

Graduate Seminar in Metaphysics  
**Realism and Truth**  
New York University

### **Overview**

The goal of this seminar will be to determine which characteristics of a given philosophical position entitle it to the honorific 'realist'. In particular, we will be interested to see whether the correct account of these characteristics makes essential appeal to the notion of truth; and if so, how different theories of the nature of truth affect our understanding of realism. Our treatment of mind-independence will therefore be secondary to discussions of such topics as: Michael Devitt's non-semantic conception of realism, meta-ontology and the problem of negative existential statements, the apparent tension between deflationism and non-factualism, and the many faces of fictionalism. Note that we will not be reading certain canonical essays by Putnam and Dummett, because they are almost impossible to cover briefly, and because I, personally, find internal realism and realism in Dummett's sense to be unpromising qua conceptions of realism in general. Indeed, as we will see, the best account of realism may reveal that it is less like a theory or thesis, and more like a philosophical stance.

### **Mechanics**

The course will meet on Mondays, from 7-9, in the graduate seminar room. I will try to lecture for about half the time, and lead discussion for the remainder. My office hours will be on Mondays from 4-6, and my email address is aburgess@princeton.edu. The readings will be made available for you to copy in a folder in the department library before they are discussed in class. On the schedule below, optional readings appear in a smaller font than the main readings. If you are taking the course for credit, you can either write a twenty (or so) page term paper on a topic we've agreed upon ahead of time, or complete a take-home examination consisting of a series of short essay questions.

## Schedule

- 1/22 There will be no assigned readings for our first meeting, but since we're at NYU, you might like to have a look at Kit Fine's paper, 'The Question of Realism'.

### Realism

- 1/29 Michael Devitt, 'What is Realism?', from his *Realism and Truth*  
Drew Khlentzos, 'Naturalistic Realism and Antirealism', from his *Naturalistic Realism and the Antirealist Challenge*
- 2/05 Gideon Rosen, 'Objectivity and Modern Idealism', in *Philosophy in Mind*  
Mark Johnston, 'Objectivity Refigured', in *Reality, Representation, and Projection*
- 2/12 Michael Devitt, 'What has Truth to do with Realism?', from his *Realism and Truth*  
Drew Khlentzos, 'Contenting Realism', from his *Naturalistic Realism and the Antirealist Challenge*

### Existence

- 2/26 Colin McGinn, 'Existence', from his *Logical Properties*  
Terence Parsons, 'Are There Non-existent Objects?', in the *American Philosophical Quarterly*
- 3/05 Nathan Salmon, 'Nonexistence', in *Noûs*  
Alexis Burgess, 'Negative Existentials Again', in nothing at the moment
- 3/19 Stephen Yablo, 'A Paradox of Existence', on his website  
Stephen Yablo, 'Does Ontology Rest on a Mistake?', on his website

### Deflationism

- 3/26 Paul Horwich, 'Reference', from his *Meaning*  
Paul Horwich, 'Truth', from his *Meaning*
- 4/02 Paul Boghossian, 'The Status of Content', in *The Philosophical Review*  
Hartry Field, 'Disquotational Truth and Factually Defective Discourse', in *The Philosophical Review*
- 4/09 Huw Price, 'The Place of Truth', from his *Facts and the Function of Truth*  
Michael Smith, 'Minimalism, Truth-Aptitude, and Belief', in *Analysis*

### Fictionalism

- 4/16 Gideon Rosen, 'Problems in the History of Fictionalism', in *Fictionalism in Metaphysics*  
Michael Frede, 'The Sceptic's Beliefs', in *The Original Sceptics: A Controversy*
- 4/23 Stephen Yablo, 'Go Figure: A Path Through Fictionalism', on his website  
Hartry Field, 'Introduction', from his *Realism, Mathematics and Modality*
- 4/30 Paul Teller, 'What is a Stance?', in *Philosophical Studies*  
Bas van Fraassen, 'Lecture Two', from his *The Empirical Stance*