



Metaphysics

Phil 245, Spring 2009

Course Description: Metaphysics is the study of what there is, i.e., what sorts of things exist and what is their nature. Broadly speaking philosophers interested in metaphysics are interested in a range of questions about the world that cannot be settled by empirical enquiry. In this course we will address a range of debates central to metaphysics: what do we mean when we say that something exists; what do we mean when we say that something causes something else; what is the nature of identity; what is the nature of the debate between realists and anti-realists. Along the way we will encounter some skepticism about the very project of metaphysics. Scientifically minded analytic philosophers working in the empiricist tradition have been critical of the metaphysics. They have asked whether the problems of metaphysics can be reduced to problems of language, i.e. interpreted as artifacts of the ambiguity of natural languages. Our exploration of the problems of metaphysics will also serve as an evaluation of this claim.

Course Goals: The aim of this course is to 1) introduce students to some basic problems in metaphysics, by 2) working through philosophical discussions of the nature of existence, modality, and causation, and 3) evaluating the relationship between language and our ontological commitments.

Requirements: You will be asked to write a 3-page paper, a 6-page mid-term paper, & a 6-page final paper on assigned topics. Each paper is worth 30% of your final grade. The goal of these assignments is to encourage students to think through problems in metaphysics on their own.

Attendance: *CLASS PARTICIPATION IS A REQUIREMENT* (10% of your final grade). Attendance is a minimum requirement for student participation. Therefore, excessive absences will affect a student's final grade.

Required Texts:

- *Metaphysics: An Anthology*, eds. Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing), 1999. (**K&S**)
- Readings on Lyceum. (**LYCEUM**)

SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

What follows is a provisional syllabus. I have included some recommended readings along with the required readings for each topic. These readings provide background material, further detail for interested students, and alternative views. They should be very helpful for constructing paper topics. Try to have a look at least some of them. I will add to these lists as the semester unfolds. It is a good idea to check back at the syllabus posted on Lyceum every week to keep track of these changes.

It is also likely that the reading schedule will change, as may the readings within it, as a result of class interest and time constraints. This type of syllabus flexibility enhances our capacity to accommodate your interests.

Introduction

Ayer

The Elimination of Metaphysics (*LYCEUM*)

Topic 1: Existence

Ontological Commitment

Quine

On What There Is (*K&S*)

Russell

Existence and Description (*K&S*)

Carnap

Empiricism, Semantic, & Ontology (*K&S*)

Russell

Existence and Description (*K&S*)

Quine

Ontological Relativity (*K&S*)

Universals

Armstrong

Universals as Attributes (*K&S*)

Devitt

'Ostrich Nominalism' or 'Mirage Realism' (*LYCEUM*)

Armstrong

Against 'Ostrich' Nominalism: A Reply to Michael Devitt (*LYCEUM*)

Topic 2: Identity & the Persistence of Things and Selves

Black

The Identity of Indiscernibles (*K&S*)

Quine

Identity, Ostension, & Hypostasis (*K&S*)

Parfitt

Personal Identity (*K&S*)

Topic 3: Modality

Plantinga

Modalities: Basic Concepts and Distinctions (*K&S*)

Lewis

Counterparts or Double Lives? (*K&S*)

Armstrong

The Nature of Possibility (*K&S*)

Recommended

Kripke

Identity & Necessity (*LYCEUM*)

Topic 4: Causation

Hume

Of the Idea of a Necessary Connection, *Treatise sec. xiv-xv* (*LYCEUM*)

Russell

On the Notion of a Cause (*LYCEUM*)

Mackie

Causes and Conditions (*K&S*)

Lewis

Causation (*K&S*)

Davidson

Causal Relations (*K&S*)

Recommended

Salmon

Causal Connections (*K&S*)

Kim

Causes and Counterfactuals (*K&S*)

Topic 5: Realism/Anti-Realism

Dummett

Realism (*K&S*)

Alston

Yes, Virginia, There is a Real World.

Recommended

Sosa

Putnam's Pragmatic Realism (*K&S*)

ASSIGNMENTS:

First Paper – Please write a 3 page (900 word) paper on one of the following topics. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1” margins. The purpose of this assignment is to rehearse & evaluate one of the arguments that we discussed from the first section of the syllabus. Make sure to hand in an electronic copy in the 1st Paper Dropbox on LYCEUM and a hard copy in the mailbox on my office door (#202) in 75 Campus Avenue.

Paper Topic (1a): How are the claims that Quine is an *Ostrich Nominalist* and Armstrong is a *Mirage Realist* related? Which do you find more plausible?

Paper Topic (1b): Quine uses his arguments against McX to introduce his criteria for ontological commitment. What is at issue in this debate? Does the criteria also, ultimately, provide us with a means to answer questions about what exists?

Due Date: 02/10/09 @ 5pm

Second Paper - Write a 6 page paper (1800 words) on one of two topics to be announced on the distribution date for the midterm. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1” margins. The purpose of this paper is twofold: a) to evaluate a standard argument in the literature; and b) to demonstrate that you can synthesize the material covered in the 1st half of the semester into a coherent position. Make sure to hand in an electronic copy in the 2nd Paper Dropbox on LYCEUM and a hard copy in the mailbox on my office door (#202) in 75 Campus Avenue.

Paper Topic (2a):

Paper Topic (2b):

Due Date: 03/17/09 @ 5pm

Third Paper – Write a 6 page paper (1800 words) on one of two topics to be announced on the distribution date for the midterm. Your paper should be double-spaced in 12 point font with 1” margins. The purpose of this paper is twofold: a) to evaluate a standard argument in the literature; and b) to demonstrate that you can synthesize the material covered in the 2nd half of the semester into a coherent position.

Topics Distributed: 03/26

Due Date: 04/10

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

A. J. Ayer, "The Elimination of Metaphysics," *Language Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1946), pp. 33-45.

Topic 1: Existence

- W.V.O. Quine, "On What There Is," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 4-12.
- Rudolf Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantic, & Ontology," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 13-22.
- Bertrand Russell, "Existence and Description," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 23-35.
- W. V. O. Quine, "Ontological Relativity," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 45-62.
- D. M. Armstrong, "Universals as Attributes," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 198-208.
- Michael Devitt, "Ostrich Nominalism' or 'Mirage Realism,'" in D.H. Mellor & Alex Oliver (eds.) *Properties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 93-100.
- D. M. Armstrong, "Against 'Ostrich' Nominalism: A Reply to Michael Devitt," in D.H. Mellor & Alex Oliver (eds.) *Properties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 101-111.

Recommended

- Bertrand Russell, "Existence and Description," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 23-35.
- Bertrand Russell, "The World of Universals" & "Our Knowledge of Universals," in D.H. Mellor & Alex Oliver (eds.) *Properties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 45-56.
- W. V. O. Quine, "Natural Kinds," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 233-242.

Topic 2: Identity

- Max Black, "The Identity of Indiscernibles," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 66-71.
- W.V.O. Quine, "Identity, Ostension, & Hypostasis," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 284-290.
- Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 365-376.

Topic 3: Modality

- Carl Plantinga, "Modalities: basic Concepts and Distinctions," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 135-148.
- David Lewis, "Counterparts or Double Lives?" in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 154-171.
- D. M. Armstrong, "The Nature of Possibility," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 184-194.

Recommended

- Saul Kripke, "Identity & Necessity," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 72-89.

Topic 4: Causation

- David Hume, "Of the Idea of a Necessary Connection," *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 155-176.
- Bertrand Russell, "On the Notion of a Cause," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 13, 1912, pp. 1-26.
- J. L. Mackie, "Causes and Conditions," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 413-427.

- David Lewis, "Causation," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 436-443.
- Donald Davidson, "Causal Relations," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 428-435.
- Michale Tooley, "The Nature of Causation: A Singularist Account," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 458-482.

Recommended

- Wesley Salmon, "Causal Connections," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 444-457.
- Jaegwon Kim, "Causes and Counterfactuals," in D.H. Mellor & Alex Oliver (eds.) *Properties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 206-207.

Topic 5: Realism/Anti-Realism

- Michael Dummett, "Realism," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 561-590.
- William P. Alston, "Yes, Virginia. There Is a Real World," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 620-633.

Recommended

- Ernest Sosa, "Putnam's Pragmatic Realism," in Jaegwon Kim & Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 607-619.

Date	Readings	Assignments
01/13	Ayer, "The Elimination of Metaphysics." (<i>K&S</i>)	1st paper topics in syllabus
01/15	Quine, "On What There Is" (<i>K&S</i>)	
01/20	Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantic, & Ontology" (<i>K&S</i>)	
01/22	Russell, "Existence and Description" (<i>K&S</i>)	
01/27	Quine, "Ontological Relativity" (<i>K&S</i>)	
01/29	Discussion: Metaphysics and Existence	
02/03	Armstrong, "Universals as Attributes" (<i>K&S</i>)	
02/05	Devitt, "Ostrich Nominalism' or 'Mirage Realism." (<i>LYCEUM</i>) Armstrong, "Against 'Ostrich' Nominalism..." (<i>LYCEUM</i>)	
02/10	Discussion: Nominalism, Realism, and Universals	1st paper due
02/12	Black, "The Identity of Indiscernibles" (<i>K&S</i>)	
02/14-02/22	Winter Recess	
02/24	Quine, "Identity, Ostension, and Hypostasis" (<i>K&S</i>)	
02/26	Parfitt, "Personal Identity" (<i>K&S</i>)	
03/03	Discussion: Identity and the Persistence of Things	2nd paper topics distributed
03/05	Plantinga, "Modalities: Basic Concepts and Distinctions" (<i>K&S</i>)	
03/10	Lewis, "Counterparts or Double Lives?" (<i>K&S</i>)	
03/12	Armstrong, "The Nature of Possibility" <i>K&S</i>	
03/17	Discussion: Modality	2nd paper due
03/19	Mackie, "Causes and Conditions." (<i>K&S</i>)	
03/24	Lewis, "Causation," (<i>K&S</i>)	
03/26	Davidson, "Causal Relations," (<i>K&S</i>)	3 rd paper topics distributed
03/31	Discussion: Causation	
04/02	Dummett, "Realism." (<i>K&S</i>)	
04/07	Alston, "Yes, Virginia. There is a Real World." (<i>K&S</i>)	
04/09	Discussion: Realism/Anti-Realism	
04/10		3rd paper due

* = Recommended