

Syllabus

Name of the course: Contemporary Metaphysics

Semester: 2018, Winter, Tuesday, 11–12.40.

Instructor: Ferenc Huoranszki

No. of Credits: 2

Course Level: Introductory

Status: Compulsory for 2 year MA, elective for one year MA

Teaching format: Lecture

Course description: The course offers a general introduction into some of the major problems of contemporary analytic metaphysics. Metaphysics is a study of the most general categories in order to answer the question: what are the ultimate constituents of reality. In the course we'll be addressing the following problems. What are properties and how are they related to objects? Under what conditions can a particular object retain its identity? What holds together the totality of particulars in order to constitute one universe, and what explains their changes? Do other universes than the actual exist? Do the past and the future exist and how is it possible for a thing to change? How are thoughts and feelings related to the physical reality? Can agents be free if the world is deterministic?

Goals of the course: Students attending this course are expected to familiarize themselves with some of the basic methods and problems of contemporary metaphysics. They shall also be introduced into some of the basic views and debates and learn how metaphysical problems are related to other philosophical issues in ethics and in the philosophy of language, mind and physics.

Learning outcomes: Students are expected to acquire the ability to reconstruct and analyze philosophical arguments or positions. These involve the understanding of validity and soundness of the arguments, the ability to identify background principles and assumptions as well as the ability to draw out the consequences of certain philosophical commitments. They are also expected to acquire certain writing skills in order to be able to formulate arguments concisely and accessibly in words and to give short critical comments. Finally, they should be familiarized with the main contemporary views and debates about metaphysics and ontology. Learning outcomes shall be measured by short writing assignments and the comprehensive final examination.

Topics for 12 weeks:

1. Particulars

Qualitative change and numerical identity
Composition and coincidence

2. Properties

Nominalism: classes and tropes
Realism: 'Platonic' and 'Aristotelian' universals

3. Necessity and possibility

Identity and essence
Possible worlds

4. Time and causation

Time and change
Causes and events

5. Dualism and monism

Material and mental properties
Supervenience and reduction

6. Free will and determinism

Incompatibilism
Compatibilism

Suggested reading:

Anthologies:

- Farkas K.–T. Crane (eds.) 2004: *Metaphysics. A Guide and Anthology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kim J. – E. Sosa (eds.) 1999: *Metaphysics. An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Loux, M. J. – D. W. Zimmerman (eds.) 2005: *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Van Inwagen, P.–D. Zimmerman (eds.) 1998: *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Books:

- Loux, M. J. 1998: *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Van Inwagen, P. 1993: *Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lowe, E. J. 2002: *A Survey of Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McDonald, C. 2005: *Varieties of Things. Foundations of Contemporary Metaphysics*. Blackwell.

Compulsory reading:

1. Articles from R. M. Adams, P. van Inwagen and R. Chisholm, in Farkas, K. – T. Crane (eds.) 2003: 161–178; 193–208; and 537–551.
2. Selections from D. Armstrong, D. Lewis and D.C. Williams in Farkas, K. – T. Crane (eds.) 2003: 227–273.
3. Selections from S. Kripke and D. Lewis in Farkas, K. – T. Crane (eds.) 2003: 301–334.
4. An article from D. Davidson and a selection from J. M. E. McTaggart in Farkas, K. – T. Crane (eds.) 2003: 401–411, 454–463.
5. Selections from R. Descartes and G. Harman in Farkas, K. – T. Crane (eds.) 2003: 611–618, 623–628; D. Lewis ‘Minimal Materialism’ in his *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology*, OUP, 1999: 33–38.
6. Articles from A. J. Ayer, P. and van Inwagen in G. Watson (ed.), *Free Will*, OUP, 1982: 15–35, 46–58, and H. Frankfurt ‘Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility’ in his *The importance of what we care about*, CUP, 1988:1–10.

Assessment for 2-year MA students: in-class written examination at the end of the first year. Students are expected to give a short, comprehensive and relevant response to the question they draw based on the content of the lectures and the readings assigned. Questions for the examination will be distributed after the term ends. As a preparation for the examination, students are required to answer a few study questions distributed during the term.

Assessment for 1-year MA students: Students’ performance shall be evaluated on the following grounds. First, answers to assignments will make up 40 % of the final grade. Second, students are required to submit a max. 2 000 word long term-paper. The topic of the paper can be either a careful critical reconstruction of

a particular and important argument for some position discussed in the course; or a comparison between competing arguments about alternative solutions to a problem; or a defense of some particular position/argument against some relevant criticism. The chosen topic should be approved by the instructor. References can, but need not, go beyond the material included into the compulsory readings. The term paper's contribution to the final assessment of students' performance is 60 %.

Deadline for submitting term-papers: April 23, 2018.

Sample study questions:

1. Are individuals reducible to the sum of their properties?
2. What reasons do we have to introduce universals in our ontology?
3. How can things survive the changes of their properties?
4. Is there a difference between essential and accidental properties?
5. What is the relation between cause and effect?
6. What is dualism? How can we understand materialism?
7. In which sense, if any, are alternate possibilities compatible with determinism?