

Representationalism vs. Expressivism (PHI 750; Spring 2024)

Hall of Languages 538, Wednesdays 3:45-6:30pm (5:00-5:10pm break)

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Office Hours: Tentatively Mondays 3:30-4:20pm and Fridays 3:00-4:00pm (when no department talks)

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

After examining the foundations of expressivism, we will consider how it bears on a variety of problems in epistemology, metaphysics, and the metaphysics/philosophy of science. Throughout, we will be interested in philosophical methodology: what—if anything—makes a non-descriptivist approach to a philosophical problem permissible, preferable, or warranted? Should descriptivist/representationalist approaches be our methodological default unless particular kinds of problems arise? Besides meta-philosophy, this is a seminar in “applied metaethics,” applying concepts from metaethics to other areas of philosophy. The reading list will be “fair and balanced” in the sense that Fox News is. At each juncture, we hope that some participants will plump for non-expressivist positions—the attractions of representationalist views typically being multitude.

COURSE ACTIVITIES:

1. *Participation* (11%): Each week by **Wednesday 11am**, please email me (i) a thesis or position that you plan to endorse/defend/propose/or advocate for (perhaps merely as a devil’s advocate) and (ii) a reason for that thesis. I will then add this to a handout for the day, with your name beside.
 - a. You’ll be expected to briefly defend or discuss your thesis at some point during class.
 - b. Assuming we have enough people in regular attendance, you can miss two classes without penalty (but please email me by Wed. 11am to give me a heads-up!).
2. *Presentation* (24%): at least once during the semester, provide a 15-20 minute overview of an argument(s) in a reading, based on a max 2-page handout (one sheet of paper), followed by moderating a 15-20 minute discussion. Feel free to present again if the spirit moves you!
3. *Paper(s)* (65%), choose one of the two tracks described below:
 - a. *Track Two*: complete two 3000 to 4000-word argumentative papers, due **March 20th** (25%) and **May 1st** (40%), respectively. Each paper should briefly motivate, articulate, and defend a philosophical intervention connected to a class topic. No need to engage with more than two sources. I am looking for a structurally sound argument.
 - b. *Track One*: complete a 6000 to 8000-word term paper due **May 1st** (55% of grade). Please cite at least six sources, engaging non-trivially with at least four. You may propose to write on a topic of personal interest, from the lens of representationalism vs. non-descriptivism (e.g. expressivism, inferentialism, normativism, some forms of pragmatism)

- i. A 1500-word blurb of the core argument or idea for your term paper will be due by **March 20th** (10% of grade). This can be fairly rough (e.g. in the form of bullet-point sentences or an outline).

Since final grades are due May 15, the maximum extension on a paper will be to May 10th (unless you are planning on an incomplete, in which case please be in touch about this by April 3rd).

Each week, I will announce on Blackboard more fine-grained directions for which parts of various sources to read (sometimes small excerpts from much longer works). Total reading each week will hopefully come in under 35 pages, with 100% optional supplements (no obligation necessary).

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS:

Week 0 (1/17)	Intro and Overview Optional: van Roojen's (2023) SEP on Moral Cognitivism vs. Non-cognitivism
Unit 1: Foundations and Foundational Problems	
Week 1 (1/24)	History and Motivation Thomasson (2020) Ch. 1 "Rise and Fall of Early Non-Descriptive Approaches" Supplements: Flocke (2020) "Carnap's Noncognitivism about Ontology" Schroeder (2010) <i>Noncognitivism in Ethics</i> Ch. 2 "The noncognitivist turn"
Week 2 (1/31)	Norm- and Plan-Expressivism vs. Inferentialism Schroeder (2010) <i>Noncognitivism in Ethics</i>, Ch. 4 "Expressivism" Chrisman (2008) "Expressivism, Inferentialism, and Saving the Debate", Section 4 on Inferentialism Supplements: Lance and Hawthorne (2002) "Precis of The Grammar of Meaning: Normativity and Semantic Content" Stalnaker (2019) Ch. 7 "Expressivism and Propositions" (first half)
Week 3 (2/7)	Frege-Geach Embedding Problem and Minimalism about Truth van Roojen's (2023) SEP "Embedding Problem Response Strategies" Horwich (1998) <i>Truth</i> 2nd edition: p. 1-12 "The Minimal Theory" Supplements: Dowell (2023) "Compositionality for Expressivists" Thomasson (2020) Ch. 3.1-3.2 (inferentialist solution to Frege-Geach) Schroeder (2008) "What is the Frege-Geach Problem?"
Week 4 (2/14)	Relativism? Objectivity? Constructivism? Constitutivism? Schroeder (2010) <i>Noncognitivism in Ethics</i> Ch 8 "Truth and Objectivity" Horgan & Timmons (2015), "Modest Quasi-Realism and the Problem of Deep Moral Error" (in <i>Passions and Projections</i>) Supplements: Bagnoli (2021) SEP "Constructivism in Metaethics", Sec 6 Price (2022) "Relativism, Expressivism, and Disagreements about Disagreement"

	Beddor (2019) “Relativism and Expressivism” Horwich (1998) <i>Truth</i> 2 nd edition: 4.15: relativism worry
Week 5 (canceled)	Central APA this week! It’s Bourbon Street or bust, y’all!
Week 6 (2/28)	Expressivism as a Meta-semantic Thesis? Creeping Minimalism? Simpson (2017) “Solving the Problem of Creeping Minimalism” Horwich (1998) <i>Truth</i> 2 nd edition: 5.29 creeping minimalism worry

Unit 2: Epistemology!

Week 7 (3/6)	Expressivism about Knowledge (attributions)
Next week is spring break!	Chrisman (2022) “From Epistemic Contextualism to Epistemic Expressivism” Field (2018) “Epistemology from an Evaluationist Perspective” Supplement: Jenkins (2015) “What Quasi-Realists Can Say about Knowledge”
Week 8 (3/20)	Epistemic Modals Yalcin (2011) “Nonfactualism about Epistemic Modality” Thomasson (2023) “A Neo-Pragmatist Approach to Modality” Supplements: Yalcin (2007) “Epistemic Modals” Moss (2013) “Epistemology Formalized”
Week 9 (3/27)	Permissivism vs. Uniqueness (about credences) Horowitz, Dogramaci, & Schoenfield (202?) “Are You Now, or Have You Ever Been, an Impermissivist?”

Unit 3: Metaphysics and Philosophy of Science

Week 10 (4/3)	Vagueness MacFarlane (2020c) “Indeterminacy as Indecision III”
Week 11 (4/10)	Metaphysical Modality Thomasson (2020) Ch. 2. “The Function of Modal Discourse”
Week 12 (4/17)	Causation Beebe (2015) “Causation, Projection, Inference, and Agency” (in <i>Passions and Projections</i>) Blackburn (1984) <i>Spreading the Word</i> , excerpts
Week 13 (4/24)	Laws of Nature Callender (2023) “Humean Laws of Nature” Ward (2002) “A Projectivist Account of Laws and Possibilities” Supplement: Spohn (2018) “How the Modalities Come into the World”
Make up day? (May 1 st ?)	We can vote on a topic and date if there’s sufficient interest! Locke (2020) “Metaphysical Explanations for Modal Normativists” Blackburn (2002) “Realism: Deconstructing the Debate”

	Price (2015) “From Quasi-Realism to Global Expressivism—and Back Again?” Simpson (2020) “What is Global Expressivism?” Williams (2013) Ch. 7: “How pragmatists can be local expressivists” Restall (2012) “Inferentialism about modal logic” Menon (202?) “Spacetime functionalists should be inferentialists”
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Each class, we will take a 10-minute break from 5pm to 5:10pm

DIVERSITY, DISABILITY, AND INCLUSIVITY:

In all course-related activities and communications, you will be treated with respect. I welcome individuals of all ages, backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, genders, gender identities, gender expressions, military backgrounds, national origins, religious affiliations, sexual orientations, ability, and other visible and non-visible differences. All members of this class are expected to help create a welcoming and inclusive environment for every other member of the class who respects this policy.

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact The Center for Disability Resources (CDR) at disabilityresources@syr.edu as soon as possible, to make an appointment to discuss your needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please e-mail me as soon as possible to set up a time to discuss your learning needs. As someone who has used these services in the past, you can assume that I will be HIGHLY sympathetic! A [link to CDR resources](#).

Additional words of care from our university overlords: Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to contact me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process. If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit their website at <https://disabilityresources.syr.edu/>, call (315) 443-4498, or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information.

LINKS TO ADDITIONAL SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY POLICIES:

- [Code of Student Conduct](#)
- [Academic Integrity Documents and Report Process](#) (and a free quiz! Gee whiz!)
- [Religious Observances Notification Policy](#)