

PHIL340 – INTRODUCTION TO METAPHYSICS

Winter Term 1, 2024
University of British Columbia

1. CONTACT

INSTRUCTOR

Name: Dr. Aaron Henry

Office: Over Zoom.

<https://ubc.zoom.us/j/66330363643?pwd=cEd3K3dqT3o0eFd5Tmh2Y0NmZ1hZz09#success>

Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 9:30-11am.

Lecture Location: CHEM C124. Lectures will also be livestreamed and recorded via Panopto.

Lecture Times: Tuesday & Friday: 3-4pm or by appointment

Email: aaron.henry@ubc.ca

E-mail policy: E-mails must be sent from your UBC e-mail address and must include the course code (PHIL340) in the subject line. E-mails are for administrative purposes only: questions about course material will be addressed during office hours. While I aim to reply to student e-mails within one or two business days, please do not hesitate to send a follow-up email if you have not received a reply from me within that time frame.

TEACHING ASSISTANT

Name: TBD

2. COURSE

OVERVIEW

This course provides an introduction to contemporary metaphysics within the analytic tradition. Metaphysicians attempt to make sense of reality in its most general aspects and to resolve seeming paradoxes that immediately arise once we start to reflect on these general aspects of reality. In this course, we will ask such questions as: What kinds of entities exist? For example, does reality contain abstract entities like numbers and properties or is reality exhausted by concrete particulars like physical particles variously arranged? And under what conditions (if any) does a collection of microphysical entities (e.g., particles) compose a macroscopic entity, such as a table or an organism? Is the world causally structured, and what does it even mean to say that one event ‘causes’ another to happen? When something undergoes a change (e.g., in size, shape, or location), what makes it the same object to the one it was before the change occurred rather than a totally new object? Might our subjective impression of time’s ‘passage’ be an illusion and might be possible, in principle, to travel backward or forward in time? Can we reconcile the appearance of free will with the possibility that the laws of nature are ‘deterministic’ or might the experience of free will be – possibly like the experience of the passage of time – be illusory? Are certain classifications of objects and other phenomena objectively more natural than others, serving to ‘carve nature at its joints,’ or are all ways of classifying the world irremediably subjective and human-centric? Are some phenomena be “socially constructed” and, if so, which ones?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

A primary objective of any philosophy course is skill development. Some of the skills you will be developing in this course include:

- ability to read, analyze, and critically assess a philosophical text;
- ability to defend your views, both in writing and in conversation.

In addition, you will acquire:

- grasp of some of the central problems and controversies in philosophy of mind and philosophy of cognitive science/artificial intelligence.

EXPECTATIONS

What I expect from you:

- to attend lectures;
- to come to lecture on time and prepared to discuss assigned readings;
- to complete assignments on time and according to the instructions;
- to treat your peers with respect;
- to ask questions and seek help when you don't understand something;
- to take responsibility for your own learning.

What you can expect from me:

- to come prepared for each lecture;
- to promote a positive and stimulating learning environment;
- to provide support throughout the term;
- to give constructive feedback on your written work;
- to treat you with respect;
- to think carefully about your questions and make a serious effort to answer them.

TEXTS

Our main text for this course will be Alyssa Ney's *Metaphysics: An Introduction*. The text is available electronically through the UBC library system. All other readings will be available through the course website (see §4 for details)

3. ASSESSMENT

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|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Midterm | (25% of final) | Due: Oct. 11 th |
| Final essay (2000-2500 words) | (35% of final) | Due: Dec. 6 th |
| Final Exam | (30% of final) | TBD |

4. POLICIES

COURSE WEBSITE

All announcements and course documents will be posted on Canvas. To access this site, go to <https://canvas.ubc.ca/> and login with your CWLid and password. PHL340 will appear under the "courses" portion of the welcome page, on the left hand side. Click on the link to access our site. You should check this site regularly for updates.

LATENESS

Assignments will be penalized 1/3 a letter grade for each day that they are late. Extensions may be granted if extraordinary circumstances are documented, but students should contact me to request an extension before the due date. Any assignment that is more than 5 days late will not be accepted.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is essential to the pursuit of learning and scholarship in a university, and to ensuring that a degree from the University of British Columbia is a strong signal of each student's individual academic achievement. Accordingly, the University treats cases of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. 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. A link about Academic Misconduct: <http://www.calendar.ubc.ca/Vancouver/index.cfm?tree=3,54,111,959>

ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

The University of British Columbia is committed to accessibility. If you have a disability that may interfere with your ability to successfully take this course, then please email me in the first few weeks. You must also register with Access and Diversity, so that they can help provide support (grant extra time on exam, note taker, etc.): <https://students.ubc.ca/about-student-services/access-diversity>

5. SUPPORT

ADVICE

It is important to keep up with the readings and to attend lectures. If you feel you need additional help with any of the course material, please don't wait to contact me.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Here is a link to information about the University of British Columbia's writing resources:

<https://writing.library.ubc.ca/>

Here are links to information about how to write a good philosophy paper:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

<http://www.public.asu.edu/~dportmor/tips.pdf>

<http://catpages.nwmissouri.edu/m/rfield/guide.html>

Here is a link to information about the 'Cornell' note taking system:

<http://lifehacker.com/202418/geek-to-live--take-study+worthy-lecture-notes>

6. SCHEDULE

Please note that this schedule may change at the instructor's discretion to suit the pace of the course and the interests of the students.

| DATE | TOPIC | READING |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Sep 5 th | Introduction | |
| Sep 10 th | Logical background: Arguments | Ney, pp.1-13 |
| Sep 12 th | Logical background: a primer on propositional and predicate logic | Ney, pp.13-28 |
| Sep 17 th | Ontology: On What There Is | Quine, "On What There Is" Ney, Ch. 1, pp. 30-57 (focusing on pp. 30-50) |
| Sep 19 th | Ontology cont'd | No new readings |
| Abstract entities | | |
| Sep 24 th | Universals and the 'One Over Many' | Ney, Ch.2, pp.60-81 |

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| Sep 26 th | Varieties of realism and nominalism | Nominalism |
| Oct 1 st | The indispensability argument for mathematical realism and Benaceraff's dilemma | Maddy, <i>Realism in Mathematics</i> , Ch. 1 (§§1, 2, and 4) |
| Material objects and puzzles of persistence | | |
| Oct 3 rd | Puzzles of identity | Ney, Ch. 3, pp. 89-100; Ch. 6, pp. 170-183 |
| Oct 8 th | Perdurantism | Sider, excerpt from <i>Four-Dimensionalism</i> |
| Oct 10 th | Critiques of perdurantism and endurantist alternatives | Ney, Ch. 6, pp. 185-189 Haslanger, "Persistence Through Time" (§5) Optional: Ayers, "Substance: Prolegomena to a Realist Theory of Identity" |
| Oct 15 th | Some other questions about identity: the "problem of the many" and special composition | Ney, Ch. 3, pp. 100-117 |
| Oct 17 th | Midterm | No new readings |
| Causation | | |
| Oct 22 nd | Hume and the specter of anti-realism | Ney, Chapter 11, §§11.1-11.2; Hume excerpt |
| Oct 24 th | Reductive theories: Regularity (<i>a.k.a.</i> , nomological) theories | Ney, Chapter 11, §§11.3-11.4; Mackie, "Causes and Conditions", §§1-2 |
| Oct 29 th | Reductive theories: Counterfactual theories | Lewis, "Causation" Optional: Lewis, "Causation as Influence" Collins et al, "Counterfactuals and causation: History, Problems, and Prospects" |
| Oct 31 st | Causation cont'd: Primitivism and Pluralism | Ney, Chapter 11, §§11.5-6; Strawson, <i>Causation and Explanation</i> §§2-3 |
| Time | | |
| Nov 5 th | The possibility of time travel | Ney, pp. 162-167; Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel" |
| Nov 7 th | The Nature of the Time Series: The A-series and the B-series | Ney, pp.138-162; Prior, "Some Free-Thinking about Time" |
| Nov 12 th | No Class | No class |
| Nov 14 th | Fatalism | No reading |
| Free will | | |
| Nov 19 th | The problem of free will and determinism | Ney, pp. 239-246 |
| Nov 21 st | Solutions: Compatibilism, Libertarianism, and Free Will Skepticism | Ney, pp. 246-256 |
| Social ontology | | |
| Nov 26 th | Natural kinds and social kinds | Ney, pp. 211-215; 259-264 |

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| Nov 28 th | The metaphysics of race | Ney, pp. 264-278; Mills, “‘But What Are You Really?’ The Metaphysics of Race” |
| Dec 3 rd | The metaphysics of gender | TBD |
| Dec 5 th | Review | No new readings |