

## PHILO588-21A(FLEXI): Truth and Politics

Lectures: Tuesdays 9:00am - 11:00am

Location: MSB.1.13 & Zoom

Instructor: Joe Ulatowski

Office: J3.19A

Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:30am - 12:30pm

or by appointment (F2F and Zoom)

### Required Texts

There is *no required text book for the course*, but there will be required readings. The required readings will be made available online using the **Talis reading list system** and in a course pack available for purchase through **Waikato Print**. The **list of readings** is available beginning on **p. 3** of this abbreviated syllabus.

### Recommended Texts

There are many! Too many to list here, but the list is available on our paper outline page. Please visit!

### Course Description

In *On Liberty*, **John Stuart Mill** argued that societies should permit the *free expression* of opinion. Even the most offensive or false opinions should be tolerated because truths will win out over falsehoods following the free exchange of such opinions in the **marketplace of ideas**. Mill, however, never had an internet connection.

The internet has increased the volume and the transmission of ideas. Some true, but many false. People freely consume these ideas, either deliberately or in passing through the use of a social media platform like *Facebook* or *Twitter*. If Mill had been correct, then **misinformation** and **disinformation** should be drowned out by facts and expert opinion; instead, they're praised and multiplied in the form of **falsehoods**, **conspiracy theories**, and **bald-face lies**.

Nowhere else is this assault on truth more apparent than in contemporary politics. This course aims to examine the challenges democracy faces in light of **the propagation of misinformation**; it aims to question whether **democracies have an interest in the promotion of true beliefs**; and, it seeks to reconcile the threat that **technology poses to truth** and **the value of truth**.

### Course requirements

*Assessment at the postgraduate level places far more demands on the student than the demands placed on them at the undergraduate level.* A postgraduate student is a professional so the expectation is for the student to have mastered the material enough to be *proficient* in understanding the material. This means that the student is expected to **write more clearly**, **argue more rigorously**, and **identify more challenges of others' views and one's own views** than what is expected of undergraduate students. Since postgraduate students enrol in fewer papers and since the main responsibility of the postgraduate student is to complete research on an independent project, the list of readings and the amount of assessment required of students in the paper is the **absolute minimum work** to be completed for the paper.

This course adopts a blended learning environment, such that content will be delivered **online** and **in-person**. It, therefore, has been designated a **FLEXI** class. This does not mean that we will not have a face-to-face component; we will. What this means is that some content will be delivered and available through the University's preferred online classroom management system: **Moodle**. The burden of the work is shared equally between the student and the lecturer. The course convenor will employ the Moodle Online platform to alert students of work that is coming due, and the student should act responsibly by checking the Moodle page regularly. It may be wise for the student to ensure that the email address the Moodle system has on file is the one that the student checks regularly.

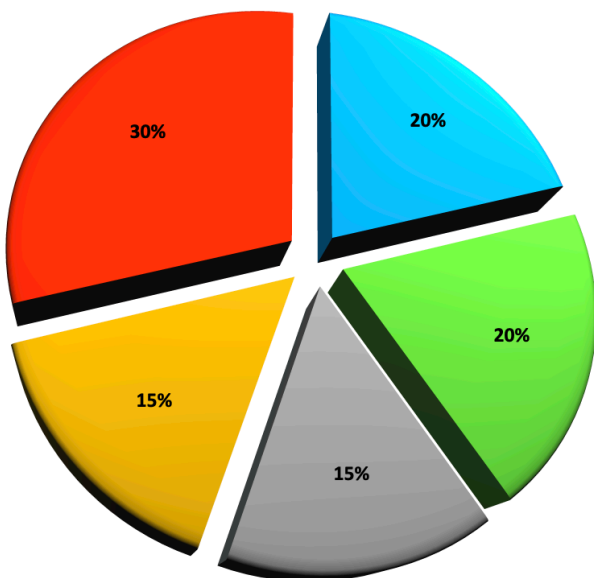
**Participation (20%)**: *Philosophy depends upon dialogue between discussants.* Because of this, an integral part of the PHILO 588 learning experience is in-class participation **with the lecturer** and **with fellow students**. For each lecture, students who participate in the in-class discussion will earn a mark for *high quality engagement* with the material. I will write down your name and a summary of your contribution every time you contribute to the classroom experience.

**Presentation (20%):** Students will give a presentation during a meeting of the regular lecture, and the topic of the presentation will be drawn from the readings. ***If there are fewer than 10 students enrolled in the paper, then students will have more than one opportunity to give a presentation.*** The presentation must be a **clear, coherent, and concise** summary of the material in the reading, and the student will be graded on their *ability* to convey the complex information in an easily digestible way. Presentations provide an opportunity for the student to develop **public speaking** and **presentation** skills, which are integral to an assortment of professional and personal life activities.

**Essay plan (15%):** Students should be sufficiently prepared to complete a long essay (5000 words). A philosophy essay should have an argument as its backbone. If there's no argument, then it's not philosophy. To prepare an argumentative essay appropriate for a philosophy paper you should submit an essay plan, which will consist of the following:

1. In one sentence, answer the question: What is the topic of your essay?
2. All philosophy essays should be focused upon one narrowly conceived issue. So, in two-to-three sentences, answer the question: What is the focus of your particular interpretation of that topic going to be?
3. In one-to-two sentences, answer the question: What is your main conclusion?
4. Name two articles or book chapters you have read, or plan to read, that you will consider and mention in your essay. Summarise what is said in each of these works, and indicate how they are relevant to your topic: one-to-three sentences should suffice. Example: Linda Zagzebski's 'Recovering Understanding' rejects the argument that understanding is a form of knowledge. This is relevant to my essay because . . .
5. Write a short outline of your planned essay. You may model this outline on the style we employ for weekly argument reconstructions, or you may use the standard model of outline employed elsewhere in the academy. (This can be up to one-full A4 page.)
6. An argumentative essay should consider potential objections or challenges that the position may face. So, in two-to-four sentences, answer the following questions: Do you have any doubts about your conclusion? What are they?
7. Philosophy essays are full of examples. Perhaps the clarity of your argument will be helped along by an illustration or thought experiment. So, provide one original example that you might employ in your essay which is relevant to your argument. (This can be two-to-five sentences.)
8. Finally, explain how this example is relevant to the argument of your essay. (1-2 sentences)

Students should use the constructive feedback received to improve the quality of the long essay. (More information about the essay plan will be distributed closer to the time it is due.)



Visual representation of course requirement distribution

**Essay draft (15%):** Students will be required to write and to submit a **draft** of their essay. The draft **need not** be 5000 words, but it should be presented in written rather than outline form. The essay draft should contain a clear and rigorous argument, and references as if it were a regular essay. I will provide **extensive constructive feedback** on the essay draft, return it to the student within **3 to 5 days** of submission, and the student should use that feedback to **substantively revise** the original draft.

**Essay (30%):** Essays should be a maximum of **5,000 words**, and the essays should be analytic, that is, they should contain an argument which includes **premises** and a **main conclusion**. The main argument, of course, is supported by **auxiliary arguments**. The Moodle page will provide some helpful guidelines for how the student should approach the project. The essay is due by **Friday, 4 June 2021 at 11:59pm**. Late submissions will be processed without penalty for up to two weeks following the official submission deadline. After that, the student receives a 0 for the assessment.

## Course Schedule

Week	Week Beginning	Topics	Readings
Course			
1	Mon 1 Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> </ul>	<p><b>Required readings/multimedia:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a Woman?"</li> <li>• Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics"</li> <li>• Country Joe McDonald, "The 'FISH' Cheer" and "I Feel-Like-I'm-Fixin'-to-Die Rag"</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommended readings/multimedia:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language"</li> <li>• Country Joe &amp; The Fish, "Superbird"</li> </ul>
2	Mon 8 Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Value of Truth</li> </ul>	<p><b>Required readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jane Heal, "The Disinterested Search for Truth"</li> <li>• Chase Wrenn, "Truthfulness as a Democratic Value"</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommended readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Friedrich, Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense"</li> </ul>
3	Mon 15 Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratic institutions and Truth</li> </ul>	<p><b>Required readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joshua Cohen, "Truth and Public Reason"</li> <li>• John Rawls, "Idea of Public Reason Revisited"</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommended readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• David Estlund, "The Truth in Political Liberalism"</li> </ul>
4	Mon 22 Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democratic institutions and Truth</li> </ul>	<p><b>Required readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• David Estlund, "Epistemic Proceduralism and Democratic Authority"</li> <li>• Elizabeth Anderson, "The Epistemology of Democracy"</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommended readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Robert Talisse, excerpts from <i>Overdoing Democracy</i></li> <li>• Linda Zerilli, "Truth and Politics"</li> </ul>
5	Mon 29 Mar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of Expression and Truth</li> </ul>	<p><b>Required readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John Stuart Mill, <i>On Liberty</i>, ch2</li> <li>• Frederick Rosen, "J.S. Mill on Truth, Liberty, and Democracy"</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommended readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michael P. Lynch, "Academic Freedom and the Politics of Truth"</li> </ul>
6	Mon 5 Apr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of Expression and Truth</li> </ul>	<p><b>Required readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• J.L. Austin, "Performative Utterances"</li> <li>• Rae Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts"</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommended readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• David Lewis, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game"</li> <li>• Robert Stalnaker, "Common Ground"</li> </ul>
7	Mon 12 Apr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of Expression and Truth</li> </ul>	<p><b>Required readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mary Kate McGowan, "Oppressive Speech"</li> <li>• Sitting Bull, "On Freedom" Prison Interview (1882)</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommended readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ishani Maitra, "Subordinating Speech"</li> </ul>
8	Mon 19 Apr	Teaching Recess Week	
9	Mon 26 Apr	Teaching Recess Week	

10	Mon 3 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disagreement, Polarisation, and Truth</li> </ul>	<p><b>Required readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cailin O'Connor and James Weatherall, "Scientific Polarization"</li> <li>Robert Post, "Truth and Disagreement"</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommended readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alex Worsnip, "Disagreement about Disagreement? What Disagreement about Disagreement?"</li> <li>Thomas Nadelhoffer, <i>et al.</i>, "Partisanship, Humility, and Epistemic Polarization"</li> <li>Bjørn G. Hallsson, "The Epistemic Significance of Political Disagreement"</li> </ul>
11	Mon 10 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disagreement, Polarisation, and Truth</li> </ul>	<p><b>Required readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thi Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"</li> <li>Tracy Llanera, "Disavowing Hate: Group Egotism from Westboro to the Klan"</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommended readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kenneth Boyd, "Epistemically Pernicious Groups and the Groupstrapping Problem"</li> </ul>
12	Mon 17 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Propaganda and Truth</li> </ul>	<p><b>Required readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>L. Susan Stebbing, "Propaganda: An Obstacle"</li> <li>Kaye Mathieson and Don Fallis, "The Greatest Liar Has His Believers"</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommended readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mark Alfano and Colin Klein, "Trust in a Social and Digital World"</li> <li>Michael P. Lynch, "Power, Bald-Face Lies, and Contempt for Truth"</li> </ul>
13	Mon 24 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Propaganda and Truth</li> </ul>	<p><b>Required readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lynne Tirrell, "Genocidal Language Games"</li> <li>W.E.B. DuBois, "The Propaganda of History"</li> <li>Sally Haslanger, "Ideology, Generics, and Common Ground"</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommended readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tommie Shelby, "Ideology, Racism, and Critical Social Theory"</li> <li>Jason Stanley, "Language as a Mechanism of Control" from <i>How Propaganda Works</i></li> </ul>
14	Mon 31 May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deceit and Truth</li> </ul>	<p><b>Required readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Karen Frost-Arnold, "Social Media, Trust and Epistemology of Prejudice"</li> <li>Michael P. Lynch, excerpts from <i>Know-It-All Society</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Recommended readings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regina Rini, "Fake News and Partisan Epistemology"</li> </ul>
15	Mon 7 Jun	Study Week	
16	Mon 14 Jun	Exam Week	
17	Mon 21 Jun	Exam Week	