Philosophy 145
Realism and Anti-realism

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General Remarks on the Course

This course is intended to introduce you to some of the basic issues in metaphysics and ontology, as these subjects have been studied in recent analytic philosophy. We will begin with ontology, the basic question of which is what there is. We will study, in particular, the question whether there are *abstract objects*, sets, numbers, games, letters, words, and the like: Such objects, if such there are, are different from concrete objects, like people, or rocks, or chairs, in that they are not located in space and time (2 isn't *anywhere*); they do not interact causally with anything ('x' doesn't cause anything to happen). Some philosophers, *nominalists*, have denied that there are any such objects, and they do raise certain kinds of philosophical perplexity. We will look at a proposal for how we might understand reference to abstract objects which originates with Gottlob Frege and has been developed, in recent years, by Crispin Wright.

Following that, we will turn our attention to metaphysics, the basic question of which is not so much what there is, but how what there is is related to our capacity to think about it. The common sense view, it is fair to say, at least about such things as the physical world, the past, and mathematics, is that what is true about such matters is something quite independent of us: The physical world, or the past, is as it is, and would still be that way, whatever we might think about it or be able to know about it. Such a view is called *realism* about the subject matter in question. And some philosophers, *anti-realists*, have denied, in specific cases, that, say, the past is independent of our cognitive capacities in this sort of way.

Anti-realist views come in two flavors. The most extreme denies that thoughts, or sentences, about some subject matter are so much as *capable* of being true or false. This view is perhaps best known in moral philosophy, where it is called *ethical anti-realism* or, in one of its most famous manifestations, *emotivism*. An emotivist holds that ethical claims, like 'Murder is wrong', are not fit to be true or false: They are, rather, mere expressions of an attitude, meaning, when properly understood, something like, "Ooh, murder, ick"—possibly together with a suggestion that one not do that. One finds similar views in the philosophy of science.

We will not be studying these sorts of anti-realist views in this course. Our attention will, instead, be focused upon views which *accept* that thoughts and statements about a given subject matter can be true or false, but deny that the *kind* of truth the statements can have is the fully 'objective' truth a realist would think they can have. Such views thus do not deny that, say, statements of mathematics *are* true or false: Rather, their central claim is that the truth or falsity of mathematical statements is not *independent* of us. An extreme version of this position would hold, for example, that what is true in mathematics is just what we *know* to be true; and a more sophisticated version would hold that what is true is what we *can* know to be true. But the real point of such views is not what specific version of the connection they establish, but rather that they attempt to forge a connection between *truth*, on the one hand, and our *cognitive capacities*, on the other.

One well-known exponent of such a view is Hilary Putnam, who argued for a view he called *Internal Realism* in a series of papers beginning in the late 1970s. We will read two of his papers from this period, and responses to them.

We will turn our attention toward Michael Dummett's version of anti-realism. We shall look closely at some of his writings on this topic, in which he attempts to lay out, not a specific anti-realism, about a specific subject matter, but the *general form* of anti-realist views about *any* subject matter. He formulates a general *argument form* which an anti-realist idealist might use to argue for her position in a particular case. This argument form is based upon what is called the 'manifestation requirement', and we shall look at challenges to the manifestation requirement. Then we will study an application of Dummett's general argument form to a specific case, namely, the case of the past.

Prerequisites

There are no specific pre-requisites for this course, although it is *not* a suitable first course for those who have had no prior exposure to philosophy: It is expected that students enrolled will have a basic understanding of how to read philosophical texts (many of the readings are quite difficult), how to analyze and criticize a philosophical argument, and so forth. There will be a *small* amount of material, too, for which a basic understanding of formal logic (as provided by e.g. Philosophy 140) would be helpful, but there is no need for students to worry if they have not taken such a class.

Course Structure and Requirements

The course will meet Tuesday and Thursday, at 10am, in Emerson 310. There will be an undergraduate section for the course, taught by a teaching fellow, if enrollment should warrant the appointment of one, or by the Instructor, if not. There will also be a graduate section, which is open *only* to graduate students in Philosophy, intended to provide them with an opportunity to discuss matters at a more advanced level than would be appropriate in the context of the lectures.

For undergraduates, the grade will be based upon two papers and a final exam. For graduate students, the grade will be based upon two papers only, the second paper being substantially longer than that expected from undergraduates.

The first paper is to be a *short*, *expository* piece of 1000-1500 words (that's 3-5 standard pages), to be due *in class* on 19 March (the last class before Spring Break). Topics for the papers will be announced on 5 March. Note that 1500 words is a *maximum length*. This is to be short, concise, and not all that time-consuming assignment; it is an opportunity for students to do some writing and get some feedback, and for me to make sure that everyone is with the program.

The topic for the second paper is to be chosen by the student; it should be cleared with me on or before Thursday, 23 April, and the paper itself will be due on the last day of reading period—though it will, of course, be accepted any time before that. I will happily read and comment on drafts given me sufficiently long before the due date. Drafts handed in by the end of classes are *guaranteed* to be returned with substantial comments. Any submitted after that will be handled on a first-come, first-served basis.

For undergraduates, the paper should be 2500-3000 words (that's about 8-10 pages), with a *maximum* length of 3500 words (twelve standard pages). For graduate students, the paper should be between twenty and twenty-five pages, with 7500 words being an upper limit.

The maximum lengths are meant to be taken seriously: You will be penalized if your paper is too long. An appropriate choice of topic, together with a some thought about what is most important, and what can be left out, will make it easy to stay under the limit. Concision is a virtue.

Readings

Unfortunately, there is no very good collection of articles on metaphysics. We shall thus be reading a number of articles by different authors. The books and journals from which the various articles come, and individual copies of them, will be put on reserve in Robbins Library. It will be up to each of you to make copies of the articles along the way, or to make a copy of the complete packet. Please make your copies *from the photocopies deposited in the library*, so as not to damage the books and journals.

Syllabus

29 January	Introductory Meeting

Ontology: Abstract Objects

3 February	Paul Benacerraf, "Mathematical Truth", in P. Benacerraf and H. Putnam, eds., *Readings in the Philosophy of Mathematics*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 403-20
5 February	Gottlob Frege, *Foundations of Arithmetic*, 2d revised ed. (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1980), pp. 67-81
10 February	Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, 2d ed. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), Ch. 14
12 February	Crispin Wright, *Frege's Conception of Numbers as Objects* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1985), sections i-iii, v, vii-viii
17 February	Hartry Field, "Platonism for Cheap? Crispin Wright on Frege's Context Principle", in his *Realism, Mathematics, and Modality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 147-70
19 February	Sylvain Bromberger, "Types and Tokens in Linguistics", in A. George, ed., *Reflections on Chomsky* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 58-89
24-26 February	Richard Heck, "Syntactic Reductionism", *draft*

Putnam's Internal Realism

3 March	Hilary Putnam, "Models and Reality", in his *Realism and Reason: Philosophical Papers, vol. 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-25
5 March	David Lewis, "Putnam's Paradox", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 62 (1984), pp. 221-36
10 March	Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth, and History* (Cambridge:), Ch. 1
12 March	Crispin Wright, "On Putnam's Proof That We Are Not Brains in Vats", in P. Clark and B. Hale, eds., *Reading Putnam* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 216-41

Dummett's Anti-realism

17 March	Donald Davidson,"Truth and Meaning", in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 17-36
19 March	Alfred Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4 (1944), pp. 341-75
	Short Paper Due!
24-26 March	*Spring Break*
31 March-2 April	Michael Dummett, "What is a Theory of Meaning? (I)", in his *Seas of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 1-33
7-9 April	Michael Dummett, "What is a Theory of Meaning? (II)", in his *Seas of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 34-93, esp. §§1-4
14 April	John McDowell, "Anti-realism and the Epistemology of Understanding", in H. Parrett and J. Bouveresse, eds., *Meaning and Understanding* (New York: De Gruyter, 1981), pp. 225-48;"In Defense of Modesty", in B. Taylor, ed., *Michael Dummett: Contributions to Philosophy* (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), pp. 59-79
16 April	Richard Heck, "Use and Meaning", *draft*
21 April	Michael Dummett, "The Reality of the Past", in *Truth and Other Enigmas*, pp. 358-74
23 April	John McDowell, "On 'The Reality of the Past'", in C. Hookway and P. Pettit, eds., *Action and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 127-44
28 April	Crispin Wright, "Realism, Truth-Value Links, Other Minds, and the Past" and "Anti-realism, Timeless Truth, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*", both in his *Realism, Meaning, and Truth*, pp. 85-106 and pp. 176-203
30 April	John Campbell, "The Realism of Memory", in R. Heck, ed., *Language, Thought and Logic: Essays in Honour of Michael Dummett* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 157-81
	Last Class
xx May	*Long Paper Due*