

Topics in Metaphysics

University of British Columbia

Fall 2021

Instructor:

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Office Hours: Thursdays 3-4 (or by appointment) over Zoom (see Canvas for the link)

Course Description

Our world includes objects like trains, planes, and automobiles. Objects are similar in some ways, and dissimilar in others. These ‘ways’ are properties: colours, shapes, sizes, and so on. But what are objects and properties? Are these categories exclusive? Exhaustive? The seminar shall investigate these and other connected questions.

Course Reading

Weekly readings and handouts will be made available on Canvas.

Assessment

Grading: We adhere to a blind grading policy. So when you submit your assignments, please include only your student number.

1. Short Paper: 30%. Due: October 17th before 11:59 p.m. (Pacific)
 - You will be given a choice of several passages from the readings. The task is to explicate and assess the argument (or arguments) in your chosen passage. Papers should not exceed 1000 words (including footnotes, and excluding bibliography).
2. Long Paper: 40%. Due: November 6th before 11:59 p.m. (Pacific)
 - Papers should not exceed 2000 words (including footnotes, and excluding bibliography). Topics will be distributed in advance.
3. Final Examination: 30%. Date and Location: TBA
 - The final exam will take place during the official exam period. It is a two hour exam, and will be a mix of fill-in-the-blank and short answer questions. Only material discussed in lecture will be examinable.

Course Schedule

1. Course Introduction (9/9)
2. Sameness and Difference: Universals (14/9)
Reading: Bertrand Russell, *Problems of Philosophy* (Ch. 9)
Optional: D. M. Armstrong, *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction* (Ch. 5); Sydney Shoemaker, 'Time Without Change'
3. Sameness and Difference: Alternatives to Universals? (16/9)
Reading: David Lewis, 'New Work for a Theory of Universals'
Optional: D. C. Williams, 'Elements of Being'
4. Causation: Properties (21/9)
Reading: Sydney Shoemaker, 'Causality and Properties'
Optional: David Lewis, 'New Work for a Theory of Universals'
5. Particular and General: A Kantian Challenge (23/9 - 28/9)
Reading: Fraser MacBride, *On the Genealogy of Universals* (Chs. 1-3)
Optional: Frank Ramsey, 'Universals'; Fraser MacBride, *On the Genealogy of Universals* (Chs. 4-5)
6. Particular and General: Fregean Themes (5/10 - 7/10)
Reading: P. F. Strawson 'Particular and General'; Gottlob Frege, 'Function and Concept'
Optional: Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (Ch. 7); P. F. Strawson, *Individuals* (Ch. 1)
7. Persistence: Perdurantism (12/10)
Reading: David Lewis, 'Survival and Identity'
Optional: Martin Pickup, 'The Situationist Account of Change'
8. Persistence: Primitivism (14/10)
Reading: Michael Ayers, 'Substance'
Optional: P. F. Strawson, 'Causation and Explanation'
9. Ontological Diversity: Particulars (19/10 - 21/10)
Reading: Helen Steward, 'Processes, Continuants, and Individuals'
Optional: Helen Steward, 'What is a Continuent?'; Bill Brewer, 'Exclusive Individuals'
10. Ontological Flexibility: Instantiation (26/10)
Reading: Umrao Sethi, 'The Varieties of Instantiation'
Optional: Jerrold Levinson, 'The Particularisation of Attributes'
11. Modality and Quantification: Kripke vs Lewis on Counterpart Theory (28/10)
Reading: Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Lecture III)

- Optional:* David Lewis, ‘Counterparts of Persons and Their Bodies’
12. Modality and Quantification: Higher Order Quantification and Properties (2/11 - 4/11)
- Reading:* Nick Jones, ‘Nominalist Realism’
- Optional:* Timothy Williamson, *Modal Logic as Metaphysics* (selections)
13. Constitution: Problem of the Many (9/11)
- Reading:* David Lewis, ‘Many, but Almost One’
- Optional:* Nick Jones, ‘Multiple Constitution’; Peter Unger, ‘The Problem of the Many’
14. Constitution: Vagueness and Arbitrariness (16/11 - 18/11)
- Reading:* Ted Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism* (pp. 120-132); Katherine Hawley, ‘Vagueness and Existence’
- Optional:* Maegan Fairchild, ‘The Barest Flutter of the Smallest Leaf: Understanding Material Plenitude’
15. Constitution: A Role for Causation? (23/11)
- Reading:* Sydney Shoemaker, ‘On What There Are’
- Optional:* Gareth Evans, ‘Identity and Predication’; John Campbell, *Reference and Consciousness* (Ch. 12)
16. Beyond the Concrete: Numbers as Objects? (25/11 - 30/11)
- Reading:* Gottlob Frege, *Foundations of Arithmetic* (Sections 21-27, and 46-69) ; Byeong-Uk Yi, ‘Is Two A Property?’
- Optional:* Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (Ch. 14)
17. Beyond the Concrete: Epistemic and Semantic Challenges (2/12)
- Reading:* Paul Benacerraf, ‘Mathematical Truth’
- Optional:* Justin Clarke-Doane, ‘Moral Epistemology: the Mathematical Analogy’
18. Review (7/12)

Course Business

1. *Late Penalties.* Late papers will be marked down by a letter grade increment per day (e.g. from A- to B+), unless permission for an extension is secured from Arts Advising. All requests for concessions (e.g. due to illness) should go through Arts Advising.
2. *Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct.* Plagiarism, which is intellectual theft, occurs where an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. However, when another person’s words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else’s work as one’s own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student’s own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments. Here is the link to the UBC Calendar entry on Academic Misconduct: <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,111,959>

3. *How to Avoid Plagiarising*: Most students plagiarise because they believe themselves to be without options. But no student will ever be without options in this course. If you find yourself in trouble, and tempted to cheat, contact me *immediately*. If you haven't *yet* cheated, a solution can always be found.
4. *Your Course Contact*. I am your primary contact for this course. I will not answer emails that ask for information readily available on either Canvas or the course syllabus, so it is always a good idea to begin by checking those two places. I will also not answer emails that ask for information easily obtainable through regular class attendance. Lastly, I will not answer emails that ask substantive philosophical questions—those with such questions should bring them to my office hours. I will respond to all other emails within two working days.
5. UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious and cultural observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available at <https://senate.ubc.ca/policiesresources-support-student-success>.
6. For those seeking advice on how to write a philosophy paper, the Philosophy Department runs an essay clinic: <https://philosophy.ubc.ca/undergraduate/philosophy-essay-clinic/>.
7. COVID-19 Information and Guidance:
 - (a) COVID-19 Safety: You are required to wear a non-medical mask during our class meetings, for your own protection and the safety and comfort of everyone else in the class. For our in-person meetings in this class, it is important that all of us feel as comfortable as possible engaging in class activities while sharing an indoor space. Non-medical masks that cover our noses and mouths are a primary tool for combating the spread of COVID-19. Further, according to the provincial mandate, masks are required in all indoor public spaces including lobbies, hallways, stairwells, elevators, classrooms and labs. There may be students who have medical accommodations for not wearing a mask. Please maintain a respectful environment.
 - (b) If you are sick, it is important that you stay home. Complete a self-assessment for COVID-19 symptoms here: <https://bc.thrive.health/covid19/en>. In this class, the marking scheme is intended to provide flexibility so that you can prioritize your health and still succeed.
 - (c) If you miss class because of illness, you will find that the handouts provide a good guide to any material you missed. Please also feel free to attend office hours remotely.
 - (d) If you anticipate that illness will cause you to miss the mid-term or final exam, contact the instructor immediately to discuss potential solutions. Do NOT come to either the test or the final while ill.
 - (e) If the instructor is feeling ill, class will either be held over Zoom or cancelled. The classroom will remain available for students to sit in and attend a Zoom session.