

Introduction to Metaphysics, PHIL 340

Winter Term 2, Spring 2021

Instructor

Alexandre Duval

Email: aduval3@mail.ubc.ca

Office hours: TBA

Course Description

This course is an introduction to metaphysics as practiced in contemporary analytic philosophy. Metaphysics, on a standard characterization, is the study of the most general and fundamental features of reality. It touches on a number of questions, such as the following: What kinds of things are there? Does the world include abstract objects like numbers, along such things as atoms and molecules? Does the world exist independently of us? Do objects have essential properties in addition to their regular (i.e., non-essential) properties? Are some classifications of objects and phenomena more privileged than others in the sense that they ‘carve nature at the joints’? What is it for something to count as socially constructed?

In this course, we will survey debates around these questions. In particular, we will focus on the four following topics:

- Ontology (the study of what there is)
- Essence, identity, and necessity
- Natural kinds (categories that carve nature at the joints)
- Human kinds and social construction

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, you will have:

- Engaged critically with texts pertaining to contemporary metaphysics in the analytic tradition
- Developed the ability to construct and assess philosophical arguments
- Acquired knowledge of influential theories and arguments concerning fundamental philosophical concepts like existence, essence, identity, necessity, and natural kind

Readings

You will have to read around 25-35 pages of philosophy each week. Usually, it will consist of a single substantive article or book chapter. Here are some papers that I am considering assigning:

- Quine, W.V.O., 1948, “On What There Is”
- Thomasson, Amie L., 2014, “The Easy Approach to Ontology: A Defense”
- Putnam, Hilary, 1982, “Why There Isn’t a Ready-Made World”
- Haslanger, Sally, 1995, “Ontology and Social Construction”

Learning Activities

You are expected to attend all classes, and to read the material before class. The instructor will lecture on the material, but students are encouraged and expected to participate by raising questions and commenting on the reading material. Some class time may also be put aside for short, team-

based exercises. Please, note that it is very difficult to do well in philosophy without regular class attendance.

Assessment

Your grade for the course will be based on:

- In-Class Exam 1 (25%)
- In-Class Exam 2 (35%)
- Final Take-Home Paper (40%)

For the in-class exams, you will have to answer a set of questions dealing with the material covered in class up to that point in the course. For the final take-home paper, I will provide you with a set of potential essay questions. You will be expected to write around 2000 words in response to **one of the questions**. You will be asked to summarize some argument or theory presented in one or more of the texts covered in the last few weeks of the course, as well as to critically engage with the text(s) by producing original arguments and observations.

Accessibility

Academic accommodations help students with a disability or ongoing medical condition overcome challenges that may affect their academic success. Students requiring academic accommodations must register with the Centre for Accessibility (previously known as Access & Diversity). The Centre will determine that student's eligibility for accommodations in accordance with Policy 73: Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities. Academic accommodations are not determined by your instructors, and instructors should not ask you about the nature of your disability or ongoing medical condition, or request copies of your disability documentation. However, your instructor may consult with the Centre for Accessibility should the accommodations affect the essential learning outcomes of a course.

Please note that you are welcome to discuss accessibility related accommodations with me without official documentation and I will make every effort to accommodate.

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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>

Academic citation

There is no required citation method for this course. Please feel free to use whichever method you are most comfortable with. Here is UBC's guide on citation:

<http://help.library.ubc.ca/evaluating-and-citing-sources/how-to-cite/>

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