

PHIL 421: Metaphysics

Instructor: Jessica Pepp

Office: 933 Leacock

Office Hours: Tuesday 14:00-16:00

E-mail: pepp@humnet.ucla.edu

Course Location and Time: Maass 328, Tuesday and Thursday 8:35 -9:55.

Course Description:

This course introduces students to the philosophical sub-discipline of metaphysics. Metaphysics focuses on answering the question: What is there? or What exists? Part of answering this question is developing an inventory - a list - of existents. Such an inventory is what philosophers call an “ontology”. During the greater part of the course, we will examine some fundamental metaphysical debates about which kinds of entities should be part of our ontology, and about what the relations are among these different kinds of entities. The putative kinds of entities whose existence and nature we will consider include concrete objects, properties, relations, propositions, and events. We will pay particular attention to causal relations and modal properties (such as necessity and possibility), which are the subjects of much debate in contemporary metaphysics. In the final part of the course, we will take the metaphysics of the mind as a case study for the application of work in basic metaphysics to other areas of philosophy. We will engage with selected contemporary work on the mind-body problem, and consider how the questions addressed in the first part of the course bear on our understanding of the relation between the mind and the body.

This course is aimed at students who have taken at least one prior course in analytic philosophy.

Course Materials:

The primary text for this course is Michael Loux, *Metaphysics: a contemporary introduction*, 3rd edition, Routledge, 2006. It is available at Paragraphe Bookstore, 2220 McGill College Ave.

Other readings will be made available online through WebCT. Students must have web access in order to download these readings.

Assignments and Evaluation:

Your grade for the course will be determined on the following basis:

Take-home midterm	30%
Take-home final	50%
Weekly reading questions	20%

Exams: The take-home midterm will be assigned on October 7, and due by email to the instructor before the start of class on October 14. The take-home final will be due on the date assigned by the University.

Weekly reading questions: One or more reading questions will be assigned each Thursday (beginning on Thursday 9 September). Responses to the reading questions (1-2 pages) are due in class on the following Tuesday. Reading question responses will be accepted **only on the day they are due during class**, except in cases of valid medical or other University-approved excuses. There will likely be some ungraded group work and in-class presentations based on the reading questions throughout the semester.

McGill Policy Statements:

1) Academic Integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/> for more information).

2) English or French submission of graded work

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

3) Students with disabilities

If you have a disability please contact the instructor to arrange a time to discuss your situation. It would be helpful if you contact the **Office for Students with Disabilities** at 398-6009 (online at <http://www.mcgill.ca/osd>) before you do this.

4) Additional information

Additional policies governing academic issues which affect students can be found in the **McGill Charter of Students' Rights** (Chapter One of the Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook available as a PDF on (<http://www.mcgill.ca/files/secretariat/Student-Handbook-2009-English.pdf>).

5) Extraordinary circumstances

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change. (see <http://www.mcgill.ca/health/>)

Schedule of Topics

Please note:

- The readings listed for each week should be completed before the Tuesday class.
- Any handouts distributed in class will also be required reading - you should review them after class to check your understanding, and refer back to them as we advance through our topics.
- In the table below, "OL" indicates readings to be supplied online via Web CT.

Week	Dates	Topic	Readings	
1	2 Sept.	Introduction to the course	None	
2	7 & 9 Sept.	Introduction to metaphysics as a discipline	<i>Optional: Loux, Introduction</i>	
3	14 & 16 Sept.	Metaphysical realism	Loux, Ch. 1	
4	21 & 23 Sept.	Nominalism	Loux, Ch. 2	

Week	Dates	Topic	Readings	
5	28 & 30 Sept.	Concrete particulars	Loux, Ch. 3	
6	5 & 7 Oct.	Propositions, facts, states of affairs, and events [Midterm assigned 7 Oct.]	Loux, Ch. 4	
7	12 & 14 Oct.	Necessity and possibility I: The fall and rise of modal notions	• Loux, Ch. 5, pp. 153-162 • Quine, "Reference and Modality", section 1 (pp. 139-144) • Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i>, pp. 34-53	OL OL
8	19 & 21 Oct.	Necessity and possibility II: Possible worlds	• Loux, Ch. 5, pp. 162-186 • van Inwagen, "Two Concepts of Possible Worlds" • Kripke, "Identity and Necessity", pp. 227-230 <i>[Optional: the entire Kripke article]</i>	OL OL
9	26 & 28 Oct.	Causation I: Hume's critique	• Loux, Ch. 6 • Hume, selections from <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i>	OL
10	2 & 4 Nov.	Causation II: regularity, counterfactual, and production views	• Lewis, "Causation" • Dowe, <i>Physical Causation</i>, Ch. 4	OL OL
11	9 & 11 Nov.	The metaphysics of causation and the philosophy of mind	• Davidson, "Mental Events" • Lepore and Loewer, "Mind Matters"	OL OL

Week	Dates	Topic	Readings	
12	16 & 18 Nov.	Causation and the philosophy of mind, continued & Modality and the philosophy of mind, begun	• Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i>, pp. 144-155 • Chalmers, <i>The Conscious Mind</i>, pp. 123-150 <i>[Also review last week's readings.]</i>	OL OL
13	23 & 25 Nov.	Modality and the philosophy of mind, continued	• Yablo, "Concepts and Consciousness" • Chalmers, "Materialism and the Metaphysics of Modality"	OL OL
14	30 Nov. & 2 Dec.	Conclusion and Review	No new reading	