativism: A Reconsideration of Chomsky’s Review of Skinner* (2007)

Week 2: A Brief History of Generative Grammar

7 October Smith, N. *Chomsky: Ideas and Ideals* (Chapter 2) (1999)

9 October No New Reading: Smith Continued

Week 3: Linguistics as Psychology

14 October Devitt, M. and Sterelny, K. *Linguistics: What’s Wrong with “The Right View”?* (1989)

Soames, S. *Linguistics and Psychology* (1984)

* Katz, J. *An Outline of Platonist Grammar* (1984)

16 October Please read **at least one** of the following

* Chomsky, N. *Rules and Representations* (1980)

- * Fodor, J. *Some Notes on What Linguistics is About* (1985)
- * Everaert, M et al. *Structures, Not Strings: Linguistics as Part of the Cognitive Science* (2015)
- * Dupre, G. *Linguistics and the Explanatory Economy* (2019)
Paper 1 Assigned

Week 4: Linguistic Nativism

21 October Pietroski, P. and Crain, S. *The Language Faculty* (2012) (Guest Lecture by Torsten Odland)

- * Berwick, R. et al. *Poverty of the Stimulus Revisited* (2011)

23 October Excerpts from Cowie, F. *What's Within? Nativism Reconsidered* (1998)

- * Tomasello, M. *Language is not an Instinct* (1996)
- * Paper 1 Due

Week 5: Internalism

28 October Putnam, H. *The Meaning of "Meaning"* (1975)

Paper 2 Assigned

30 October Chomsky, N. *Language and Nature* (1995)

- * Burge, T. *Psychology and The Environment* (2003)

Week 6: Language Evolution

4 November Pinker, S. and Bloom, P. *Natural Language and Natural Selection* (1990)

1 November Paper 2 Due

6 November Hauser, M. et al. *The Faculty of Language: What is it, Who has it, and How did it Evolve?* (2002)

- * Pinker, S. and Jackendoff, P. *The Faculty of Language: What's Special About It?* (2004)
- * Berwick, R. and Chomsky, N. *Why Only Us?* (Chapter 1) (2015)

Week 7: Mind and Nature

11 November NO CLASS: Veteran's Day

13 November Chomsky, N. *Language as a Natural Object* (2000)

Week 8: Politics

18 November Chomsky, N. *The Responsibility of Intellectuals* (1967)

20 November Chomsky, N. *What Kind of Creatures Are We?* (2015) (Chapter 3)

Week 9: How Things Are

24 November Essay Plan Due

25 November Chomsky, N. *The Dilemmas of Dominance* (2003)

27 November Herman, E. and Chomsky, N. *Manufacturing Consent* (Chapter 1) (1988)

* Chomsky, N. *The Threat of a Good Example* (1992)

Week 10: What Can Be Done?

2 December Chomsky, N. *The Relevance of Anarcho-Syndicalism* (1976)

* Chomsky, N. *Problems of Knowledge and Freedom* (Chapter 2) (1971)

4 December Chomsky, N. *The Case Against B.F. Skinner* (1971)

9 December Final Paper Due