

PHIL 470: Seminar: Metaphysics & Epistemology
Truth and Reality

Spring 2006

Class meeting time: TR 5:30-6:45 pm
Classroom: H 124
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Instructor: Dr. JeeLoo Liu
Office location: H-311A
Office hours: T R 3:45 - 5:15 pm
or by appointment

Text: *Phil 470: Truth and Reality* [A course packet prepared by JeeLoo Liu]
Nelson Goodman: *Ways of Worldmaking* [Hackett]
Hilary Putnam: *The Many Faces of Realism* [Open Court]
W. V. Quine: *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* [Columbia U. Press]
William P. Alston: *A Sensible Metaphysical Realism* [Marquette U. Press]

Course Description: What is “reality”? Do we really know the reality? Is reality simply what we perceive, or is it what we as humans have created together? Is human science *advancing toward* reality, or are we simply shifting from one scientific paradigm to another? Is what we call ‘reality’ constructed out of humans’ conceptual schemes? Is there a moral reality? Do moral truths have objective truth-values? Are our moral judgments simply reflections of our own sentiments or do they reflect the moral reality? This course will focus on the debate between realism and anti-realism. To pave the road to our discussion, we will first look at various theories of truth. What do we mean by ‘truth’? What can serve as our standards of truth? Is truth simply what is assigned as *truth* by convention? Could opposite statements both be *true*? This course will challenge your ordinary conceptions of truth and reality.

Course Objectives:

- (1) To introduce students to the main topics and theories in contemporary epistemology and metaphysics;
- (2) To assist students in developing their own stance on the debate between realism and anti-realism as well as on key issues related to knowledge and truth;
- (3) To teach students some important philosophical techniques of argumentation;
- (4) To improve students’ ability to read critically and to write clearly and precisely.

Grading:

Mid-term exam (in class)	15 %
Final exam (non-cumulative)	15 %
Eight weekly essays (2 pages each) [8 out of 11]	15 %
1 final paper (8-10 pages)	15 %

Presentation of course material	10 %
Presentation of student paper	10 %
Active class participation	20 %
Full attendance	2 points extra credit

To receive a final grade for the course, no portion of your grade can be a “zero”.

COURSE GRADES: Calculated on the following scale

95-100	A	74-76	C
90-94	A-	70-73	C-
87-89	B+	67-69	D+
84-86	B	64-66	D
80-83	B-	60-63	D-
77-79	C+	Under 60	F

Academic Dishonesty:

“Academic dishonesty is comprised of obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for work by the use of any dishonest, deceptive, fraudulent, or unauthorized means.” The most commonly observed form of academic dishonesty is copying others’ writings on the Internet. Even when you are merely borrowing a single sentence from someone else, doing so without proper quotation marks and author-attribution counts as plagiarism. **Students who commit acts of academic dishonesty will automatically fail the course.** Students with questions about how to cite others’ work should see the instructor.

Class Attendance and Participation:

Students must be conscientious about attending classes on a regular basis. Any consecutive absences must be given proper explanation. **You are allowed up to two absences without explanation. After the second absence, every absence will constitute a half-grade reduction in your final grade.** To excuse your absences from that point on, you will need to present credible documentation (busy at work is not an admissible excuse). Class participation includes active discussion in class, raising relevant questions, answering questions, and paying close attention in class. **Everyone (each student as well as the instructor) is responsible for making this class interesting, engaging, and thought-provoking.**

Classroom Etiquettes:

Classroom environment is for the instructor and all students to interact with one another in a professional and intellectual manner. Students are expected to observe common classroom etiquettes. Behavior that interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior. Such behavior includes (but not restricted to)

- (i) constant late arrivals;

- (ii) early departures without proper explanation;
- (iii) chatting with your neighbors during lectures;
- (iv) eating in class;
- (v) doing things unrelated to the course in class, such as reading other books, doing assignments for other courses, or playing with your laptop.
- (vi) **not turning off your cell phone in class.**

Students with repeated disruptive behavior will be asked to leave the classroom.

General Policies:

1. To succeed in this course, you should keep pace with the syllabus. Your regular attendance is strongly emphasized, and you are also expected to finish the reading assignments prior to each class. If you can't make it to class on any given day, you should send me an e-mail explaining the reason. Attendance is highly emphasized in this class. Do not squander your free absences – there are always unexpected things that would prevent you from coming to class on a given day. If you use up your free absences, you will have to take the penalty when you do miss one more class.
2. Everyone must submit one critical discussion question for each reading/session prior to class time (how much earlier before class time will be decided by the class in the first week of semester). The question should be posted on the Blackboard via your Fullerton portal. The question should be thoughtfully composed, and NOT in the nature of inquiring about the meaning of a paragraph, a sentence, or a word, etc. Your question will be viewed by all students in the class. I will print out all questions so that they will be part of the content of our class discussion. These discussion questions will count toward your participation grade (20 %), so please do not submit your question anonymously.
3. All written assignments must be typed, double-spaced, and free of spelling errors.
4. Homework must be handed in **on the assigned date and in person (essays left in my mailbox will be counted as 'late')**. Each homework essay should comprise both an explanation and an evaluation of the author's view. **Do the best you can even when you find the article too difficult to summarize.** The main purpose of these homework assignments is not for me to evaluate you, but for me to assist you. From your essays, I can understand where the difficulties lie and attempt to help you gain more understanding.
5. In this class students will be divided into two groups for homework assignments. If you belong to Group 1, you should hand in your essays on *every* Tuesday; if you belong to Group 2, you should hand in your essays on *every* Thursday. However, if in any given week you know that your schedule conflicts with your group's due date, you can write an essay for the other group. **No essays *after* my lecture on the given article will be accepted and you should write one essay each week.** You are permitted to skip three

- essay assignments without penalty (write 8 out of 11 assignments), or you may write the extra assignments for extra credits (1 point each in the final grade).
6. Homework essays will not be graded individually. They are to be collected at the end of the semester for a total assignment of homework grades. Your grade will depend on the total effort you have put into these essays. I hope you will appreciate the importance of finishing an assigned project on time.
 7. In the first half of the semester, students will team up (two in each group) to give presentation on course materials. The presentation takes about 30 minutes. Presenters should prepare an outline of the presented material as handouts. This is a chance for students to develop their ability to organize and present course materials. **Do not hand in your homework essay on the date of your course material presentation. So, plan ahead.**
 8. In the second half of the semester, students will sign up to give a presentation of their own papers. Your paper will be based on the assigned course materials, with additional secondary readings you find through your own research. You will need to defend your position on the given topic. Each student's paper presentation takes about 35 minutes, which includes 20 minutes reading time and 15 minutes for discussion. This is a chance for students to develop their ability to organize and present their philosophical ideas and be ready to defend them against challenges. **Do not hand in your homework essay on the date of your paper presentation. So, plan ahead.**
 9. You need to hand in the first draft of your paper on the date of your paper presentation. I will give you feedback for further improvement on your paper. The final paper is due on **May 18. A half-grade deduction will be made for each day delayed.** You are encouraged to schedule a paper conference with me to discuss your term paper project.
 10. Exams will be given in the form of essay questions (study questions will be prepared for each exam). **No make-up exam will be given unless you obtain permission from me at least two days in advance or if you present your special reason with acceptable documentation.**
 11. **Students are expected to arrive on time for exams. Late arrivals will not be given time extension.**
 12. **To receive a final grade for the course, students must complete all assignments.** In other words, if you get a “zero” for any of the assignments (paper, exams, homework essays, participation and presentations), you will automatically fail the course.
 13. You are encouraged to meet with me during my office hours, send e-mail messages to me, or call me if you have any question regarding the course.

Syllabus

Date	Content of discussion	Assignments for this class
T 1/31	Introduction	None
R 2/2	Michael Devitt: What Is Realism?	[packet]
T 2/7	Michael Devitt: What is Truth?	[packet]
R 2/9	Michael Devitt: What Has Truth to Do with Realism?	[packet]
T 2/14	John Searle: Does the Real World Exist? Group 1 essay #1	[packet]
R 2/16	William Alston: Realism and the Tasks of Epistemology Group 2 essay #1	[packet]
[The Notion of <i>Truth</i>]		
T 2/21	W. V. Quine: Truth by Convention Group 1 essay #2	[packet]
R 2/23	Alfred Tarski: The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics Group 2 essay #2	[packet]
T 2/28	Alfred Tarski: (Cont'd) Group 1 essay #3	[packet]
R 3/2	Donald Davidson: Truth and Meaning Group 2 essay #3	[packet]
T 3/7	Marian David: Truth as Correspondence Group 1 essay #4	[packet]
R 3/9	Nicholas Rescher: Truth as Ideal Coherence Group 2 essay #4	[packet]
T 3/14	Susan Haack: The Pragmatic Theory of Truth Group 1 essay #5	[packet]

- R 3/16 Paul Horwich: The Deflationary View of Truth
Group 2 essay #5 [packet]
- T 3/21 **Review**
- R 3/23 **Mid-term Exam**
- T 3/28 **Spring Recess**
- R 3/30 **Spring Recess**

[Realism/Antirealism]

- T 4/4 (i) Nelson Goodman: *Ways of Worldmaking*
(ii) Hilary Putnam: Reflections on Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking*
Group 1 essay #6 Goodman: 1-56
[Packet]
- R 4/6 (i) Nelson Goodman: *Ways of Worldmaking*
(ii) Israel Scheffler: The Wonderful Worlds of Goodman
Group 2 essay #6 Goodman: 91-140
[Packet]
- T 4/11 (i) Hilary Putnam: *The Many Faces of Realism*
(ii) Ernest Sosa: Putnam's Pragmatic Realism
Group 1 essay #7 Putnam, Lecture I & II
[Packet]
- R 4/13 Hilary Putnam: *The Many Faces of Realism*
Group 2 essay #7 Putnam, Lecture III & IV
- T 4/18 William Alston: *A Sensible Metaphysical Realism*
Group 1 essay #8 Alston, the whole book
- R 4/20 Michael Dummett: Realism & Anti-Realism
Group 2 essay #8 [packet]
- T 4/25 W. V. Quine: Ontological Relativity
Group 1 essay #9 Quine, 26-68

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| R | 4/27 | W. V. Quine: Natural Kinds
Group 2 essay #9 | Quine, 114-38 |
| T | 5/2 | Donald Davidson: On the Very Idea of A
Conceptual Scheme
Group 1 essay #10 | [Packet] |
| R | 5/4 | (i) Crispin Wright: Quietism
(ii) Richard Rorty: Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry?
Davidson vs. Wright.
Group 2 essay #10 | [Packet]
[packet] |
| T | 5/9 | David Wiggins: Truth, Invention and the
Meaning of Life
Group 1 essay #11 | [packet] |
| R | 5/11 | (i) Simon Blackburn: How to Be an Ethical
Anti-Realist
(ii) Gilbert Harman, Ethics and Observation
Group 2 essay #11 | [Packet]
[Packet] |
| T | 5/16 | Richard Boyd: How to Be a Moral Realist | [Packet] |
| R | 5/18 | Last class: Review and Reflections
<u>Final paper due in class</u> | |

Final Exam: Thursday , May 25 5:00 - 6:50 PM