

Metaphysics
John Symons
University of Kansas, Spring 2013
Philosophy 650: TR 11.00-12.15
4011 Wescoe

Description: Metaphysics is the inquiry into the general and most fundamental features of being. This course is intended to provide you with a critical introduction to the practice of contemporary metaphysics. The course is divided into two parts. The first half of the course takes the topic of identity as a starting point for exploring some central themes in contemporary metaphysics. The second half of the course is devoted to the interplay between the metaphysics of space and time and the natural sciences.

Learning Outcomes:

- (1) The ability to analyze and evaluate assumptions, claims, evidence, arguments, and forms of expression; and select and apply appropriate interpretive tools
- (2) The ability to demonstrate basic competence in the principles, theories, and analytic methods used in the humanities
- (3) Familiarity with the core themes and methods in contemporary metaphysics

Texts: Please purchase a copy of Lowe's, *A Survey of Metaphysics*. Other readings are available electronically.

Requirements and Evaluation: In addition to two short papers written individually, your grade will be partially determined by collaborative work.

Collaborative work:

Discussion will be a critical feature of the course and I plan to grade your participation in Blackboard discussion threads. You will present a final collaborative project during the final three class sessions.

Blackboard discussion:

Fine discussion	4%
Ladyman discussion	4%
Barcan Marcus discussion	4%
Modal Logic discussion	4%
Naming and Necessity	4%

	Discussions total	20%
800 word essay		20%
1600 word essay		35%
Final Project		25%

The final project will be composed of

a written argument of under 600 words (Blackboard)
a document of under 1000 words presenting a review of the relevant background material to your argument (Blackboard)
a presentation of that argument in 15-20 minutes (in-class)
adequate responses during a Q&A following your presentations (in-class)

If you are unsure as to what constitutes academic misconduct at KU, please refer to

<http://documents.ku.edu/policies/governance/USRR.htm#art2sect6>

For grading policies at KU, please consult

<https://documents.ku.edu/policies/governance/USRR.htm#art2sect2>

Accessibility: If you have a disability for which you may be requesting special services or accommodations for this course, please contact Disability Resources <http://www.disability.ku.edu> at 22 Strong Hall or at 864-2620 (V/TTY). Please provide me with a letter from the Disability Resources Office indicating the accommodations to which you are entitled.

Office Hours: TR 10.00-11.00 Wescoe 3075 or by appointment.

Provisional Schedule

PART 1

- January 22: Welcome to the course. Grading policies and expectations for this course.
January 24: Introduction to Metaphysics. What is it? What were the standard objections to metaphysics?

Graded Assignment (CLOSES JAN 31)

Discussion:

Kit Fine, What is Metaphysics?

http://traffic.libsyn.com/philosophybytes/Kit_Fine_on_What_is_Metaphysics_.mp3

According to Kit Fine, metaphysics is the philosophical study of reality. Unlike natural science, metaphysics is a priori. What kind of authority do you think a priori reasoning has? If you are inclined to say that it has 'none', consider the status of mathematical knowledge.

Please contribute to the discussion thread on the Blackboard page.

- January 29, 31: Identity: Read E.J. Lowe: Chapter 1,2,3,4
February 5, 7: Identity, individuality, and structure
Max Black: The Identity of Indiscernibles (1952)

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2252291>

Graded Assignment (CLOSES FEB 14)

Maximum 800 word essay:

How we think about the distinctness of the two spheres in Black's essay is difficult if their differences are indiscernible. Please present what you take to be the central argument of the paper. Then please critically reflect on the arguments in Black's essay. What are the most important weaknesses of the paper, if any?

Graded Assignment (CLOSES FEB 19)

Discussion: Please contribute to the discussion thread on the Blackboard page.

James Ladyman

<http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/identity-individuality-and-discernibility-audio>

Intuitively, there should be more to being an individual than being an object.

What do you think about PII in light of examples like the numbers i and $-i$ or for quantum cases where objects are distinct and yet share all properties in common? Explain Ladyman's understanding of what's at stake in discussions of discernibility.

- February 12, 14: Some Technicalities. What is Modality, What is a Modal Logic?
Ruth Barcan Marcus "Modalities and Intensional Languages" (Synthese, 1961)
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20114401>
<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/14/us/ruth-barcan-marcus-philosopher-logician-dies-at-90.html>

ALTERNATIVE Graded Assignment (CLOSES FEB 26)

Maximum 400 word essay

Watch this lecture by [Rajeev P. Goré](#), Australian National University: http://videlectures.net/ssl09_gore_uml/

After watching this video, please explain what it means to say that modal logic is non-classical

- February 19: Introduction to *Naming and Necessity* (Full text available on Blackboard)
February 21: Kripke and a posteriori necessary truths
February 26: Intuition and Philosophical Methodology
<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10516-007-9019-7>
February 28: Identity and the Physical
March 5: Transworld Identity:
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-transworld/>

Graded Assignment (Due April 2)

Research Paper

Maximum 1600 word essay

Do you think that actualism preserves our intuitions about possibility and necessity? Does it matter? What's wrong or right about Lewis' view of possible worlds on your reading?

March 7-14: Essences and Possible Worlds
 Lowe: Chapters 5,6,7

March 19-April 2 No Class: Spring Break and Collaborative Projects

PART 2: Space and Time

April 2, 4: Absolutism versus relationalism. Lowe: Chapter 14

April 9, 11: Incongruent Counterparts and the Nature of Space. Lowe: Chapter 15

April 16: The Paradoxes of Motion and the Possibility of Change. Lowe: Chapter 16

April 18: Tense and the Reality of Time. Lowe: Chapter 17

April 23-30: Causation and the Direction of Time. Lowe: Chapter 18

Huw Price, Does time-symmetry imply retrocausality? How the quantum world says "maybe". In *Studies in History and Philosophy of Modern Physics*, 43(2012), 75—83 <http://arxiv.org/abs/1002.0906>

May 2: Student projects (15 minute presentations)

May 7: Student projects

May 9: Student projects

-Friday, May 10, 13 Stop Day

-Monday, May 13, 13 First day of Finals

-Friday, May 17, 13 Last day of Finals

-Sunday, May 19, 13 Commencement