

PHIL5842 Representation and Reality

Syllabus, Fall Semester 2023

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Basic Information

Level: MA/PhD

Credits: 4 US credits; 8 ECTS credits

Classes: Fall Semester, Wednesdays 08:50-10:30 and Thursdays 17:40-19:20, in Room D-212

Prerequisites: Some experience of contemporary philosophy of language, mind, metaphysics, and familiarity with basic propositional and predicate logic is advisable. Please consult me if you are unsure.

About the Course

This is a course about the relationship between metaphysics and the philosophy of language and mind – the relationship between the study of reality, and the study of how we think and speak about it. The course roughly divides into two parts. In the first part we will focus on debates about the role language has to play in ontology – the study of what exists. In the second part we will focus on the ‘non-representationalist’ movement in 20th and 21st Century philosophy: this embodies the idea that some kinds of language don’t represent the world at all, and that this undermines metaphysical inquiry in those areas.

The goal of this course is to introduce students to cutting edge work in the intersection of metaphysics and language/mind, and get students not only learning about the debates going on but engage in them, in some cases with the authors of the papers discussed.

Learning Outcomes

Students who complete this course will have a broad and deep understanding of some contemporary debates in metaphysics and the philosophy of language and mind, a good sense of where crucial points of disagreement lie within these debates, and the ability to analyse and critically evaluate the most important philosophical arguments in these debates.

Format

Classes will be held on Wednesdays 08:50-10:30 and Thursdays 17:40-19:20 in Room D-212. Classes will involve a combination of lecture and discussion. Readings and suggested discussion questions for each session will be posted on Moodle in advance; handouts will be posted after each class.

In some of the sessions, the author of one of our readings will join for discussion via Zoom. Some have yet to be confirmed; confirmed speakers are listed on the outline below.

All students will be expected to: attend and participate in both seminars each week; complete the reading for each class and prepare for the discussion using the discussion questions; prepare a question for the guest speaker when there is one. Students may be invited to summarise the readings in some sessions.

Assessment

Assessment is via a single essay of max 2000 words for MA students and 4000 words for PhD students. Good participation in class may merit a higher grade in borderline cases.

Course Outline

The first five weeks of the course will focus on the broad debate centred on Quine's view that the linguistic structure of our best theories is a guide to metaphysics. The final seven weeks will focus on the idea that some language might not actually be in the business of representing the world at all, and the potential anti-metaphysical fallout of this big idea.

Here is a week-by-week description. (This may slightly change depending on guest availability)

Week	Title	Brief description
1	Introduction/Quine	Introduction to key ideas; introduction to Quinean metaphysics
2	Non-Existence	The problem of non-existence; Russell's theory of descriptions as a solution. Guest speaker Tim Crane.
3	Against linguistic metaphysics	Further criticisms of Quinean methods; resistance to those criticisms. Guest speaker Matti Eklund.
4	Truthmaking	The idea of truthmaking; different forms of truthmaker theory; criticisms of truthmaker theories.
5	Ordinary language philosophy returns?	Amie Thomasson's <i>Easy Ontology</i> project and criticisms. Guest speaker Tim Button.
6	Non-Representationalism	The idea that some language does not represent the world; the impact of this on metaphysical inquiry.
7	Non-Representational Theories of Meaning	How to account for language, if not via representation. Challenges facing such views and responses to them.
8	Linguistic Pluralism	The idea that language has <i>many functions</i> ; the relevance of this idea to metaphysics. Guest speaker Amie Thomasson.
9	The Basic Anti-Metaphysical Argument	Price's core anti-metaphysical argument; Jackson's challenge to Price. Guest speaker Huw Price.
10	Expressivism vs Moral Metaphysics	Expressivism's attempt to avoid discussing the metaphysics of morality; Terence Cuneo's challenge. Guest speaker Simon Blackburn.
11	"Creeping Minimalism" and Quietism	The threat of minimalism; the possible collapse of realism and anti-realism. Guest speaker Camil Golub.
12	Global Expressivism?	The argument that expressivism really applies to all language, not just some; criticisms of that argument

Reading List – Essentials

This has essential items only; please see the Moodle for a list of background and further readings.

Week 1. Introduction/Quine

Dyke, Heather. *Metaphysics and the Representational Fallacy*, (Routledge, 2008), chapter 1: ‘Metaphysics and the origins of the representational fallacy’ (pp.14-36)

Quine, W.V.O. ‘On What There Is’, *Review of Metaphysics* 2, 1948, 21-38

Week 2. Non-Existence

Russell, Bertrand. *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, ch.16 ‘Descriptions’. (On Moodle, 14 pages)

Crane, Tim. ‘What is the Problem of Non-Existence?’, *Philosophia: Philosophical Quarterly of Israel* 40 (2012), 417–434. Also available at his website.

3. Against linguistic metaphysics

Barnes, Elizabeth and Cameron, Ross. ‘A Critical Study of John Heil’s *From an Ontological Point of View*’, in Giacomo Romano (ed.) ‘Symposium on *From an Ontological Point of View* by John Heil’, *SWIF Philosophy of Mind Review* 6, 2007, pp.22-30 Available online.

Cameron, Ross. ‘Quantification, Naturalness and Ontology’, in Allan Hazlett (ed.), *New Waves in Metaphysics*, 2010, Palgrave-Macmillan, pp. 8-26. Also available on his website. Only sections 1-3 are essential.

Dyke, Heather. ‘Words, Pictures, and Ontology’, in Romano (ed.) pp.31-41

Eklund, Matti. ‘On Some Recent Criticisms of the ‘Linguistic’ Approach to Ontology’, *dialectica* 63, 2009, 313–323.

4. Truth and Truthmaking

Rodriguez-Pereyra, Gonzalo. ‘Why truthmakers’, in Beebe & Dodd, eds, *Truthmakers: The Contemporary Debate*, (Oxford University Press, 2005) pp.17-33

Hornsby, Jennifer. ‘Truth without truthmaking entities’, in Beebe & Dodd, pp.33-47

5. Ordinary Language Philosophy Returns?

Thomasson, Amie L. ‘Easy Ontology and its Consequences’ in Gary Ostertag (ed.) *Meanings and Other Things: Essays on the work of Stephen Schiffer* (OUP 2016), 34-53.

Button, Tim. ‘Deflationary Metaphysics and Ordinary Language’, *Synthese* (2016)

6. Non-Representationalism

Gert, Joshua ‘What is Neopragmatism?’ in Gert (ed) *Neopragmatism* (forthcoming OUP)

Price, Huw ‘Metaphysical Pluralism’ *The Journal of Philosophy*, 89 (1992), 387-409

7. Non-Representational Theories of Meaning

Horwich, Paul, ‘A Use Theory of Meaning’ in his *Reflections on Meaning* (OUP 2005)

Gert, Joshua ‘Neopragmatist semantics’ *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 106 (2023) 107-135

8. Linguistic Pluralism

Price, Huw, 'Immodesty without mirrors: making sense of Wittgenstein's linguistic pluralism' in his 2011 *Naturalism Without Mirrors*

Thomasson, Amie 'How should we think about linguistic function?', forthcoming - *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*.

9. The basic anti-metaphysical argument

Price, Huw 'Naturalism and the Fate of the M-Worlds', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1997)

Jackson, Frank, 'Naturalism and the Fate of the M-Worlds', as above

10. Expressivism vs Moral Metaphysics

Cuneo, Terrence 'Properties for Nothing, Facts for Free? Expressivism's Deflationary Gambit' in Shafer-Landau (ed) *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* vol 8 (OUP 2013)

Blackburn, Simon. 'Some remarks about minimalism', in Wright, C. & Coliva, A. (eds.), *Mind, Meaning, and Knowledge: Themes From the Philosophy of Crispin Wright*, pp.195–210 (OUP 2012)

11. "Creeping Minimalism" and Quietism

Dreier, James 'Metaethics and the Problem of Creeping Minimalism' 2004

Golub, Camil 'Representation, Deflationism, and the Question of Realism' 2021

12. Global expressivism?

Macarthur, David and Price, Huw 'Pragmatism, Quasi-Realism, and the Global Challenge' in Price *Naturalism Without Mirrors* (2011 OUP)

Simpson, Matthew 'Should expressivists go global?' *Philosophical Studies* 2023