

PHL 331: Metaphysics

Instructor: Catharine Diehl

Office: JHB 424; hours Tues. 4:00-5:30 and by appointment

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Course Time: M/W 3:30-5:00

Updated: Sept. 10, 2018

Course Description:

This course will provide an introduction to several core topics in metaphysics concerning the nature of reality: particulars/universals, time, and modality. Philosophical discussion around these topics arises from classical queries and puzzles concerning what exists and how it does so: do only *particulars* (individual objects like tables, chairs, laptops, and water bottles) exist or are there also entities of another sort—so-called *universals* such as greenness or length—that can be instantiated by more than one particular? Is time real? How do objects change? Could two indistinguishable objects exist? What is the nature of possibility and necessity? We will approach these questions by examining a number of debates between proponents of rival positions within analytic philosophy.

Students should expect to become familiar with a variety of contemporary approaches to central topics in metaphysics as well as learn how metaphysicians develop answers to fundamental questions. They will also have the opportunity to hone their skills in argument analysis and develop their skills in philosophical writing.

Course Texts:

All texts will be available in a coursepack for sale at the U of T bookstore by **Sept 12**. I will hand out the first reading in class. Please purchase a copy, if possible. Otherwise, a copy will be available at Robarts for your use.

Evaluation:

Your grade in the course will be calculated on the basis of the following criteria:

1. For each class for which a new reading is assigned, you are required to submit a **dialectical outline** in which you state, as precisely as possible, the main theses of the reading and the arguments that are used to support it. You should write your outlines in such a way that the argumentative structure of the reading is made clear. Mastering this form will help you to reconstruct arguments accurately, which is one of the most important skills in philosophical writing. The dialectical outlines are worth 15% of your grade. You may skip **three** dialectical outlines over the course of the semester and receive full credit. Since there are sixteen readings, you will need to complete **thirteen** for full credit.
2. Two 4-6 page essays, each worth 25% of your final grade to be due on **Oct. 15** and **Dec 6**. Topics for each essay will be distributed twelve days in advance of the due date. Please hand in a paper copy to me in class.
3. A final exam, worth 25% of your final grade, in the scheduled exam period.
4. Attendance and participation are worth 10% of your final grade.

Schedule of Topics and Readings:

Please complete all readings for the date listed on the syllabus. Class lecture and discussion will presuppose that students have read the assigned materials.

Session Date

Sept. 10	<i>Course introduction and introduction to particulars/ universals</i>
Sept. 12	<i>Are there any universals?</i> Reading: Bertrand Russell, “The World of Universals,” from <i>Problems in Philosophy</i> (1912)
Sept. 17	<i>Nominalism</i> Reading: Zoltán Gendler Szabó, “Nominalism” (2003), §§1-3
Sept. 19	<i>Nominalism cont’d</i> Reading: “Nominalism,” §§4-6
Sept. 24	<i>Platonistic Universals</i> Reading: Joshua Hoffman & Gary Rosenkranz, “Platonistic Theories of Universals” (2003)
Sept. 26	<i>Platonistic Universals cont’d</i>
Oct. 1	<i>Do we need universals after all?</i> Reading: David Lewis, “New Work for a Theory of Universals” (1983)
Oct. 3	Lewis, cont’d
Oct. 10	<i>Must there be more than universals?</i> Reading: Max Black, “The Identity of Indiscernibles” (1952)
Oct. 15	<i>The bundle theory (cont’d)</i> Reading: John (O-Leary) Hawthorne and J.A. Cover, “A World of Universals” (1998)
Oct. 17	<i>Time—the unreality of time</i> Reading: J.M.E. McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time” (1908)
Oct. 22	<i>The Unreality of Time</i>

- Reading:** D.H. Mellor, “The Unreality of Tense,” in *Real Time* (1985)
- Oct. 24 *Time—is only the present real?*
- Reading:** A.N. Prior, “The Notion of the Present” (1970)
- Oct. 29 *Time—Presentism Cont’d*
- Reading:** Ned Markosian, “A Defense of Presentism” (2004)
- Oct. 31 *Time Travel*
- Reading:** David Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel” (1976)
- Nov. 12 *Time and change*
- Reading:** Mark Hinchcliff, “The Puzzle of Change” (1996)
- Nov. 14 *4-Dimensionalism*
- Reading:** Ted Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time*, pp. 11–42 (2001)
- Nov. 19 *Modality: What is Metaphysical Modality?*
- Reading:** Timothy Williamson: “Modality as a Subject for Science” (2017)
- Nov. 21 Williamson, cont’d
- Nov. 26 *Modal realism*
- Reading:** David Lewis, “On the Plurality of Worlds,” §§1.1 & 1.2 (1986)
- Nov. 28 *Modal realism cont’d*
- Dec. 3 *Essence and Modality*
- Reading:** Kit Fine, “Essence and Modality” (1994)
- Dec. 5 “Essence and Modality” cont’d
- Dec. 6 Review
- Final essay due in class**

Additional Course information:

1. **Course Contact.** In addition to our regular lectures, I will hold a set of weekly office hours on Tuesdays from 4–5:30 p.m. in JHB 424. Feel free to attend these should you need to speak with me on matters pertaining to the course, or to ask any questions. Outside of class and office you may reach me by email at catharine.diehl@utoronto.ca.

Please note that all email should include “PHL 331” somewhere in the subject-line, and must be sent from your official U of T address.

Please note also that I may disregard email that seeks after information readily available on the course syllabus, or by attending class lectures. Otherwise, please allow 24 hours for a response from me.

Finally, note that email is not the place to ask substantive philosophical questions about the course material. You should bring these sorts of questions to my office hours, or ask them in class.

2. **Style and formatting of written work.** Your submitted work should conform to a standard formatting and citation style, such as MLA, APA, or Chicago. See [here](#) for examples.
3. **Late Work.** It is important that your work for this course be submitted on time. Late penalties on assigned work are set at 1/3 of a letter grade per day, to a maximum of five days (this includes weekends/holidays), unless accompanied by a documented medical explanation or due to a family/emergency. Any work outstanding beyond this point will receive a grade of 0.

Further resources

1. A helpful primer on how to write a good philosophy paper can be found [here](#).
2. Academic honesty. This course will adhere to the University’s policy on academic integrity, which can be found [here](#)

Note that the common penalty in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences for plagiarism in a written assignment, test, or examination is F on the piece of work. For the most serious acts of plagiarism, such as the purchase of an assignment or cheating on a test or examination, the penalty can also include suspension for a period of up to five years from registration in courses taught in a particular department or from all courses taught in this Faculty.

3. **Disability accommodation.** Should you require any accommodations in this course due to a disability, please do not hesitate to communicate this fact to me.