

Syllabus

Name of the course: Metaphysics

Semester: 2020-21, Winter, Tuesday, 13.30–15.10.

Instructor: Ferenc Huoranszki

No. of Credits: 2

Course Level: Introductory

Status: Mandatory for two year MA 1st year, elective for one year MA

Teaching format: Lecture

Course description: The course offers a general introduction into some of the major problems of contemporary analytic metaphysics. Metaphysics is a study of the most general categories in order to answer the question: what are the ultimate constituents of reality? In the course we'll be addressing the following problems. What are properties and how are they related to objects? Under what conditions can a particular object retain its identity? Do other universes than the actual exist? Do the past and the future exist? How things change? How are persons and their thoughts and feelings related to the physical reality?

Learning outcomes: Students attending this course are expected to familiarize themselves with some of the basic methods and problems of contemporary metaphysics. They shall also be introduced into some of the basic current debates and learn how metaphysical problems are related to other philosophical issues in the philosophy of language, mind and physics. Students are expected to acquire the ability to reconstruct and analyze philosophical arguments or positions. These involve the understanding of validity and soundness of the arguments, the ability to identify background principles and assumptions as well as the ability to draw out the consequences of certain philosophical commitments. They should be familiarized with the main contemporary views and debates about metaphysics and ontology. Learning outcomes shall be measured by the comprehensive final examination.

Topics for 12 weeks:

1. Introduction: ontological categories

I. Individuals

2. Qualitative change and numerical identity
3. Compositional change and persistence

II. Properties

4. 'Platonic' and 'Aristotelian' realism
5. Conceptual and class nominalism
6. Trope theories

III. Necessity and possibility

7. Identity, essence, and kinds
8. Possible worlds

IV. Time and change

9. Static and dynamic theories of time
10. Time, change and reality

V. Dualism, idealism, and materialism

11. Substance dualism and monism

12. Property dualism and supervenience

Suggested reading:*Anthologies:*

- Farkas K.–T. Crane (eds.) 2004. *Metaphysics. A Guide and Anthology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kim J. – E. Sosa (eds.) 1999. *Metaphysics. An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Loux, M. J. – D. W. Zimmerman (eds.) 2005. *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Van Inwagen, P.–D. Zimmerman (eds.) 1998. *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Books:

- Loux, M. J. 1998. *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Van Inwagen, P. 1993. *Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lowe, E. J. 2002. *A Survey of Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McDonald, C. 2005. *Varieties of Things. Foundations of Contemporary Metaphysics*. Blackwell.

Mandatory reading:

1. ---
2. Adams, R. M. 'Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 76, No. 1 (1979), pp. 5-26.
3. Chisholm, R. 'Identity through Time', In Michael C. Rea (ed.), *Material Constitution* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1997) 537-551.
4. Armstrong, D. 'Universals as Attributes', Chapter 5, sections I-VIII of *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction*, Westview Press, 1989: 75-99.
5. Lewis, D. From 'New Work for a Theory of Universals' in *Papers in Epistemology and Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999, 1-55); pp. 8-25.
6. Williams, D. 'On the Elements of Being: I', *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (1953), pp. 3-18.
7. Bird, A. 'Essences and natural kinds', In Robin Le Poidevin (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Metaphysics*, Routledge, (2009) pp. 497-506.
8. Armstrong, D. 'The Nature of Possibility', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (1986), pp. 575-594.
9. McTaggart, 'The Unreality of Time', *Mind*, Vol. 17, No. 68 (1908), pp. 457-474.
10. Shoemaker, S. 'Time and Change', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 66, No. 12 (1969), pp. 363-381.
11. Swinburne, R. Experts from 'Personal Identity: The Dualist Theory', Sydney Shoemaker and Richard Swinburne *Personal Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).
12. Lewis, D. Expert from 'New Work for a Theory of Universals', in *Papers in Epistemology and Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999, 1-55); pp. 25-39.

Assessment for 2-year MA students: in-class written examination at the end of the first year. Students are expected to give a short, comprehensive and relevant response to the question they draw based on the content of the lectures and the readings assigned. Questions for the examination will be distributed after the term ends. Grading criteria for the written exam are as follows:

The usual length of answers is 600-900 words (1.5, 2 pages). In order to earn an "A-" the written exam paper has to cover most of the relevant material covered in the lectures. It has to show evidence of a thorough understanding of the issues discussed in the course. It has to be written clearly and concisely, in competent academic English. One of the most important criteria will be the quality of the arguments. The

text must be relevant to the question: it should not contain materials that do not pertain to the issue discussed. Failing to meet these criteria will result in the appropriate reduction of the grade. In order to earn an “A”, all the above are required, plus evidence of *independent thinking* or *independent organization of the material*. This means that the paper does not simply reproduce the lecture notes, or copies a sample answer prepared by someone else. An “A” paper presents the material in a way that shows that you have thought through the question yourself (consulting further readings can help this). You can also add your own assessment of the question. The emphasis is not on originality; you don't need to invent something nobody has said before. Rather, the idea is that you make these problems your own, and develop, as best as you can, your own view of them (which can very well agree with the views defended by some others).

Assessment for 1-year MA students: Students' performance shall be evaluated on the following grounds. Students are required to submit a max. 2500-word long term-paper. The topic of the paper can be either a careful critical reconstruction of a particular and important argument for some position discussed in the course; or a comparison between competing arguments about alternative solutions to a problem; or a defense of some particular position/argument against some relevant criticism. The chosen topic should be approved by the instructor. References can, but need not, go beyond the material included into the compulsory readings.

Deadline for submitting term-papers: May 3, 2021.

Sample study questions:

1. Are individuals reducible to the sum of their properties?
2. What reasons do we have to introduce universals in our ontology?
3. How can things survive the changes of their properties?
4. Is there a difference between essential and accidental properties?
5. How can we interpret mind-body dualism?
6. What are possible worlds?
7. What is idealism and materialism?