

PHIL130 METAPHYSICS

Professor: Paolo Santorio
Office Hours: Mo 10:30-12:30, H&SS 8004

UC San Diego, Winter 2019
HSS 1128A, TuTh 9:30-10:50

In the words of philosopher Steve Yablo, metaphysics is “the study of what there is and how it all hangs together, at a breathtaking level of abstraction”. It’s hard to provide a more precise way of characterizing what metaphysics is (at least, without writing a philosophy paper about it!). As a rule of thumb, metaphysics investigates very general properties, relations, concepts, and categories of being. Typical topics in metaphysics include the nature of necessity and possibility, the existence of abstract objects, the nature of causation, temporal properties and relations, notions of ontological dependence.

We will be focusing on work in metaphysics in the analytical tradition in philosophy. The course will survey a number of contemporary debates. In particular, after a week of introduction, we will focus on four topics:

- time and time travel;
- modality (i.e., necessity and possibility);
- causation;
- more briefly, the metaphysics of race.

One word about the composition of our syllabus: in almost every unit, the writings of philosopher David K. Lewis figure prominently among the readings. This level of focus on a single author is unusual for an undergraduate philosophy course, but it is a natural choice here. Lewis made groundbreaking contributions to most subareas of metaphysics, to the point that contemporary metaphysics is often characterized as ‘postlewisian’.

READINGS AND TEXTBOOK

The textbook for the class is:

Alyssa Ney, *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Routledge, 2014

We won’t read it cover to cover, but we’ll use about half of it. (Unfortunately, this is more than enough for me to be legally allowed to put copies of it on the web.) In addition, I will assign about 15 research articles, all of which will be posted online.

ASSIGNMENTS

You will be asked to hand in eight weekly take-home quizzes and write three papers (the first slightly shorter than the other two). In addition, I expect you to come to class having done the readings and participate in discussion. The breakdown of points is as follows:

- Short quizzes (best seven out of eight): 20%
- Class participation: 10%

- Paper 1: 20%
- Paper 2: 25%
- Paper 3: 25%

Take-home quizzes. On eight weeks within the term, you will be asked to fill in a short take-home quiz. The quiz will consist of some multiple choice questions and some questions requiring a short written answer. It should only take 20-30 minutes (or less) to fill in. The bar for this assignment won't be high, and I expect that most quizzes that are handed in will get a full score.

The quizzes may be handed in exclusively in class. I will not accept quizzes submitted by email.

(I may make exceptions for special circumstances, possibly requiring documentation.)

I will read each of your quizzes, but I will only count the grades of the best seven. This means also that you may simply skip one quiz with no consequence to your grade. Decide to skip a quiz at your own risk, especially at the beginning of the semester!

Papers. Topics for papers will be posted three weeks before the deadline. The first paper will be required to be between 1,200 and 1,500 words. The second and the third will be required to be between 1,500 and 1,800 words.

EXTENSION POLICY

I will use a 'time bank' method for granting extensions for papers. Each of you starts the semester with an allowance of 48 hours of extension time in the 'bank', divided into blocks of 12 hours. You may use your allowance at any point, no questions asked. Please just flag to me that you intend to use one or more blocks when you do. Once you run out of your allowance, I will not grant further extensions. (I may make exceptions for special circumstances, possibly requiring documentation.)

After your extension allowance runs out, your grade will be reduced 1/3 of a mark for each day a paper is late. For example, an A- will be reduced to a B+ in one day, a B in two days, and a B in three days.

The foregoing exclusively applies to papers. There will be no extensions on quizzes.

LAPTOP USAGE POLICY

Use of laptops, tablets, and phones is not allowed in class, except in special cases. Contact me for permission if you have specific reasons why you need to use any of these devices.

PLAGIARISM

Please familiarize yourself with university policies on plagiarism, cheating, and academic integrity.

In general, plagiarism is presenting as yours work that you did not produce. This can happen in a variety of ways. Note in particular that you can plagiarize a text even if you paraphrase or change some of the words in it. Note also that plagiarism need not be knowing or intentional. Always err on the side of citing any sources that have influenced your thinking, including websites and people you have had conversations with.

Any form of cheating or plagiarism will be reported immediately. Penalties for academic integrity infractions may include failing the assignment, failing the course, suspension, and expulsion.

WEEK-BY-WEEK SCHEDULE (TENTATIVE)

Notice: schedule and readings may be subject to change. Please make sure you are using the latest version.

Week 1: Introduction; ontology and ontological commitment

Lecture 1. (January 8th) Introduction. Metaphysics and its place in philosophy; ontology.

No required reading.

Lecture 2. (January 10th) Quine's criterion for ontological commitment.

Required reading: Quine, "On What There Is". Start reading Ney, chapter 1 (no need to read the 'Boxes').

Week 2: The ontology of time

Lecture 3. (January 15th) The ontology of time: Introduction

Required reading: Ney, Chapter 5.

Lecture 4. (January 17th) Presentism vs Eternalism, 1/2

Quiz 1 due in class

Required reading: Sider, chapter 2 of *Four-Dimensionalism*.

Week 3: The ontology of time (continued); time travel

Lecture 5. (January 22nd) Presentism vs Eternalism, 2/2

Required reading: Markosian, "Defending Presentism".

Lecture 6. (January 24th) Time Travel within a block universe framework: Lewis

Quiz 2 due in class

Required reading: David Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time travel".

Week 4: Time travel (continued)

Lecture 7. (January 29th) Time travel within a growing block framework: Van Inwagen.

Required reading: Van Inwagen, "Changing the Past"

Lecture 8. (January 31st) Is time travel consistent? The bilking argument.

Quiz 3 due in class

Required reading: Ismael, "Closed Causal Loops and the Bilkling Argument"

Paper 1 due (online) on February 1st, 11:59pm

Week 5: Modality

Lecture 9. (February 5th) Introduction: possible worlds

Required reading: Ney, chapter 7.

Lecture 10. (February 7th) A philosopher's paradise: Lewisian Modal Realism

Quiz 4 due in class

Required reading: Lewis, selections from chapter 1 of "On the Plurality of Worlds"

Week 6: Modality (continued)

Lecture 11. (February 12th) Possible worlds: the actualist take

Required readings: Stalnaker, “Possible Worlds”

Supplementary reading: Van Inwagen, “Two Notions of a Possible World”.

Lecture 12. (February 14th) Actualism and essence

Required reading: Plantinga, “Modality and Possible Worlds”.

Quiz 5 due in class

Week 7: Causation

Lecture 13. (February 19th) Causation: introduction

Required reading: Ney, chapter 8.

Lecture 14. (February 21st) Lewis on Causation, 1/2

Required reading: Lewis, “Causation”.

Paper 2 due (online) on February 25th, 11:59pm

Week 8: Causation (continued)

Lecture 15. (February 26th) Lewis on Causation, 2/2

Required reading: TBA

Lecture 16. (February 28th) Issues in Causation: Transitivity

Required reading: Hall: “Causation and the Price of Transitivity”.

Quiz 6 due in class

Week 9: Causation (continued)

Lecture 17. (March 5th) Issues in Causation: Omissions

Required reading: Thomson: “Causation: Omissions”

Lecture 18. (March 7th) TBA (Possibly: causation spillover and wrap-up)

Required reading: TBA

Quiz 7 due in class

Week 10: Metaphysics of Race

Lecture 19. (March 12th) The Metaphysics of Race

Required reading: Ney, chapter 10.

Lecture 20. (March 14th) Up for grabs! (You will be given choices.)

Required reading: TBA

Quiz 8 due in class

Paper 3 due (online) on March 19th, 11:59pm