

PHIL 4300: Realism, Anti-Realism and Non-Realism in Metaethics & Metaphilosophy (Fall 2018)

Instructor: Gordon Davis (Gordon.Davis@carleton.ca)

Mondays 11:35-2:25, PA 3A36

Though grounded in some general themes in ethical theory, this course will cover a cross-section of various areas in philosophy, in some cases guided by students' research interests. It will do so (a) in terms of issues concerning the nature of normativity, and (b) in terms of some parallels between reflection on normativity and reflection on the nature of philosophical argument. A central theme will be the realism/anti-realism debate; we will also consider whether it makes sense to speak of a so-called third option, e.g. 'non-realism'. It is arguably a central issue in philosophy whether *any* normative claims can sustain a realist interpretation (not just ethical ones); this course may thus be of interest to some students with more interest in metaphysics and epistemology than in ethics.

Roughly the first half of the course will focus on this issue, mainly as it applies to ethics and the general theory of value. In the second half, students will have an opportunity to draw connections between the metaethical context and other relevant areas in philosophy that may interest them (e.g. logic, critical theory, epistemology, aesthetics).

Discussions of realism and anti-realism often distinguish soft targets, such as aesthetics and religion (where anti-realist exposure of their alleged lack of objectivity is common), from cases touching on the 'hard' sciences, for example the claims of theoretical physics (where certainty might be hard to come by, but where some realists seek the highest degree of objectivity nonetheless). Philosophers in the British tradition, such as Berkeley and Hume, developed anti-realist accounts of our talk of the external world, causation and the reality of the past; and philosophers in the German and Indian traditions have sometimes rejected realism about anything and everything non-mental. Physicalists like Quine have inverted this, directing anti-realism at much of our customary talk of mental phenomena (like the concept of a 'content of belief'), but retaining a realist account of scientific discourse about the physical world.

We will pay special attention, though, to concepts and claims that seem routine in our everyday thought and speech: 'possibilia' (what might be or might have been), 'abstract objects' (with a role in our talk about types rather than tokens), mathematical truths (which are apparently about abstract objects such as numbers), epistemic justification (e.g. the property of being a *reasonable* inference) and the self (the apparent referent of those ever-present pronouns 'I' and 'me'). Most people *and* most philosophers seem implicitly to be realists about at least some of these things. A major question in contemporary philosophy has been whether claims about what has *value* (be it moral, personal, practical, cultural, etc.) have more in common with discourse where realism is least contentious or with claims, like those of aesthetics, where anti-realism is most tempting. The field that has done the most to explore these comparisons and contrasts is metaethics, so most of our initial readings will be in that area.

#### READINGS:

Short excerpts from Hume, Kant, G.E. Moore (TBD)

Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1992) OPTIONAL

Richard Joyce, *The Myth of Morality* (Cambridge U.P., 2001) – excerpts TBA

Terence Cuneo, *The Normative Web: An Argument for Moral Realism* (Oxford U.P., 2007)

Derek Parfit, *On What Matters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2011) – excerpts from Volume II

- Cuneo, Joyce and Parfit all available online at Carleton Library Catalogue

J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977), chapter 1

S.E.P.: ‘Realism’ (Alexander Miller); ‘Moral Anti-Realism’ (Richard Joyce); ‘Reasons for Action’ (3 entries); ‘Value of Knowledge’ (Pritchard/Turri); additional readings TBA

### TENTATIVE SCHEDULE :

Sept. 10	Introduction to Realism, Anti-Realism, Scepticism and Truth
Sept. 17	Distinctions in Ethics (reading: Mackie, ch. 1 of <i>Ethics</i> )
Sept. 24	T. Cuneo (ebook @ library): <i>The Normative Web</i> , chs. 1 & 3 (& ‘Introduction’)
Oct. 1	Cuneo, chapters 2 and 4: epistemic reasons ( <b>Pres’n 1</b> on ‘companions in guilt’)
Oct. 8	NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)
Oct. 15	Presentations + Cuneo, chs. 5-6 ( <i>Discussion of Essay 1</i> : see Oct. 31 below)
Oct. 22	Presentations + Cuneo, chs. 7-8
Oct. 29	Other forms of anti-realism: e.g. Constructivism and Non-Cognitivism
<b>OCT. 31 (Weds, end-of-day by email) SEND ESSAY # 1</b>	
Nov. 5	Presentation 2 on other forms of irrealism: Reductive naturalism, relativism, etc.
Nov. 12	Pres’n 2 (cont’d)... & ‘non-realism’ (D. Parfit, <i>On What Matters</i> (TBA))
Nov. 19	Pres’n 2 (cont’d) (evolutionary moral psych: Parfit & RJ, <i>Myth of Morality</i> )
Nov. 26	‘Non-realism’ as a form of cognitivism (Parfit & the idea of ‘robust’ realism)
Dec. 3	Inter alia: Consultations on final paper topics

### EVALUATION

Paper 1 **due Oct. 31** (for / against Mackie vs. Cuneo, 6-10 pages) 30 %

**Presentation 1**: comparative metaphilosophy & ‘companions in guilt’ 10 %

(QNs for **Pres**: Can some concepts be naturalized & others not? eg, some apt for ‘psychologism’ & some not? If the latter=*anomaly*, does that tend for or against Mackie’s ‘queerness’ arg’t?

Components: (1) summ. of key concept(s) in area (w. at least one ref.), (2) are any ‘companions in guilt’? (3) if so, do you feel this makes Mackie’s anti-realism more or less convincing?)

(CONT...)

Paper 2, Take-home essay (on themes from presentations, 10-15 pages)	40 %
Presentation 2 (on contemporary irrationalism(s) in ethics and/or epistemology)	10 %
Participation (including attendance)	10 %

Guidelines for essays and presentations will be provided in connection with each assignment. In general, the main criteria for evaluating essays include: clarity of writing, effective essay structure, handling of possible objections and replies (or where appropriate, actual objections in the current literature), use of course readings and other sources (including fairness of interpretation and appropriate methods of citation), quality of argumentative strategies, explicitness and quality of reasoning, critical distance from sources (including those that support your position), originality, creativity, and imagination (e.g. in the use of illustrations, examples, counterexamples).

Late papers lose 5 % per day (*including weekend days*), unless a documented reason is given, on or within a few days of the deadline.

(Papers should be sent via email, and will be due at 11:59 PM on the due date.)

Page specifications assume 12-point font and double-spacing. So, the first (midterm) should be between 1500 and 2500 words. The final paper should be between 2500 and 4000 words. If a paper is clearly under-length, the mark will suffer; and if a paper is far too long, I would ask you to edit and resubmit. In the latter case, given deadlines (especially in December), you would have very little time to do this. It is therefore the responsibility of anyone who feels they have no choice but to submit an over-length paper to be checking email regularly, both the day after submitting and every subsequent day, in order to see how much time there is for such editing – i.e. to see my initial response.

## Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2018-19)

### **Assignments:**

Unless specifically told otherwise by their instructors, students:

- Must not use a plastic or cardboard cover or paper clips.
- Must staple the paper (there is a stapler on the essay box).
- Must include the following on the first page: student name and number; course name and number; instructor's name.
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work – see dates below.
- Assignments handed in through the essay box (just inside the glass doors, Paterson Hall, Floor 3A) must be dropped into the box by **4:15** on a regular business day in order to be date-stamped with that day's date. Assignments handed in after 4:15 or on a non-business day will be stamped as having been handed in on the next business day.
- Students are required to keep copies of their assignments. If your paper is lost at any point, you will be considered not to have submitted it if you cannot produce a copy immediately on request.

### **Evaluation:**

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

### **Deferrals for Final Exams:**

If you miss a final examination (formally scheduled or take-home) because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply for a deferral. You must apply within 3 working days after the scheduled date of your formally scheduled exam or within 3 working days after the due date of a take-home exam. Visit the Registrar's Office for more information: <http://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/acadregsuniv2/#2.5>

### **Plagiarism:**

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

### **Academic Accommodation:**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. [carleton.ca/pmc](http://carleton.ca/pmc)

**Pregnancy obligation:** write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

**Religious obligation:** write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

**Survivors of Sexual Violence:** as a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and is survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: [carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support](http://carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support)

**Accommodation for Student Activities:** Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

For more information on academic accommodation, please contact the departmental administrator or visit: [students.carleton.ca/course-outline](https://students.carleton.ca/course-outline)

**Important Dates:**

Sept. 5	Classes start.
Sept. 18	Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Oct. 8	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 22-26	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 23	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.
Dec. 7	Last day of fall term classes. <b>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</b> Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course.
Dec. 9-21	Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 21	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 7	Classes begin.
Jan. 18	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 18	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 18-22	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 26	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.
Apr. 9	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 12-27	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 19-21	Statutory holiday. University closed. No examinations take place.
Apr. 27	All take-home examinations are due on this day.

**Addresses:**

Department of Philosophy:	3A35 Paterson Hall <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/philosophy">www.carleton.ca/philosophy</a> 520-2110
Registrar's Office:	300 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/registrar">www.carleton.ca/registrar</a> 520-3500
Academic Advising Centre:	302 Tory <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/academicadvising">www.carleton.ca/academicadvising</a> 520-7850
Writing Services:	4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Library <a href="http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/">http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/</a> 520-3822
MacOdrum Library	<a href="http://www.library.carleton.ca/">http://www.library.carleton.ca/</a> 520-2735