

# PHI4399P The Nature of Truth, Spring 2020

Instructor: Daniel Waxman

Email: danielwaxman@ln.edu.hk

Office: HSH224

Office Hours: Wednesday 12:30pm – 2:30pm, Friday 1:30pm – 3:30pm

Class Times: Wednesday 2:30pm – 4:00pm, Friday 5pm – 6:30pm

## Brief Course Description

This course introduces students to some of the philosophical and logical debates surrounding the notion of truth. We will address questions like the following. What is the nature of truth? (For that matter, does it even have a nature?) What does it mean to say or think that something is true? Is truth absolute and objective, or subjective and relative to a speaker or society? How should our understanding of truth be affected by fundamental and far-reaching paradoxes involving the concept?

## Class Materials

The main text is *The Nature of Truth*, edited by Michael Lynch and published by MIT Press. This contains many of the most influential historical and contemporary readings on the nature of truth. Relevant parts of the book will be posted to the course's Moodle page. I'll also put other readings on Moodle from time to time. In addition, the Moodle page will contain other course materials (e.g. syllabus, class handouts, guided questions, important dates). Please check it regularly.

Other readings you might find helpful:

- The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy has excellent overviews of some of the topics we'll discuss. (I especially recommended the entries on truth, the correspondence theory of truth, the coherence theory of truth, pragmatism, pluralist theories of truth, Tarski's truth definitions, the deflationary theory of truth, and the liar paradox).
- Richard Kirkham: *Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction* (MIT Press). A good introduction to theories of truth.
- Burgess & Burgess: *Truth* (Princeton University Press). Another good introduction, focusing on deflationism.
- Scott Soames: *Understanding Truth* (OUP). Among other things, contains a very nice discussion of the impact of the liar paradox on theorising about truth.

## Schedule of Topics

Here is a rough overview of the topics we will cover. Please note that this schedule may – probably will – change depending on our progress. The exact dates and content of the assignments will be provided in due course. Since the pace would most likely be too fast otherwise, I’ve scheduled several “overflow” classes to allow us to catch up on the material (or discuss interesting issues that arise) as we go along.

Class	Topic	Chapter(s) of Sider
Jan 17th	Intro	Lynch’s Intro (1-6)
Jan 22nd	Correspondence	Lynch’s Intro (9-15) & Alston, A Realist Conception of Truth
Jan 24th		*NO CLASS* (Chinese New Year)
Jan 29th		*NO CLASS*
Jan 31st		*NO CLASS*
Feb 5th		Coherence
Feb 7th	*OVERFLOW CLASS*	
Feb 12th	Pragmatism	Lynch’s Intro (183-193) & Dummett, Truth
Feb 14th		Putnam, Two Philosophical Perspectives
Feb 19th		Rorty, Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry?
Feb 21st		Price, Truth as Convenient Friction
Feb 26th		*OVERFLOW CLASS*
Feb 28th		Tarski
Mar 4th	Field, Tarski’s Theory of Truth	
Mar 6th	Soames, What is a Theory of Truth	
Mar 11th	*OVERFLOW CLASS*	
Mar 13th	Paradox	
Mar 18th		*OVERFLOW CLASS*
Mar 20th	Pluralism	Lynch, A Functionalism Theory of Truth
Mar 25th		Wright, Truth: a Traditional Debate Reviewed
Mar 27th		*OVERFLOW CLASS*
Apr 2nd	Deflationism	Lynch’s Intro (421-431) & Ramsey, The Nature of Truth
Apr 4th		Field, The Deflationary Conception of Truth
Apr 9th		Gupta, A Critique of Deflationism
Apr 11th		Devitt, The Metaphysics of Truth
Apr 16th		Truth and Objectivity
Apr 18th	Rosen, Objectivity and Modern Idealism	
Apr 23rd	*REVIEW CLASS*	

## Learning Outcomes

Students should be able to:

- Display knowledge of the most influential traditional and contemporary theories of the nature of truth and the philosophical debates between them;
- Articulate the semantic paradoxes and assess their philosophical implications for theorizing about truth;

- Formulate and defend their own views about the nature of truth, in particular regarding the question of whether it is relative or absolute.

### **Assessment and Measurement of Learning Outcomes**

Assessment will be calculated as below:

<b>Assessment</b>	<b>% of final grade</b>
Participation	10%
Presentation	20%
Topic paper	35%
Final exam	35%

- Class participation means more than just showing up. I would like this class to be discussion focused, so it's especially important that you've done the readings and participate in the discussion.
- The in-class presentation should be approximately 20 minutes, summarizing and evaluating one of the assigned readings. This will involve presenting the author's main position and supporting argumentation, evaluating the argument, and leading a short discussion. You should prepare a short (max 2 pages) handout for your presentation.
- Your paper should each be 6-8 pages in length. I will give you a list of potential topics in due course; I am happy for you to choose your own (on the condition that you consult with me first).

### **Important Notes**

1. Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
2. Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is "the presentation of another person's work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student's own work". Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
3. Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
4. To enhance students' understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course "Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness" is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>