
Spring 2020

Truth and Time

PHL 415

Instructor: Aaron Griffith
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Classroom: James Blair 142
Time: Tuesdays 3:30pm – 6:20pm
Office: James Blair 138
Office Hours: T/Th 11:30am – 12:30pm

Overview

This is a course in contemporary metaphysics focusing on issues related to truth and time. We'll consider questions such as: What is truth? How are truth and reality connected? What is time? Do the past and future exist? What is the structure of temporal reality? Are there any truths about the future? In what sense, if any, is the future 'open'? We'll finish the course with reflection on some of the normative implications for these issues, especially with respect to freedom, fatalism, and our obligations to future generations.

Goals

Upon completion of this course, students will:

- Read and critically engage with contemporary work in analytical metaphysics.
- Become familiar with fundamental concepts of metaphysics and philosophy of language.
- Understand and be able to discuss the various debates over (i) the nature of truth, (ii) the nature of truthmakers, (iii) the structure of the world in time, and (iv) the relations between truth, time, and freedom.

Requirements

1. Attendance and Participation (10%)
2. Lead one Discussion (10%)
3. Three Critique Essays (40%)
4. Final Essay (40%)

Materials

- All readings are PDFs available on Black Board.

Grading Scale

- **A: 90-100 (90-93: A-, 93.5-100: A)**
- **B: 80-89 (80-83: B-, 83.5-86: B, 86.5-89: B+)**
- **C: 70-79 (70-73: C-, 73.5-76: C, 76.5-79: C+)**
- **D: 60-69 (60-63: D-, 63.5-66: D, 66.5-69: D+)**
- **E: 0-59**

Reading/Assignment Schedule

Week	Date	Readings	Assignments
1	N/A	<p>Introduction</p> <p>No Class. Familiarize yourself with syllabus and Metaphysical Terminology (pdf)</p>	
2	1/28	<p>Truth and Truthmaking</p> <p>David Armstrong, "A General Theory of Truthmaking" Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, "Why Truthmakers" Trenton Merricks, "Truth Supervenes on Being"</p> <p>Add/Drop Ends</p>	
3	2/4	<p>Time: Eternalism</p> <p>Kristie Miller, "Presentism, Eternalism, and Growing Block" J.J.C Smart, "The Tenseless Theory of Time" Sam Baron and Kristie Miller, "Characterizing Eternalism"</p>	
4	2/11	<p>Time: Presentism</p> <p>Dean Zimmerman, "The Privileged Present: Defending an A-Theory of Time." Ned Markosian, "A Defense of Presentism"</p>	Critique Essay 1 Due
5	2/18	<p>Time: Growing Block</p> <p>Michael Tooley, <i>Time, Tense, and Causality</i>, pp. 11 – 71.</p>	Zane
6	2/25	<p>Truthmaking and Time I</p> <p>Caplan and Sanson, "Presentism and Truthmaking" Ross Cameron, "Truthmaking for Presentists" Alan Rhoda, "Presentism, Truthmakers, and God"</p>	Ailish Jake Hans

7	3/3	Truthmaking and Time II Ted Sider, <i>Four-Dimensionalism</i> , pp. 11 – 52. David Braddon-Mitchell, “How Do We Know That It Is Now Now?” Peter Forrest, “The Real but Dead Past: A Reply to Braddon-Mitchell”	Critique Essay 2 Due
8	3/10	No Class: Spring Break	
9	3/17	No Class Spring Break	
10	3/23-3/27	Future Contingents and the Open Future I Aristotle, <i>De Interpretatione</i> 9 Stephan Torre, “The Open Future” Elizabeth Barnes and Ross Cameron, “The Open Future: Bivalence, Determinism, and Ontology” Withdrawal ends	Isaac Noah Critique Essay 3 Due
11	3/30-4/3	Future Contingents and the Open Future II Borghini and Torrenco, “The Metaphysics of the Thin Red Line” Patrick Todd, “Future Contingents are all False!” John MacFarland, “Future Contingents and Relative Truth”	Écho Yasmine
12	4/6-4/10	Freedom and Fatalism I Richard Taylor, “Fate” Merricks, “Truth and Freedom” Fischer and Todd, “The Truth About Freedom” Craig Bourne, “Fatalism and the Future”	Ale Keaton Caleb
13	4/13-4/17	Freedom and Fatalism II Nelson Pike, “Divine Omniscience and Voluntary Action” Alvin Plantinga, “On Ockham’s Way Out”	William Tanja

14	4/20-4/24	Truth, Time, and Ethics I Heather Dyke, "What Moral Realism Can Learn from the Philosophy of Time" M. Fiocco, "Consequentialism and the World in Time"	Rough Draft of Final Essay Due Friday 4/24 at 11:59pm
15	4/27-5/1	Truth, Time, and Ethics II Robert Elliot, "The Rights of Future People" Aaron Griffith, "Intergenerational Rights and the Problem of Cross-Temporal Normative Relations"	Monica
16		Finals Week	Final Essay Due Monday 5/11 at 11:59pm

Of Special Note

Attendance

Attendance is *mandatory*. Attendance will be taken at arbitrary points during the semester. You get 3 free documented absences during the semester. For each documented absence after your 3rd you will lose 1% off of your final grade. Please be on time to class. But if you are late to class, please enter the room quietly and unobtrusively. Absences may be excused for the following reasons only: (a) a serious medical issue (i.e., one requiring hospitalization or confinement in the infirmary), (b) a family emergency (i.e., death or emergency hospitalization of an immediate family member), (c) conflicting University-related events, (d) religious observances, or (e) jury duty.

Missed Tests

Make up or alternative tests will not be granted without documented proof of either (a) a serious medical issue (i.e., one requiring hospitalization or confinement in the infirmary), (b) a family emergency (i.e., death or emergency hospitalization of an immediate family member), (c) conflicting University-related events, (d) religious observances, or (e) jury duty. If you miss a test and do not have documented proof of these cases, you will receive a 0 (zero) as your score. (Alternate tests should be scheduled ahead of time for reasons (c) through (e).)

Papers

Papers will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are late. I am happy to help you get an early start on your written assignments. You are responsible for backing up texts composed on a computer, and failures of software or hardware are not acceptable reasons for a late assignment. I highly recommend using Dropbox to back up your files:

<http://www.dropbox.com/>

If you do not understand why you received the grade you did, please come see me. Under no conditions will your grade be lowered if you do come see me to discuss a grade you received. *However, if you do want clarification you must submit to me in writing your question or concern before we meet in person.*

I also encourage you to take advantage of the writing resources on campus. The *Writing Resources Center* in Swem Library offers free feedback on your written work, including help with drafting, organizing, and editing your assignments. Find the writing center online at <http://www.wm.edu/as/wrc/>.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious matter and will be handled by the appropriate authorities. According to official William & Mary policy, plagiarism is “the presentation, with intent to deceive, or with disregard for proper scholarly procedures of a significant scope, of any information, ideas or phrasing of another as if they were one’s own without giving appropriate credit to the original source” (Section IV, C: Honor Code Violations). Turning in any work which is not your own and not properly acknowledged as such will result in a recommendation for failure in the course and subject you to further action by the university. Please review the university policy on academic dishonesty and speak to me if you have questions. See:

https://www.wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/studenthandbook/honor_system/section_VI/index.php

Writing Resources Center

The Writing Resources Center, located on the first floor of Swem Library, is a free service provided to W&M students. Trained consultants offer individual assistance with writing, presentation, and other communication assignments across disciplines and at any stage, from generating ideas to polishing a final product. To make an appointment, visit the WRC webpage www.wm.edu/wrc.

Class Behavior

You are responsible for being prepared for each class session, which means having carefully read the assignment for each day of class and thought of questions you would like to discuss. You are responsible for all material covered in both lecture and the required readings.

I ask that all members of the class conduct themselves in a respectful manner. Respect for others takes a number of forms in this class, and in academic life generally. In the first place, it means that we need to be sensitive to how our behavior in class affects others. For example, I ask that students be conscientious about how your use of technology affects others in class. Take conversations and phone calls outside. Please do not text, chat online, or surf the net in class. If your behavior becomes problematic or disruptive, I will ask you to leave. I ask that you have intellectual respect for others, as well. This means that if you disagree with a position that someone holds, you should assume that the person is at least as smart as you are, and that the person probably has good reasons for thinking as he or she does. Your job is to be a good listener and exchange ideas, not to attack and degrade others.

Students with Disabilities

It is the policy of The College of William & Mary to accommodate students with disabilities and qualifying diagnosed conditions in accordance with federal and state laws. Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Students will also need to contact Student Accessibility Services staff at 757-221-2509 or at sas@wm.edu to determine if accommodations are warranted and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more information, please see www.wm.edu/sas.

Additional Resources

Not all resources (especially those online) are created equal! You will not need to read or research any other material than the required readings to succeed in this course. However, you may be interested in pursuing our topics further. In addition to the optional readings I will provide on our course website, I recommend two websites in particular:

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: www.plato.stanford.edu/

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: www.iep.utm.edu/

