PHIL 130: Metaphysics
Winter 2023. UCSD
Syllabus

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1 Course Description

This course will provide an introduction to topics in contemporary analytic metaphysics, including ontology, abstract objects, time, modality, laws of nature, chance, and free will. These topics also provide a foundation for further studies in philosophy.

2 Course Information

- Meeting time: Monday and Wednesday at 5:00-6:20pm. First class on Monday Jan 9th.

- Office hours: Monday and Wednesday at 4:00-4:50pm. Other times by appointment.

- I will hold office hours in my office (in person recommended) and concurrently on Zoom (meeting ID: 202 988 3478).

- Prerequisites: no formal requirements. Prior courses in introduction to philosophy and symbolic logic would be helpful.

- Required texts:

  Alyssa Ney, *Metaphysics: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2014; any version, including PDF version, is fine).

3 Metaphysics

Why study metaphysics? Well, metaphysics is the study of the general character of reality. If you wonder about the following questions, then this course is for you!

- What exists? Do numbers and consciousness exist in addition to particles and tables?

- What is real?

- What is time and what is space?

- What are spatial parts? Are there temporal parts?

- What is possibility and necessity?

- What are laws of nature? And physical chances?

- Do we have free will? Is it compatible with causal determinism?

- What is the place of the mind and of the consciousness in a physical world?

We won't be able to address all of these questions. We will focus on some questions in this course: ontology, abstract objects, time, modality, laws of nature, chance, and free will.

4 About Me

I am an assistant professor in the department of philosophy at UCSD. I am also a fellow of the newly established John Bell Institute for the Foundations of Physics. I did my graduate studies at Rutgers University, NJ, where I received a PhD in philosophy, a master in mathematical physics, and a graduate certificate in cognitive science. My research interests include: philosophy of physics, philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics, metaphysics, and decision theory. I am also interested in philosophy of mind, philosophy of religion, and Chinese philosophy.

In metaphysics, I have done research on the ontology of mathematical objects, the fundamentality of physical space, the nature of physical laws, the metaphysics of mental qualities, and the metaphysics of quantum mechanics. You can find out more about me on my website: www.eddykemingchen.net.

5 Learning Goals

Our main goal is to gain an understanding and appreciation of metaphysics and the methods of analytic philosophy.

6 Grading and Expectations

- Grade assignment: $100 \geq A \geq 92 \geq A- \geq 88 \geq B+ \geq 85 \geq B \geq 82 \geq B- \geq 78 \geq C+ \geq 75 \geq C \geq 72 \geq C- \geq 68 \geq D \geq 59 \geq F \geq 0$.

- Problem sets: 50%

  There will be weekly problem sets consisting of multiple-choice questions and short essay questions. They require you to have a good understanding of the reading materials and the class discussions. We will have about 7-8 problem sets. Your lowest two grades will be dropped when counting towards your problem set final score.

- Reading quizzes: 10%

  There will be a reading quiz due before each class. Your lowest two grades will be dropped when counting towards your final score.

- Midterm exam: 20%

  There will be a midterm take-home test. The midterm exam will help with memory consolidation and provide feedback to the instructor.

- Final paper: 20%

  An argumentative paper (10-15 pages double-spaced) will be due on March 20th.

- Attendance: attending classes is highly recommended. I expect lively discussions. If you have taken courses with me in the past, you know that I teach best when students ask questions during class. Your questions and feedback would help me adjust my pace and pedagogy.

- Extra credit presentations: 5%

  I think the best way for one to truly understand something is to teach it to others. There will be many options (15 minutes in each class) for you to do in-class oral presentations, such as a summary and a critique of the readings. However, you will be required to prepare powerpoints slides and/or handouts. You are very encouraged to talk with me if you would like to present on any topic you find interesting. You will be rewarded a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 5 extra points towards your final grade.

- Since this is an upper-level class, please feel free to visit my office hours to discuss your questions about the class materials. If you cannot come to my regular office hours, I am happy to make appointments with you to accommodate your schedule. See Section 2 for information about office hours.

- Please try to come to classes on time. Please do not text or call on your phone, or surf the internet (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) during class.

- We won't have time to go over all the readings. Students in previous semesters have found it useful to organize reading groups to discuss the readings that are designated as "optional." That's a great idea to learn. If you are interested in organizing such a group, please let me know if you need my help in any way.

7 Academic Integrity

Here is the Integrity of Scholarship Agreement as stated on the UCSD Academic Integrity Office. Please follow these expectations in this course.

Students are expected to complete the course in compliance with the instructor's standards. No student shall engage in any activity that involves attempting to receive a grade by means other than honest effort, for example:

- No student shall knowingly procure, provide, or accept any materials that contain questions or answers to any examination or assignment to be given at a subsequent time.

- No student shall complete, in part or in total, any examination or assignment for another person.

- No student shall knowingly allow any examination or assignment to be completed, in part or in total, for himself or herself by another person.

- No student shall plagiarize or copy the work of another person and submit it as his or her own work.

- No student shall employ aids excluded by the instructor in undertaking course work.

- No student shall alter graded class assignments or examinations and then resubmit them for regrading.

- No student shall submit substantially the same material in more than one course without prior authorization. A student acting in the capacity of an instructional assistant (IA), including but not limited to teaching assistants, readers, and tutors, has a special responsibility to safeguard the integrity of scholarship. In these roles the student functions as an apprentice instructor, under the tutelage of the responsible instructor. An IA shall equitably grade student work in the manner agreed upon with the course instructor. An IA shall not make any unauthorized material related to tests, exams, homeworks, etc. available to any student.

Each student is responsible for knowing and abiding by UCSD's Policies on Integrity of Scholarship and Student Conduct. **Any student violating these policies will earn an 'F' in the course and will be reported to the University for the violation.** Authorized course assistance is available in person and electronically from the course instructor and instructional assistants.

8 Accessibility

I would like to make sure that everyone in the class feels safe and respected. If you have any particular need, please contact the UCSD Office for Students with Disabilities at the beginning of the semester. They will forward the necessary information to me. We can work out the details in person.

From the website of the UCSD Office for Students with Disabilities:

The Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) at UC San Diego works with undergraduate, graduate, and professional school students with documented disabilities, reviewing documentation and, through an interactive process with the student, determining reasonable accommodations. Disabilities can occur in the following areas: psychological, psychiatric, learning, attention, chronic health, physical, vision, hearing, and acquired brain injuries, and may occur at any time during a student's college career. We encourage you to contact the OSD as soon as you become aware of a condition that is disabling so that we can work with you. Students registered with the OSD have the same responsibilities as other students: getting to class regularly, meeting with faculty and peers to study and learn, and finally demonstrating understanding and mastery of course content. OSD helps students with disabilities navigate that system by establishing a set of academic accommodations based on each student's individual disability. In order to receive support, students must schedule an appointment with the OSD to discuss obtaining reasonable accommodations based on their current, functional limitations, particularly as they pertain to a higher education academic setting.

9   Course Plan

There will be a reading quiz due online before each class, starting with the second lecture. "[PDF]" means that the reading is uploaded as a PDF document and is available for download on the course Canvas website. This is an upper level class in philosophy, so the materials are not easy. Please budget enough time for readings and homework.

- **Unit 1. Introduction.**

  ⋆ Jan 9. What metaphysics is; logic review I

  Readings:

  – Ney, Chapter 0: Logic for Metaphysics, pp. 1-13.

  ⋆ Jan 11. Logic review II

  Readings:

  – Ney, Chapter 0: Logic for Metaphysics, pp. 13-29.

  Problem set #1 due online by 8pm, Jan 14. (Don't stress too much about this one; you get two freebies; see Section 6)

- **Unit 2. Ontology.**

  ⋆ Jan 16. [Martin Luther King Jr. Day]

  ⋆ Jan 18. Readings:

  – Ney, Chapter 1: Introduction to Ontology, pp. 30-50. [Note: heavy readings!]

  – Quine, "On What There Is" [PDF]

Problem set #2 due online by 8pm Jan 21.

⋆ Jan 23. Readings:

– Ney, Chapter 1: Introduction to Ontology, pp. 50-59.

- **Unit 3. Abstract Objects.**

  ⋆ Jan 25. Readings:

  – Ney, Chapter 2: Abstract Entities, pp. 60-76.

  – Armstrong, *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction*, Chapter 1: The Problem [PDF]

  Problem set #3 due online by 8pm Jan 28.

  ⋆ Jan 30. Readings:

  – Ney, Chapter 2: Abstract Entities, pp. 77-88.

  – Swoyer, "Abstract Entities" [PDF]

  – Dorr, "There Are No Abstract Objects" [PDF]

- **Unit 4. Time I.**

  ⋆ Feb 1. Readings:

  – Ney, Chapter 5: Time, "Time's Passage," pp. 138-139.

  – Ney, Chapter 5: Time, "The Objection from Special Theory of Relativity," pp. 140-142. [Note: this is hard!]

  Problem set #4 due online by 8pm Feb 4.

  ⋆ Feb 6. Readings:

  – Ney, Chapter 5: Time, "Ontologies of Time," pp. 142-146

- **Unit 5. Time II.**

  ⋆ Feb 8. Readings:

  – Ney, Chapter 5: Time, "The A-theory and the B-theory," pp. 146-152.

  – Smart, "The Tenseless Theory of Time" [PDF]

  – Ney, Chapter 5: Time, "The Truthmaker Objection," pp. 152-162.

  – Zimmerman, "The Privileged Present: Defending an 'A-Theory' of Time" [PDF]

  Midterm exam due online by 8pm Feb 11.

- **Unit 6. Modality.**

  ⋆ Feb 13. [Pre-recorded lecture on Zoom] Readings:

  – Ney, Chapter 7, Modality, pp. 190-201.

– Plantinga, "Modalities: Basic Concepts and Distinctions" [PDF]

  ⋆ Feb 15. [Pre-recorded lecture on Zoom] Readings:

    – Ney, Chapter 7, Modality, pp. 202-211.

  Problem set #5 due online by 8pm Feb 18.

- **Unit 5. Time II, continued.**

  ⋆ Feb 20. President's Day holiday.

  ⋆ Feb 22. Readings:

    – Ney, Chapter 5: Time, "Time Travel," pp. 162-169.
    – Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel" [PDF] [Note: this is a difficult paper, but it's a classic!]

  Problem set #6 due online by 8pm Feb 25.

- **Unit 7. Laws of Nature.**

  ⋆ Feb 27. Readings:

    – Carroll, SEP article on laws of nature, sections 1, 2, 4.
    – Armstrong, *What is Law of Nature*, selections [PDF]
    – Lewis, *Philosophical Papers, Volume II*, "Introduction" [PDF]
    – Loewer, "Humean Supervenience" [PDF]

  ⋆ March 1. Readings:

    – Carroll, SEP article on laws of nature, section 6.
    – Maudlin, *The Metaphysics Within Physics*, selections [PDF]
    – Loewer, "Two Accounts of Laws and Time" [PDF]

  Problem set #7 due online by 8pm Mar 4.

- **Unit 8. Free Will I.**

  ⋆ March 6. Readings:

    – Ney, Chapter 9, "What is Free Will?" pp. 239-241.

  ⋆ March 8. Readings:

    – Ney, Chapter 9, "The Problem of Free Will and Determinism" pp. 241-246.
    – Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will*, selections [PDF]
    – Hoefer, SEP article on causal determinism, selections

  Problem set #8 due online by 8pm Mar 11th.

- **Unit 9. Free Will II.**

  ⋆ March 13. Readings:

    – Ney, Chapter 9, "Compatiblism" pp. 246-251.

  ⋆ March 15. Readings:

    – Ney, Chapter 9, "Libertarianism" and "Skepticism about Free Will", pp. 252-258.

  Final paper due online by 10pm March 20.