

Propositional Attitudes
PHIL 434/634
Yale University, Spring 2012

10 January 2012

I. Basic Information

Instructor: Bruno Whittle

Office: 405A Connecticut Hall
Office Hours: TBA and by appointment (feel free to use the latter option)
Office Telephone: 203.432.1675 (not a reliable way to reach me)
E-mail: bruno.whittle@yale.edu (the best way to reach me)

Course time: Tuesdays 3:30–5:20
Course location: LC 105
Course website: <https://classesv2.yale.edu/portal/> (login required)

II. Course Topics and Prerequisites

The seminar will be about propositional attitudes: believing, desiring, hoping, regretting, suspecting, etc. Why? Because they are fundamental states, and also an enduring source of philosophical problems. The first part of the seminar will look at one the classic problems relating to propositional attitudes: Frege's puzzle. We will do this by looking in depth at an important and ambitious recent approach to this problem: Kit Fine's 'semantic relationism'. The second part of the seminar will look in particular at belief, and at a number of problems relating to it. An example is the following. Here are two apparently very plausible ideas about belief: first, beliefs are our means of storing information; and, second, if you believe something, then you are willing to use it in reasoning. But it is relatively easy to see (by way of examples) that these ideas cannot both be right. So one question we will ask is: what does this tell us about belief? We will also, in this part of the seminar, look at paradoxes for belief, such as the preface paradox. The third part of the seminar will look other attitudes, including desire. Desire, in particular, seems to be an under-explored philosophical topic: on the one hand, it is widely assumed to be one of our most fundamental and important mental states (e.g., when it comes to explaining our behaviour); but, on the other, there has been relatively little investigation into the nature of this state (for example, what do my preferences have to be like, to count as desiring such-and-such?). It is very natural to try to give an account of desire in terms of (something like) possible worlds, but there are questions concerning how exactly one should do this: these will be among those that we will consider in the third part of the seminar.

While there are no particular prerequisites for the course, I expect any student taking the course to have reasonable familiarity with philosophy. However, throughout the semester, I am happy to help guide students to appropriate background and supplementary readings which I will post on the course web site. But I will expect students to take responsibility for filling lacunae that would otherwise preclude understanding; as a result, there may be weeks where an individual student will end up doing more reading than the schedule below indicates.

III. Course Requirements

All those attending the seminar (including auditors) are expected to keep up with the readings and to participate actively in class discussions. Participation in class discussion will determine 30% of your grade.

All students enrolled in the seminar for credit must complete one of the following two sets of requirements:

Option 1: (Required for graduate students and philosophy majors fulfilling their senior requirements)

- One mid-term paper (6–8 pages) due on or before Friday, Feb. 24 at 5pm. (30% of grade.)
- One final paper (15–20 pages), which may but need not be on the same topic as your mid-term paper. The assignment has two parts (40% of grade):
 - (a) A proposal and outline (3–5 pages). In the proposal, you should identify your topic and the issues it raises, and explain in a general way what you intend to say about these issues. The proposal must be submitted by Friday, March 30 at 5pm. Comments on your proposal will be provided to you by Friday, April 13 at 5pm. Extra office hours will be held during the week of April 16 so that you can discuss your paper with me if you wish.
 - (b) The paper itself, due on or before Wednesday, April 25 at 5pm. (NB: THIS IS A FIRM DEADLINE; NO EXTENSIONS WILL BE GRANTED, PLEASE PLAN ACCORDINGLY.)

Option 2: (Recommended for undergraduates not fulfilling their senior requirement)

- One mid-term paper (4–6 pages) due on or before Friday Feb. 24 at 5pm. Suggested topics for the mid-term paper will be posted on the website two weeks before it is due. (30% of grade.)
- One final paper (8–12 pages), due Wednesday, April 25 at 5pm. The final paper may be a significantly expanded version of mid-term paper, or it may address a different (pre-approved) topic. (NB: THIS IS A FIRM DEADLINE; NO EXTENSIONS WILL BE GRANTED, PLEASE PLAN ACCORDINGLY.) (40% of grade)

IV. Course Readings (provisional)

Copies of all readings will be available at the PHIL 434/634 site at <https://classesv2.yale.edu/portal/>.

1/10: Week 1: Introduction

PART I: Rival Conceptions of Propositions

1/17: Week 2: Russellian Propositions/Semantic Relationism I

- K. Fine, Introduction and ch. 1 of *Semantic Relationism* (Blackwell, 2007).

1/24: Week 3: Russellian Propositions/Semantic Relationism II

- K. Fine, ch. 2 of *Semantic Relationism*.

1/31: Week 4: Russellian Propositions/Semantic Relationism III

- K. Fine, chs 3 and 4 of *Semantic Relationism*.

2/7: Week 5: Possible Worlds Propositions

- R. Stalnaker, chs 4 and 5 of *Inquiry* (MIT Press, 1984).

Optional background: R. Stalnaker, ch. 3 of *Inquiry*.

PART II: Belief and its Function

2/14: Week 6: Reducing Beliefs to Credences

- B. Weatherson, 'Knowledge, Bets and Interests' (forthcoming).

2/21: Week 7: Against the Reduction

- J. Ross and M. Schroeder, 'Belief, Credence, and Pragmatic Encroachment' (forthcoming).

2/28: Week 8: A Different Approach to Belief

Optional

- B. Whittle, 'Belief, Information and Reasoning' (draft).

3/20: Week 9: The Preface Paradox

- D. Christensen, chs 2 and 3 of *Putting Logic in its Place* (OUP, 2004).

PART III: Desire and Other Attitudes

3/27: Week 10: Desire I

- D. Fara, 'Specifying Desires' (forthcoming).

4/3: Week 11: Desire II

- I. Heim, 'Presupposition Projection and the Semantics of Attitude Verbs' (*Journal of Semantics*, 1992).

4/10: Week 12: TBA

4/17: Week 13: TBA