

# PHI 750: Puzzling Propositions

Fall 2024, Syracuse University

## Course Description

Propositions play a central role in the philosophy of language but continue to present philosophical puzzles. For example, one might think that since sentences can occur under temporal operators just as under modal operators, propositions *qua* meanings of sentences must vary in truth value not just across worlds, but also times, maybe even locations or other parameters. Or as another example, it seems like we can refer to propositions using terms like ‘the proposition that it’s raining’, and yet whereas ‘Alice fears that it’s raining’ may be true, ‘Alice fears the proposition that it’s raining’ is not (why would she fear an abstract object?). In this seminar we will begin by looking at Kaplan’s theory about the role of propositions in language presented in *Demonstratives*, and then delve into the two topics above. This will eventually lead us into recent “higher-order” approaches to propositions, questions about whether propositions can be structured in anything like the way the sentences we use to express them are, and connections between these topics.

## Contact Information

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## Course Requirements

The following is required of all seminar participants: (i) attendance, preparation, and participation in class discussion, and (ii) a question or critical comment posted to the Blackboard discussion forum one day before the seminar.

Those enrolled for credit are also required to write either (i) two separate papers (10-12 pages each) over the course of the semester, or (ii) one shorter paper (10-12 pages) earlier in the semester and a longer ( $\geq 20$  pages) development of that first paper at the end of the semester.

## Schedule

Below is a tentative schedule. Readings may get added or removed depending on seminar participants’ interests. Note the deadlines for writing assignments.

**Week 1 [8.26]:** Kaplan (1977/1989) ‘Demonstratives’: Preface, I–VI

**9.2 Labor Day, No Classes**

**Week 2 [9.9]:** Kaplan (1977/1989) ‘Demonstratives’: VII–VIII, XIII–XIV, XVIII–XIX (to Remark 8), Lewis (1980) ‘Index, Context, and Content’

**Week 3 [9.16]:** MacFarlane (2009) ‘Nonindexical Contextualism’

**Week 4 [9.23]:** Rabern (2012) ‘Against the Identification of Assertoric Content with Compositional Value’  
Rabern (2013) ‘Monsters in Kaplan’s Logic of Demonstratives’ (§2–3)

**Week 5 [9.30]:** Pickel (2019) ‘Structured Propositions in Generative Grammar’  
**Topic for first paper due**

**Week 6 [10.7]:** King (2002) ‘Designating Propositions’

**10.14 Fall Break, No Classes**

**Week 7 [10.21]:** Rosefeldt (2008) ‘That’-clauses and Non-Nominal Quantification’  
**First Paper Due**

**Week 8 [10.28]:** Nebel (2019) ‘*Hopes, Fears, and Other Grammatical Scarecrows*’

**Week 9 [11.4]** D’Ambrosio (2023) ‘Prior’s Puzzle Generalized’

**Week 10 [11.11]:** Hofweber (2019) ‘Idealism and the Harmony of Thought and Reality’  
Trueman (2021) ‘Idealism and the Identity Theory of Truth’

**Week 11 [11.18]:** Goodman (2017) ‘Reality is Not Structured’  
*Background:* Klement (2010) ‘Russell, His Paradoxes, and Cantor’s Theorem: Part I’ (§1–3), Dorr (2016) ‘To Be F is To Be G’ (§6)  
**Topic for second paper due.**

**11.25 Thanksgiving Break, No Classes**

**Week 12 [12.2] :** Bacon (2023) 'A Theory of Structured Propositions'

**Week 13 [12.9]:** Hofweber (2022) 'The Case Against Higher-Order Metaphysics'

**12.16: second paper due**