

Truth: from Ancient Greek thought to modern linguistic semantics

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Course summary

This course studies the concept of truth and truth judgement (veridicality). We examine philosophical and linguistic theories of truth from antiquity to the modern day. From the Greek *alētheia* to the Latin *veritas* and on, truth arises as a cross-cultural value and a cross-linguistic default and communicative expectation. We discuss logical, epistemic and moral truth— and distinguish between objective and subjective dimensions of truth and veridicality. Subjective truth relies crucially on how speakers use knowledge to assess what is true and what is a fact. We discuss also the relation between truth, perception, memory, and evidence; as well as the relation between truth and desire. Some of the philosophers and logicians whose contributions on the topic will be examined are the Pythagoreans, the Sophists, Plato, Aristotle, prominent Stoics, Pyrrhonian and Academic Sceptics, Cicero, Frege, Tarski, Nietzsche, Pierce, Wittgenstein, Grice and Giannakidou, among others. This course will involve quizzes and in-class games that further develop metalinguistic and metacognitive awareness, while a new appreciation of language, reality and of human cognition is an anticipated desirable outcome.

Target audience: The course addresses both undergraduate and graduate level students of various disciplines, primarily within the Humanities and the Social Sciences. Yet given the nature of the topic, the course is appropriate for participants of diverse scientific backgrounds that have an interest on the link between reality, logic and human language.

Readings

Course reading material is exclusively based on sources either available online or papers that will be distributed in pdf form prior to the course. No purchase of textbook is necessary.

Required readings

Plato, *Republic* books VI-VII, Aristotle, *On interpretation* and *On sophisticated refutations* (included in the *Organon*)

General bibliography

Blockley, Roger C. 2001. Ammianus and Cicero on Truth in Historiography. *Ancient History Bulletin* 15.14-24.

- Braet, Antoine. 2007. The Oldest Extant Rhetorical Contribution to the Study of Fallacies (Cicero *On invention*, 1.78–96, and *Rhetoric to Herennius*, 2.31–46: Reducible to *Hermagoras?*), *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 40(4).416-433.
- Giannakidou, Anastasia. 2016. The subjunctive as evaluation and nonveridicality. In: *Mood, aspect and modality: what is a linguistic category?* Ed. by J. Blaszack, A. Giannakidou, D. Klimek-Jankowska, K. Mygdalski. University of Chicago.
- Giannakidou, Anastasia & Alda Mari. 2016. A unified analysis of the future as epistemic modality: the view from Greek and Italian. *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory*
- Kant, Immanuel. 1998. *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and ed. by P. Guyer and A. W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Saeed, John. 2009. *Semantics*. London: Blackwell.

Course schedule

- Day 1 Introduction: truth in philosophy and logic
- Day 2 The Sophists (Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus), Nietzsche, Durkheim, Wittgenstein and the Socratics
- Day 3 Pyrrhonian and Academic Scepticism versus Epistemic Nihilism (quiz 1)
- Day 4 Language and truth: Pragmatics and the Cooperativity Principle; Linguistic Relativism
- Day 5 Propositional logic: from Aristotle and Chrysippus to Frege and Tarski (quiz 2)
- Day 6 Veridicality and logical fallacies: (Aristotle, Cicero, Lock, Kant, Moore and Giannakidou)
- Day 7 Sample applications: truth in politics, in research and in court (Plato on truth and the brave lie; research methodology; forensic linguistics) (quiz 3)
- Day 8 Truth and subjectivity in language (guest lecturer: Anastasia Giannakidou)
- Day 9 On lying (guest lecturer: Anastasia Giannakidou)
- Day 10 Review and final exam

Evaluation

Course evaluation is based on class participation (20%), three in-class quizzes (30%), a final examination (20%) and a take-home essay (30%) to be submitted after the end of the course (deadline: 10 August, 2017, word limit: 3.000). The grading system followed is based on a maximum score of 100 points, in particular: A (90-100), A- (85-89), B (75-85), B- (70-74), C (60-69), D ($59 \leq$)