

Phil. 4360: Metaphysics

Fall, 2004

Lecture: MWF 12-12:50, Hlms 263
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General description:

Metaphysics deals on the most general level with what sorts of things exist, and what is the nature of the things that exist. We will focus mainly on contemporary analytic metaphysics, with a few readings of historical interest (such as Hume & Reid). We will cover such topics as the existence of 'abstract objects', the proper understanding of 'possibility' (as opposed to actuality), the nature of space and time, the freedom of the will, and so on. We will not discuss psychic powers, UFO's, or any of things you might find in the "metaphysics" section of the local book stores.

Text:

The text is a course packet available at the CU book store. A copy will be on reserve at Norlin circulation desk.

Course requirements:

• *Papers (1/3 of grade):*

I will ask you to write 4 short papers. See schedule for due dates. Please read the guidelines and paper topics at the end of this syllabus.

• *Tests (2/3 of grade):*

There will be 4 in-class tests (multiple choice, short answer, short essay). You will be tested on your knowledge/understanding of philosophical positions and arguments discussed in class and in the reader.

• *Class Participation (indeterminate & subjective):*

Grades close to borderlines may be influenced by class participation, which includes participation in class discussion, and attendance.

Who should take this class?

If you take my class, you should be willing and able to come *on time* and to do the work.

If you want to learn about basic metaphysical issues, and particularly if you are interested in philosophical argumentation, then you should take my class. See the schedule and the paper topics below, to determine whether you will find the content of the course interesting.

I know one way of teaching philosophy: that is to *do* philosophy in the classroom, with the students. If you are going to complain about a professor defending his own philosophical views and criticizing the views of the authors in the course reader, then don't take a class from me.

Other guidelines:

1. You may call me before 10 p.m. or after 10 a.m. Leave a message, since I screen my calls. Or send email, and I will probably get back to you the same day.
2. Please feel free to come to my office hours to talk about philosophy, play chess, or whatever.

If you have any questions, I will do my best to answer them, and you will probably leave feeling clearer.

3. You will get the most out of class if you participate in philosophical arguments, and ask for clarification of anything you don't understand. The professor will also be pleased.
4. I will post copies of my lecture notes & this syllabus on my web page <home.sprynet.com/~owl1>. But this is not intended as a substitute for coming to class.
5. Please do not walk into class late.

Grading policy:

Grades will be 'curved', if necessary, so as to yield a B- average for the class. The grade adjustment formula will be $(\text{Adjusted score}) = (\text{Raw score})n + 100(1 - n)$, where "raw score" is your percentage grade in the course prior to applying the curve. n is a number between 0 and 1 that will be adjusted as necessary to cause the class average to be a B- (smaller values of n yield a larger grade adjustment).

Schedule:

Unit 1: Ontology. Universals & Numbers.	
M, Aug 23	Introduction. Platonic realism. Plato, <i>Parmenides</i>
W, Aug 25	Nominalism. David Hume, from <i>Treatise of Human Nature</i>
F, Aug 27	Refutation of nominalism. David Armstrong, "Infinite Regress Arguments ..."
M, Aug 30	Scientific realism. David Armstrong, "Towards a Theory of Properties"
W, Sept 1	Ontological commitment. W. V. Quine, "On What There Is"
F, Sept 3	Ostrich nominalism. Michael Devitt, "'Ostrich Nominalism' or 'Mirage Realism'?" David Armstrong, "Against 'Ostrich' Nominalism"
M, Sept 6	<i>No Class - Labor Day</i>
W, Sept 8	More on ontological commitment. John Searle, from <i>Speech Acts</i> Paper #1.
F, Sept 10	Numbers. Gottlob Frege, <i>Foundations of Arithmetic</i> , §§21-7.

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| M, Sept 13 | More on numbers.
Frege, §§46, 62, 68, 74, 76-77. |
| W, Sept 15 | Review. |
| F, Sept 17 | Test #1. |

Unit 2: Miscellaneous Metaphysics.

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| M, Sept 20 | Infinity.
Galileo Galilei, <i>Dialogues Concerning Two New Sciences</i> |
| W, Sept 22 | More on infinity.
Me, from <i>Reader, Philosophy 2440</i> |
| F, Sept 24 | Possible worlds: a crazy theory.
David Lewis, "Possible Worlds" |
| M, Sept 27 | Possible worlds: a sensible view.
Saul Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> |
| W, Sept 29 | Causation.
David Lewis, "Causation" |
| F, Oct 1 | <i>No Class - Fall Break</i> |
| M, Oct 4 | Events.
Donald Davidson, "Events as Particulars" |
| W, Oct 6 | More events.
Jaegwon Kim, "Events as Property Exemplifications"
Paper #2. |
| F, Oct 8 | The ship of Theseus/temporal parts.
Judith Thomson, "Parthood and Identity Across Time", sec. I-IV |
| M, Oct 11 | More temporal parts.
Judith Thomson, "Parthood and Identity Across Time", sec. V-VII |
| W, Oct 13 | Review. |
| F, Oct 15 | Test #2. |

Unit 3: Space & Time.

- M, Oct 18 Does time exist?
J. E. McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time"
- W, Oct 20 Absolute space.
Isaac Newton, scholium to the definitions in *Principia Mathematica*
- F, Oct 22 Relational theory of space.
From *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*
- M, Oct 25 The theory of relativity.
Albert Einstein, *Relativity*
- W, Oct 27 More on relativity.
Arthur Lovejoy, "Dialectical Argument...", part I
- F, Oct 29 Criticism of Einstein.
Arthur Lovejoy, "Dialectical Argument...", part II
- M, Nov 1 Non-Euclidean Geometry & General Relativity.
Rudolf Carnap, *Philosophical Foundations of Physics*, ch. 14
Paper #3.
- W, Nov 3 More on geometry & General Relativity
Rudolf Carnap, *Philosophical Foundations of Physics*, ch. 15
- F, Nov 5 The dimensions of space.
Richard Swinburne, "The Dimensions of Space"
- M, Nov 8 Review.
- W, Nov 10 **Test #3.**

Unit 4: Free will, Personal Identity.

- F, Nov 12 Determinism & free will.
Brand Blanshard, "The Case for Determinism"
- M, Nov 15 Hard determinism.
Paul Edwards, "Hard and Soft Determinism"
- W, Nov 17 Compatibilism.
W. T. Stace, "The Problem of Morals"
- F, Nov 19 Incompatibilism.
Peter van Inwagen, "When Is the Will Free"

M, Nov 22	For Free Will: the self-refutation argument. J. R. Lucas, "The Presupposition of Thought" Huemer, "Is Hard Determinism Self-Refuting?", parts I, II, III, V
W, Nov 24	For Free Will: the Gödelian argument. J. R. Lucas, "Minds, Machines and Gödel"
F, Nov 26	<i>No Class - Thanksgiving</i>
M, Nov 29	Personal identity - introduction. Daniel Dennett, "Where Am I?" Paper #4.
W, Dec 1	Personal identity - the memory theory. John Locke, <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> , II.27.9-12. Thomas Reid, "Of Mr. Locke's Account of Our Personal Identity"
F, Dec 3	Personal identity - the bundle theory. David Hume, <i>Treatise of Human Nature</i> , I.VI. Thomas Reid, <i>Inquiry into the Human Mind</i> , II.VI
M, Dec 6	Review.
W, Dec 8	Test #4.

Paper Questions

Guidelines - Please read:

- Papers are graded on a scale of 1 to 5, 5 being best. The typical grade is 4. Late papers lose 1 pt.
- You may verbally discuss the questions with other students, but you must write your own paper.
- If you cannot come to class, send it by email before class, but do *not* send some bizarre format and assume that I can read it. Safest is to simply paste it into an email message, or attach it as a text file.
- Select from the questions below. Try to explain briefly why you give the answer you do. If you have no opinion about the question, you may just describe what you think are the main alternative views. You will write 4 papers total, 1 for each unit.
- Length: To get full credit, your paper must at least fill up 3 complete pages. It may be longer, but please don't go over 6 pages. Beyond that, take as long as it takes to answer the question.

Unit 1: Answer one of these for paper #1.

- Does whiteness exist? If so, what sort of thing is it (does it exist outside the mind, does it exist outside the physical world, etc.)?
- Does the number two exist? What is the number two, anyway?
- Is there a correct criterion of ontological commitment? If so, what is it?
- Pick something that you read in the text or heard in class in this unit, and explain why you think

it's false.

Unit 2: Answer one of these for paper #2.

- a. Suppose you have a lamp with an unusual mechanism, which works as follows. The lamp starts out off. After $\frac{1}{2}$ second, a mechanism switches it on. After another $\frac{1}{4}$ second, it is switched back off. After another $\frac{1}{8}$ second, it gets switched back on... And so on. Nothing else intervenes to do anything to the lamp. At the end of 1 second, would the lamp be on or off?
- b. Does the cause of an event have to occur before the event? Or could it occur at the same time (or even later)?
- c. What is causation? (Or, what does "A caused B" mean?)
- d. Theseus owned a ship. Periodically, he had to replace a plank in his ship (due to wear and tear). Over a period of ten years, he successively replaced every plank (one at a time), so that the ship at the end of the ten years was made of entirely different wood from the ship at the beginning. Question: Was it still the same ship? Why or why not?
- e. Pick something that you read in the text or heard in class in this unit, and explain why you think it's false.

Unit 3: Answer one of these for paper #3.

- a. There are many stories about time travel in the movies and in books. Are any of them logically consistent? If yes, when are they consistent and when not? If no, is it possible to have a consistent time-travel story?
- b. In what ways is space similar to time, and in what ways are they different?
- c. Scientists have proposed some counter-intuitive theories about the structure of space and time. Are there any philosophical limitations to what sort of structure scientists can (rationally) hypothesize for space and time? (For instance, circular time, ten-dimensional space, two-dimensional time, etc.)
- d. Is it possible that acceleration is absolute, even though velocity is only relative?
- e. Pick something that you read in the text or heard in class in this unit, and explain why you think it's false.

Unit 4: Answer one of these for paper #4.

- a. What the heck *is* free will?
- b. Imagine that you have your brain divided down the middle, and the two halves are transplanted into two different bodies. Assume that the halves of the brain and the bodies survive the operation, resulting in two people who function almost normally. Which of the two, if any, would be you? Is there a possible way to determine this?
- c. In *Star Trek*, the transporters are said to decompose a person's body and then beam the energy to a distant location, where it is reconstituted into a person having all the same observable properties. Is it really the same person, or is it just another person who looks just like the original person?
- e. Pick something that you read in the text or heard in class in this unit, and explain why you think it's false.