Course Syllabus

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Office hrs, on TR: 12:00 - 1:50 2:00 - 3:50 12:00 - 1:50
– or by appointment –

Brief Description:

This will be a unique opportunity to interact with faculty and other students around a research project in a seminar environment. The topic is material from Prof. Roy’s sabbatical book project, Properties, Possibilities and Physical Things: Toward the Pleasures of Platonism Without the Pain, in which he takes up questions about abstract objects, including fictional characters, properties and possibilities, and especially the question whether they have a ground in the concrete physical world. The format is modeled on a graduate seminar but with an increased level of faculty input. Thus a typical class will include a short faculty presentation, a response paper from a student – having been prepared (or plotted!) beforehand in conference with other faculty, a short reply by the presenting faculty, and then general faculty/student discussion. So the course will have a unique emphasis on discussion and interaction with faculty, give intensive and one-on-one attention to writing, and provide an opportunity to interact with and contribute to an ongoing philosophical research project. It is something the Department is rarely positioned to offer, supported by a grant from the CSUSB Teaching Resource Center. Phil 485 requires as prerequisite Phil 380 or consent of the instructors along with successful completion of the Department Skills Quiz.

Texts:

The primary text for this course is Roy’s manuscript, Properties, Possibilities, and Physical Things: Toward the Pleasures of Platonism Without the Pain, together with certain supplements. This much will be supplied to you in xerox form free of charge! In addition, there is a “big book” of additional supplements, different ones of which will be required of different students (depending on writing assignments). This will be available in the Logic Lab (UH 052); you can read or copy from the book there.

Grading:

Grading is based on homework and participation (20%), two short papers, at least one of which will be presented in class (20% each), and a term paper which may develop one of the short papers (40%). There is also some opportunity for extra credit. A typical class will include a short presentation by one faculty member (A); a student response paper, prepared in conferences with a second faculty member (B); a short reply by the first faculty member (A); and then general discussion prompted in part by the third faculty member (C). Given these roles:

a) There will be regular reading assignments for each class period. The homework (20% of the grade) is to prepare discussion questions based on the reading. These can be for understanding, “I don’t
understand...” or philosophical, “There seems to be a problem...” For a given period, reading questions are to be received (electronic OK) by the C faculty member prior to class, at a time to be designated as we go. Homework will be scored on a 4-point scale, with the first three points based on the written questions – whether they reflect serious engagement with the material. Insofar as this is a seminar course, the fourth point will reflect the extent to which the questions work as an actual guide into your class discussion. An average score of 4 is sufficient for 100% on homework. However scores of 5 and even 6 are possible on homework assignments that lead to substantive results in discussion – and especially, for ones that “take Roy down” philosophically (for which there may be many opportunities, given the rough state of his manuscript). Each assignment is of equal weight, though the lowest two homework grades will be dropped. The dropped homework grades are to allow for missed classes and emergency. Given its role for discussion, no late homework will be accepted. Exceptions to this policy will be allowed only for exceptional (and continuing) circumstances. All homework is to be typed.

(b) The short papers (20% each) are of course, central to the very operation of the course. After the first few periods (where faculty will take the response roles), students will sign up to present a topic on a given date. Then, including meeting(s) with a B faculty member, they develop a 5-6 page response paper for presentation. Responses will typically incorporate readings from the “big book” beyond regular class readings. The paper must be judged adequate for presentation and distributed to other faculty by the B faculty member, prior to presentation again at a time to be designated as we go. Copies of the paper should be brought to class for all. The presentation itself may simply be to read it. There is at least one final meeting with the B faculty member to discuss “what happened” to the paper in discussion, and how it might be revised. The grade is based on the final draft, not on discussion as such. If the paper is not judged adequate for presentation by the designated date, it is not presented; the final version is docked one full grade (10 points); and the B faculty member gives an informal presentation of “what the student was aiming at.” Each student will present at least once, and write twice, though given unpredictability in the schedule, it may be that not both papers will be presented.

(c) The term paper (40% of the grade) is due at the time of the final exam (2:00 Th 3/22). It is a paper of 10 - 12 pages, and may either expand one of the two short papers, or take up a separate topic. In the former case, it would be natural to build on what you have based on responses from discussion. In the latter case, you will need to arrange a topic with one of the three faculty no later than the fourth week of classes (no later than 2/1) and arrange with them a schedule that leaves room for at least one draft on which they can comment.

Schedule of Instruction:

The schedule follows the outline of Roy’s text, with particular readings and overall pace as indicated by sign up sheets.