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PHL 495.01: Metaphysics

Armond J. Duwell

University of Montana - Missoula, armond.duwell@umontana.edu

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Philosophy 495 Metaphysics

MW 2:10-3:30

Professor Armond Duwell

Office: LA 154

Phone: 406-243-6281

email: armond.duwell@umontana.edu

office hours: MWF 8-9

Textbooks: *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* and
Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings both by Michael Loux

Introduction:

This course is an introduction and survey of metaphysics. Metaphysics is too encompassing to exhaustively survey in a single semester, but we'll cover some of the main areas. There is much dispute about what metaphysics is, and its proper scope. A rough and ready characterization that won't offend too many metaphysicians is this: Metaphysics is the study of the existence of entities that are of a very general kind or category. In that regard, metaphysics is all-encompassing. This may seem hopelessly vague, but an example might help. One basic metaphysical question is whether there are material objects or not. One metaphysician might hold that material objects are primitive and cannot be analyzed in terms of more basic entities. Another might hold that material objects are simply agglomerations of sensory qualities, thereby denying that material objects are primitive. In this class we aim to explore some of the most basic categories like universals, particulars, identity, change, modality, causation, time, and space.

Learning Goals:

1. Students will be able to articulate alternative views associated with different categories, e.g. realism v. nominalism regarding universals.
2. Students will be able to articulate the arguments mustered for and against different views of categories, e.g. raise difficulties for realism regarding universals that nominalism can address and vice versa.
3. Students will be able raise their own criticisms of different views of categories and articulate how certain views fail to meet certain desiderata.

Grading and Exams:

20% attendance and participation, 20% presentations, 20% essay, 40% final paper.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. You get two unexcused absences. Additional unexcused absences will incur 5% reduction in final grade up to a total of 10%. Absences will be excused after the fact only in case of extreme circumstances that could not have been anticipated. Moreover, proof of extreme circumstances is required. Absences may be excused before the fact and is up to my discretion. In all cases, please talk to me about any foreseeable problems as soon as you anticipate them. I'm far more lenient when you are forthright about your problems.

Participation: Active participation is essential for learning philosophy. Our primary purpose in this class is to explore conceptual space by means of rational argumentation. I want to hear from you.

A range: The student is fully engaged and highly motivated. This student is well prepared, having read the assigned texts, and has thought carefully about the texts' relation to issues raised in lecture and section. This student's ideas and questions are substantive (either constructive or critical); they stimulate class discussions. This student listens and responds to the contributions of other students.

B range: The student participates consistently in discussion. This student comes to section well prepared and contributes quite regularly by sharing thoughts and questions that show insight and a familiarity with the material. This student refers to the materials discussed in lecture and shows interest in other students' contributions.

C range: The student meets the basic requirements of section participation. This student is usually prepared and participates once in a while but not regularly. This student's contributions relate to the texts and the lectures and offer a few insightful ideas, but do not facilitate a discussion.

Presentations: You will be required to present on two articles in class. These will be made in groups of two students. For your presentation you will have to have an excellent command of the article you are presenting on as you will be leading discussion. The presentations should have two parts: 1. A summary of the main problems the author(s) deal(s) with and their proposed solutions (taking not more than 1/2 hour) and 2. a set of problems formulated by your group for discussion. You should provide a handout (with your names written on it) to me and the class with a list of the problems for discussion. To be clear, a problem is a reason for thinking the author's argument is defective in some way, i.e. defective premises or weak inductive argument structure. In addition, some of your questions might relate the article being discussed to previous work we have discussed. I will expect to see a copy of your handout at least two days in advance of your presentation so I can give you feedback. I am happy to meet with you to help you understand what's going on in your presentation article.

A range: You present an accurate reconstruction of the problem that the author is dealing with, an accurate and charitable reconstruction of the arguments pertaining to that problem, and a careful criticism of the author's arguments via your discussion questions. You take an active role leading discussion of the paper by responding to student's

comments. In particular, you will have anticipated responses to your discussion questions, especially how you think the author(s) might respond, and use those to draw out more elaborate comments about student's responses or to generate further discussion.

B range: You present a reasonable reconstruction of the problem that the author is dealing with, a charitable reconstruction of the arguments pertaining to that problem, and some criticism of the author's arguments via your discussion questions. You will lead discussion of the paper and respond to student's comments.

C range: You state the topic of the paper without articulating the problem that the author intends to address. You provide a summary of the paper (mere chronology without isolating the main arguments). You provide discussion questions that are related to the text, but aren't primarily geared to addressing possible weaknesses in the author's argument. You ask questions, but don't develop discussion.

Essay: You will be required to write a brief essay ~800 words (give or take 100 words or so). The essay is due on March 7th in class. I will assign an essay topic. The topic will be on material we have already covered in class. I will expect you to provide an analysis much like we do in class. Critically evaluate arguments, address the strengths and weaknesses of a particular position, etc. I will provide grading criteria when I hand out the essay topics.

Final Paper: You will be required to write a paper of at least 12 pages (12 pt font, normal margins, double spaced) on a topic of your choosing. You must submit your paper topic along with an abstract by April 18th. You must use at least one primary source (from a reputable collection of papers or philosophy journals) that we have not used in class (reference works, encyclopedia articles, etc. do not meet this requirement), in a non-trivial way. I will be happy to provide comments on drafts given to me before April 30th. The essay will be due in the final exam period of class (3:20 Monday May 7th). The grading criteria will be discussed at a later date.

Classroom courtesy:

Please turn off cell phones when you come into class. If you have to leave early, please indicate that to me before class begins, and let me know why you must leave early.

Special Needs:

Students with disabilities will receive reasonable modifications in this course. Your responsibilities are to request them from me with sufficient advance notice, and to be prepared to provide verification of disability and its impact from Disability Services. Please speak with me after class or during my office hours to discuss the details. For more information, visit the Disability Services for Students website at www.umt.edu/dss/

Tentative Schedule:

Below is a list of readings to be read in chronological order. Numbers refer to chapters in your textbook. The rest are readings that I will post as PDFs on Moodle for you to download. This is a first time I'm teaching the class using these books, so I don't have a sense of how long it will take to cover certain topics. So, reading assignments will be given at the end of each class. If you miss class, you can find the reading assignments on Moodle. We may cover everything on the list below, we may not. If we do, we will press on to other topics mentioned at the bottom of the list.

No Class on Monday 2/20.

THE PROBLEM OF UNIVERSALS: METAPHYSICAL REALISM

Chapter 1

THE PROBLEM OF UNIVERSALS: NOMINALISM

Chapter 2

Russell, "The World of Universals"

Price, "Universals and Resemblances"

Quine, "On What There Is"

Williams, "Elements of Being"

Armstrong, "Universals as Attributes"

CONCRETE PARTICULARS I: SUBSTRATA, BUNDLES, AND SUBSTANCES

Chapter 3

Black, "The Identity of Indiscernibles"

Allaire, "Bare Particulars"

Van Cleve, "Three Versions of Bundle Theory"

Casullo, "A Fourth Version of Bundle Theory"

THE NECESSARY AND THE POSSIBLE

Chapter 5

Lewis, "Possible Worlds"

Plantinga, "Actualism and Possible Worlds"

Lewis, "Counterparts or Double Lives?"

Kripke, "Identity and Necessity"

CAUSATION

Chapter 6

Hume, selections from *A Treatise of Human Nature*

Ewing, "Cause"

Anscombe, "Causality and Determination"

Mackie, "Causes and Conditions"

Lewis, "Causation"

CONCRETE PARTICULARS II: PERSISTENCE THROUGH TIME

Chapter 8

Heller, "Temporal Parts of Four-Dimensional Objects"

Merricks, "Endurance and Indiscernability"

Parfit, "Personal Identity"

Lewis, "Survival and Identity"

Swineburne, "Personal Identity: The Dualist Theory"

If we have time, we'll either look at the nature of time, or at metaphysical anti-realism.