Metaphysics, it has been claimed, is the study of the most fundamental aspects of the structure of reality, and in this sense precedes empirical science. So what is metaphysics, and how does it relate to science? Before we conclude the course by considering its relation to science, we will discuss many questions that can be thought to delineate metaphysics. The topics to be covered (although there is some flexibility about this) include existence, identity and change, universals and particulars, modality, causation, space, time and persistence, freedom and determinism, and metaphysics and science.

This class will engage these topics with an emphasis on contemporary views and debates. Accordingly, our approach will be topic-oriented, rather than historical.

Prerequisites: Graduate standing or permission of the instructor.

Distribution requirements: This course can be counted towards the fulfillment of the distribution requirement in metaphysics.

Required texts

All mandatory (and perhaps some recommended) readings will be made available through e-reserves or online. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (http://plato.stanford.edu/) has many excellent background and survey papers. Go to the course web page for links.

Course requirements and evaluation

The following are necessary and jointly sufficient conditions to obtain letter grade credit for this seminar:

1. Participation: You are expected to attend all classes and to actively participate in discussions. If you have to miss a class, you must let me know in advance.

2. Class presentations: Every participant gives at least two presentations of no more than 15 minutes. You are expected to do something visual (blackboard, overheads, handout). Do not try to be comprehensive; rather, synthesize the important parts (main thesis, main argument) and offer some critical thoughts for discussion.
3. **Short papers:** Submit 5 short papers of 3 to 4 pages, reflecting readings for the meeting when the paper is submitted. I want to see a clear statement of the main thesis of the article you are discussing, a brief summary of the main argument, and *your independent judgment and critical reflection.*

or

**Seminar paper:** Submit a term paper of 15 to 20 pages or so, on a topic approved by me. Please submit a paragraph-long outline of your project by Tuesday, **5 March 2013.** The full paper is due on Thursday, **21 March 2013.**

**Topics and readings**

Please note that the topics listed do not map bijectively to meetings; the plan would to just go through them more or less in order. The reading list is tentative and may still change, in particular upon popular demand. In particular, I only expect us to cover a strict subset of this list. Talk to me if you would like to read some general background texts in metaphysics or read up on a particular topic.

(1) **Existence**


(2) **Identity and change**

- Roderick Chisholm, ‘Identity through time’, in his *Person and Object*, Open Court (1976), 89-113 (Ch. 3).

(3) **Universals and particulars**

- Bertrand Russell, ‘The world of universals’, in his *The Problems of Philosophy*, Clarendon (1912), 91-100 (Ch. 9).
(4) Modality

- David Lewis, ‘Counterparts or double lives’, in his On the Plurality of Worlds, Blackwell (1986), 192-263 (Ch. 4; read at least §§4.1-4.3).

(5) Causation


(6) (Space)time and persistence

- C D Broad, ‘The general problem of time and change’, in his Scientific Thought, Routledge and Kegan Paul (1923), 53-84 (Ch. 3).
- J J C Smart, ‘The space-time world’, in his Philosophy and Scientific Realism, Routledge and Kegan Paul (1963), (Ch. 7).


(7) **Freedom and determinism**


(8) **Metaphysics and science**


Please let me know if there are particular topics or readings you would like to discuss in the seminar. I (and the class) may be willing to accommodate your wish.