Course Guide

PHIL10138: Realism, Relativism, and Reality
2017-18

Course Organizer: Professor Michela Massimi
(michela.massimi@ed.ac.uk)

Office Location: room 5.03 DSB
Office Hours (semester 1 only):
Thursday 1pm -3pm
(outside office hour only by appointment, please
email: michela.massimi@ed.ac.uk).

Course Secretary: Ann-Marie Cowe
(Annmarie.Cowe@ed.ac.uk)

Department of Philosophy
School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences
University of Edinburgh
1. Course Aims and Objectives

What is truth in science? Why do scientists disagree sometimes on the same evidence? Is our scientific knowledge relative to different principles endorsed by rival scientific communities? When it comes to allocating research funds for scientific programmes, what principles should guide policy-making? Join this course to explore these cutting-edge questions for contemporary science. The course will map the territory of the vast debate between realism and relativism in science, with a focus on both classic texts and more contemporary approaches.

This course provides an introduction to the vast arena of philosophical inquiry that goes under the names of realism and relativism in science. What is truth in science? and why do experts disagree on scientific evidence? what good might relativism be? The course is structured in two Parts. In Part I, we read some classical texts (from Quine's ontological relativity, to Goodman's ways of worldmaking and Rorty's epistemic relativism, among others). Part II of the course zooms into contemporary debates on realism in science and on the values of truth, objectivity, disagreement and progress in scientific research

2. Intended Learning Outcomes

On completion of this course, the student will be able to:

1. By the end of this course, students will demonstrate a well-rounded view of central debates in philosophy of science
2. engage with essential readings by identifying strengths and weaknesses in the arguments
3. understand reasons for defending or rejecting specific philosophical views
4. analyse philosophical ideas and learn how to refine them
5. write with clarity and originality

3. Lecture Times and Locations

SEMESTER 1: Thursdays, 9.00am – 10.50pm. DAVID HUME TOWER, LG.06

4. Lecture Content

PART I: THE CLASSICS

Week 1
Quine’s ontological relativity
Essential readings:

Week 2
*Putnam’s internal realism*

Essential readings:

Week 3
*Thomas Kuhn and incommensurable paradigms*

Essential readings:

Week 4
*Nelson Goodman’s Starmaking*

Essential readings:

Week 5
*Rorty’s epistemic relativism*

Essential readings:
Rorty, R. (1979) Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature (Princeton University Press), pp. 322-342 (“Kuhn and incommensurability” and “Objectivity as Correspondence and as Agreement”)

**PART II: VARIETIES OF REALISM**
Week 6
Scientific realism


Week 7
Kuhnian legacies: the historical turn


Week 8
Against relativism


Week 9
Real Realism


Week 10
Structural Realism

Week 11

Perspectival Realism

Giere, R. (2006) Scientific Perspectivism (UCP), ch. 4

5. Readings

In addition to the readings listed under “4. Lecture content”, students may want to read some of the many books and articles available on each of these topics. Here below are some suggestions (certainly not an exhaustive list) for further readings.


______(1990) Realism with a Human Face (Harvard University Press)

Price, Huw (2011) Naturalism without mirrors (OUP)


6. Assessment Information

Undergraduate students will be assessed by:
• a mid-term essay of 1,500 words (worth 40%) due **Thursday 26th October by 12pm (mid-day)**
• weekly participation and coursework (worth 10%)
• a end-of-term essay of 2,000 words (worth 50%) due **Thursday 14th December 2017 by 12pm (mid-day)**

**Master students** will be assessed by an essay of 2,500 words (worth 100%) and due **on Monday 18th December 2017, 12 noon**, on a topic of their own choosing to be agreed upon with the course organizer. Formative essays provide an opportunity for MSc students to practice their essay writing and do not count towards the final mark. Deadline for formative assessment **Thursday 26th October, noon**.

**Weekly participation and coursework**

Every student should come to class each week having carefully read the assigned texts and written down (a) 1-2 sentences of what they take to be the one or two main claims of the text, and (b) no more than 500 words explaining a possible objection to the argument for that/those claims. Both (a) and (b) are due at the beginning of class. Consistent weekly participation in the seminar discussion is an integral part of the assessment for this course and is worth a total of 10% of your final mark. The course organiser will indicate week by week which reading is assigned for seminar discussion for the following week.

**8. Learn**

Please note, all the relevant essential readings are available online via LEARN for this course. Electronic submissions is also via Turn-it-In in LEARN. For essay submission instructions please see the instructions on LEARN. Please note you should not include your name or matriculation number on coursework, only your exam number.

**9. Common Marking Scheme**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| A1    | 90-100| Excellent
*Outstanding in every respect, the work is well beyond the level expected of a competent student at their level of study.* |
| A2    | 80-89 | Excellent
*Outstanding in some respects, the work is often beyond what is expected of a competent student at their level of study.* |
| A3    | 70-79 | Excellent
*Very good or excellent in most respects, the work is what might be expected of a very competent student.* |
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Mark Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Good or very good in most respects, the work displays thorough mastery of the relevant learning outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>Good</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The work clearly meets requirements for demonstrating the relevant learning outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Pass</td>
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<td>The work meets minimum requirements for demonstrating the relevant learning outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>Marginal fail</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>The work fails to meet minimum requirements for demonstrating the relevant learning outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>Clear fail</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>The work is very weak or shows a decided lack of effort.</td>
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<td>G</td>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>Bad fail</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The work is extremely weak.</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td>0-9</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The work is of very little consequence, if any, to the area in question.</td>
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The marking scheme used for all coursework and for degree and resit examinations is the University Common Marking Scheme. The principal grades and descriptors, as approved by the School of PPLS, of the University’s Extended Common Marking Scheme, are as follows.

**A1 90-100 Excellent**
Outstanding in every respect, the work is well beyond the level expected of a competent student at their level of study. It
- Shows creative, subtle, and/or original independent thinking
- Demonstrates breadth of knowledge and deep understanding of the subject matter
- Draws on a wide, relevant literature base
- Demonstrates an excellent standard of synthesis and evaluation and a critical and insightful analysis of the literature
- Is well focused, with concentration on the main issues to be addressed
- Presents a compelling case by means of clear logically structured argument or debate, well supported with evidence
- Is written with flair
- Has, where appropriate, complete and correct referencing
- Is flawless in grammar and spelling

**A2 80-89 Excellent**
Outstanding in some respects, the work is often beyond what is expected of a competent student at their level of study. It
- Shows original, sophisticated independent thinking
- Demonstrates a thorough understanding of the subject matter
- Draws on a wide, relevant literature base
• Demonstrates critical and insightful analysis of the literature
• Is well focused, with concentration on the main issues to be addressed
• Presents a strong case by means of clear, logically structured argument or debate, supported with evidence
• Shows a good standard of academic writing
• Has, where appropriate, complete and correct referencing
• Shows a high standard of grammar and spelling

A3 70-79 Excellent
Very good or excellent in most respects, the work is what might be expected of a very competent student. It
• Explores the topic under discussion fully
• Shows some complex and/or sensitive independent thinking Complexity and or sensitivity is reflected in the argument
• Demonstrates a sound understanding of the subject matter
• Draws in a wide relevant literature base
• Demonstrates critical analysis of the literature
• Is well focused, with concentration on the main issues to be addressed
• Presents a good case by means of clear logically structured argument or debate, supported by evidence
• Shows a competent standard of fluent academic writing
• Has, where appropriate, complete and correct referencing
• Shows a good standard of grammar and spelling

B 60-69 Very Good
Good or very good in most respects, the work displays thorough mastery of the relevant learning outcomes. It
• Demonstrates a good understanding of the area in question
• Draws on adequate references
• Demonstrates good synthesis, analysis, reflection and evaluation of the literature
• Concentrates on the main issues to be addressed
• Presents an adequate case by means of clear, well structured, logical argument supported with evidence.
• Has, where appropriate, complete and correct referencing of sources
• Shows a good standard of grammar and spelling

C 50-59 Good
The work clearly meets requirements for demonstrating the relevant learning outcomes. It
• Shows evidence of sufficient knowledge and understanding of the material
• Uses references appropriately to support the argument, though they may be limited in number or reflect restricted reading.
• Demonstrates limited critical analysis and evaluation of sources of evidence.
• Addresses the area in question clearly and coherently
• Has satisfactory structure, presentation, and expression
• Has, where appropriate, complete referencing of sources, though there may be minor flaws in referencing technique

D 40-49 Pass
The work meets minimum requirements for demonstrating the relevant learning outcomes.

It
• Demonstrates a sufficient level of knowledge and understanding but at a basic level, and there may be minor inaccuracies
• Lacks detail, elaboration or explanation of concepts and ideas.
• Displays limited synthesis and analysis of the literature
• Presents a highly descriptive account of the topic with no real critical analysis
• Presents a weak argument which is not logically structured or which lacks clarity or is based on unsubstantiated statements
• Has, where appropriate, complete referencing of sources, though there may be flaws in referencing technique.
• Has largely satisfactory expression, though there may be minor spelling or grammatical errors

E 30-39 Marginal fail
The work fails to meet minimum requirements for demonstrating the relevant learning outcomes. It
• Does not demonstrate a sufficient level of knowledge and understanding
• Utilises only limited reference sources and offers poor analysis of them
• May not adequately address the area in question, because its content is too limited or because there are some inaccuracies
• Presents a poorly structured, poorly developed, or incoherent argument, or no argument at all
• Has an awkward writing style or poor expression of concepts
• Has incomplete or inadequately presented references
• Shows a lack of attention to spelling and grammar.

F 20-29 Clear fail
The work is very weak or shows a decided lack of effort. It
• Displays very poor or confused knowledge and understanding
**Does not address the area in question.**
• Presents no argument or one based on irrelevant and erroneous content
• Displays an unacceptable academic writing style and/or presentation
• Has incomplete or inadequately presented references, if any

G 10-19 Bad fail
The work is extremely weak. It
• Displays no knowledge or understanding of the area in question
• Presents incomplete, muddled, and/or irrelevant material
• Provides no coherent discussion of the area in question
• Has incomplete or inadequately presented references, if any

H 0-9 Bad fail
The work is of very little consequence, if any, to the area in question. It
• Is incomplete in every respect.