

Topics in Metaphysics (G9515) - Fall 2009

Rovane

Office hours Tues. 2:30-4 p.m., 712B Philosophy Hall

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Our general topics will be: 1) how to formulate the doctrine of relativism; 2) what grounds there are to affirm or deny it, especially in the domain of natural facts studied by science and in the domain of morals. Along the way, we'll take up some more specific issues and themes, including: what it means to say that truth is relative; the nature of disagreement; holistic conceptions of content and the theory-ladenness of observation; transcendental arguments; scientific realism; anti-realism; subjective vs. objective bases for morals.

Course Requirements: participation in discussion; one presentation; one term paper.

Readings. My plan is it to distribute all the required readings electronically by e-mail attachment. Most of them will be downloaded from journals and other e-sources in the university library, or from authors' webpages – which means that you can also get them right away on your own if you want to get started before I send them to you.

However, some of the material will be scanned from the books listed below. Many of you may already own these books, and if you don't I urge that you consider purchasing them. (I haven't ordered them because it seems simpler these days for you to order things on the net).

Carnap, *Meaning and Necessity*

Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (available in a cheap e-version)

Feyerabend, *Problems of Empiricism* (vol. 2 of his collected papers)

Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*

Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*

Mackie, *Inventing Right and Wrong*

Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*

McDowell, *Mind, Language and Reality*

N.B. You should think of the required readings as a bare minimum of what you will do in the course, and you should feel free to organize your further reading around your other research interests. You should also feel free to raise issues from your other reading when they are relevant to the seminar discussion. I'll be distributing a very incomplete bibliography to get you started on the first day of term.

Required Readings listed by week:

1. Introductory Meeting

I. The Current Debate: Disagreement, Anti-Realism, Relative Truth

2. Kolbel, "The Evidence for Relativism", *Synthese* 2009
- MacFarlane, "Making Sense of Relative Truth", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 2005
- MacFarlane, "Relativism and Disagreement", *Philosophical Studies* 2007
- Crispin Wright, "On Being in a Quandary", *Mind* 2001
- Boghossian, "What is Relativism?" from *Truth and Realism*, eds. Greenough and Lynch

II. The Twentieth Century Debates

3. Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology," from *Meaning and Necessity*
- Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *Philosophical Review* 1951
4. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, ch. 9; Postscript (
- Feyerabend, "Problems of Empiricism" from Colodny, ed. *Beyond the Edge of Certainty*, Pittsburgh Studies in the Philosophy of Science vol. 4
5. Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme", *APA Proceedings and Addresses* 1973-4, reprinted in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*
6. Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, chs. I, II, VI
- Kitcher, "Real Realism: The Galilean Strategy and Why it Works", *Philosophical Review* 2001
- Davidson, "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics" from *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*
7. Williams, "The Truth in Relativism" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 1974-75

III. The Contrast between Science and Morals

8. Harman, "Moral Relativism Defended", *Philosophical Review* 1975
9. Mackie, excerpts from *Inventing Right and Wrong*, Part One
- Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, chs. 8-9
10. Railton, "Moral Realism", *Philosophical Review* 1986
- Smith, "Beyond the Error Theory", draft online
11. Sreenivasan, "Understanding Alien Morals," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 2001
12. McDowell, Critical Notice: Williams's *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, *Mind* 1986
- McDowell, "Two Varieties of Naturalism," from *Mind, Language and Reality*

IV. How to Formulate Relativism

13. Concluding roundtable discussion

