

Metaphysics

Simon Fraser University

Fall 2018

Course Instructor:

Fatema Amijee

email: famijee@gmail.com

Office Hours and Location: Mondays 2-4pm and by appointment in WMC 5605

Course Description

Metaphysics is the study of reality, construed in the broadest possible sense. Questions to be discussed include: What is the nature of time? Is time-travel possible? What exists? What are their features or properties? How do things persist across time? What is causation? How can we account for the difference between possibility and actuality?

We'll approach these questions systematically by examining them (in the first instance) through the lens of David Lewis's work in metaphysics. Lewis was a prolific and extremely influential philosopher, and his contributions to metaphysics continue to frame much of the contemporary discussion. In addition to reading seminal works by Lewis, we'll read a range of critical and complementary work done by philosophers such as David Armstrong, Sara Bernstein, Jessica Wilson, Kit Fine, Michael Ayers, and P. F. Strawson.

Course Readings

Readings will be made available on Canvas.

Evaluation

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

1. Midterm test: 20%. In class on October 3rd, 2018
 - *Instructions:* This will be an in-class midterm consisting in short-answer questions. A midterm study guide will be distributed a week ahead of time.
2. Term Paper: 40%. Due December 3rd, 2018
 - You will be required to write a term paper (approx. 2000 words). Paper topics will be distributed in class. Paper submission will be on Canvas.
3. Final Exam: 40%. During the official exam period
 - The exam will consist in short-answer questions, and will be modeled on the midterm test.

Course Schedule

1. Course introduction; Introduction to Counterfactuals

2. Causation I

Reading: David Lewis, “Causation”; David Lewis, “Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow”

Supplementary: Sara Bernstein, “David Lewis’ Theories of Causation and their Influence”

3. Causation II

Reading: David Lewis, “Causation as Influence”; P.F. Strawson, “Causation and Explanation”

Supplementary: Ned Hall, “Two Concepts of Causation”

4. Persistence and Identity I

Reading: David Lewis, “Survival and Identity”; Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (selections)

Supplementary: Michael Ayers, “Substance: Prolegomena to a Realist Theory of Identity”

5. Persistence and Identity II

Reading: David Lewis, “Counterparts of Persons and Their Bodies”

Supplementary: David Lewis, “Counterpart Theory and Quantified Modal Logic”; Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (selections)

6. Time

Reading: J.M.E McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time”; David Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel”

Supplementary: A. N. Prior, “Some Free Thinking About Time”

7. Properties and Laws I

Reading: David Lewis, “New Work for a Theory of Universals”

Supplementary: Sydney Shoemaker, “Causality and Properties”; David Armstrong, *A Theory of Universals* (selections)

8. Properties and Laws II

Reading: David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (selections); David Lewis, “Putnam’s Paradox”

Supplementary: Brian Weatherson, “The Role of Naturalness in Lewis’s Theory of Meaning”; Robbie Williams, “Eligibility and Inscrutability”

9. Reduction and Humeanism I

Reading: David Lewis, “Psychophysical and Theoretical Identifications”; David Lewis, “An Argument for the Identity Theory”

Supplementary: David Lewis, “How to Define Theoretical Terms”; Kit Fine, “Essence and Modality”

10. Reduction and Humeanism II

Reading: David Lewis, “Humean Supervenience Debugged”; David Lewis, “Ramseyan Humility”

Supplementary: Jessica Wilson, “What is Hume’s Dictum, and Why Believe It?”; Shamik Dasgupta, “Inexpressible Ignorance”

11. Modality I

Reading: David Lewis, “Anselm and Actuality”; David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (selections)

Supplementary: Robert Stalnaker, *Mere Possibilities* (selections)

12. Review and catch-up

Course Business

1. *Attendance and Tardiness.* You will not be penalized for missing class. However, given the nature of this course, missing class is sure to adversely affect your grade. Arriving late in class is disruptive and distracts both the instructor and other students. Make an effort to arrive on time, and let your instructor know if you are going to be late.
2. *Laptops.* Laptops are not permitted in class.
3. *Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct.* Simon Fraser University takes plagiarism (and academic misconduct more generally) very seriously. You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is, and also for knowing the particular plagiarism penalties. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to) the use of a thinker’s ideas or words without proper citation; the purchase of assignments; the use of internet resources without proper citation; and the submission of work written (in whole or in part) by another. Penalties for plagiarism range from a zero on the assignment to suspension from the university. You can acquaint yourself with SFU’s policies over plagiarism on this website: <http://www.sfu.ca/students/academicintegrity/resources.html>
4. *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.
5. *Late Penalties.* This will be a challenging and fast-paced course. It is highly recommended that you attend every class meeting and get your work in on time. The late penalty on the mid-term and final papers is set at 1/3 of a letter grade per day, to a maximum of three days (this includes weekends/holidays), unless accompanied by a documented medical explanation. Any work outstanding beyond this point will receive a grade of 0.
6. *Your Course Contact.* I am your primary contact for this course. Course-related emails must have “PHIL203” somewhere in the subject line. I will not answer emails that ask for information readily available through on either Canvas or the course syllabus, so it is always a good idea to begin by checking those two places. Also, I recommend that if you have a substantive philosophical question, you come to my office hours or set up an appointment rather than send me an email. I will respond to all other emails within two working days.
7. *Special Accommodations.* I am more than happy to assist with special accommodations for students registered with accessibility services. If you are registered with accessibility services, please don’t hesitate to have your accessibility services representative get in touch with me. Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodation should contact the Centre for Students with Disabilities as soon as possible. More information is available at <http://www.sfu.ca/students/disabilityaccess.html>.