

PH351-15 Metaphysics

24/25

Department

Philosophy

Level

Undergraduate Level 3

Module leader

Thomas Crowther

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

Metaphysics is the most general attempt to make sense of things. Though it is perhaps the oldest branch of the discipline, contemporary metaphysics is a vibrant and exciting subject. In this module, students are introduced to a number of different problems that have been at the centre of discussion in historical and contemporary metaphysics, and to some attempted solutions to these puzzles. Students will be encouraged to think for themselves about the puzzles and about philosophers' attempts to solve them.

Module aims

The module aims to give students a good critical understanding of a number of core topics in historical and contemporary metaphysics. The module falls into broadly two parts. The first part of the module will focus on a number of questions about ordinary perceptible objects, like palm trees and peregrine falcons. We will investigate some paradoxes about the identity of objects over time, such as the paradox of material constitution (the statue and the clay), and the puzzle of change (how can the same object persist over time if it changes?). In the second part of the module we will turn to questions about the nature of persons and questions about personal identity and selfhood over time. Various views about personal identity will be explored, including psychological continuity theories and animalism. In the second part of the module, we will also look at some key texts from the Ancient Indian Buddhist metaphysical tradition.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

The first part of the module engages with traditional and contemporary problems about objects and identity. The second part of the module engages with questions about personal identity and the self. Representative topics to be studied include:

1. Substance: What is a substance?
2. Identity over Time: Do objects have temporal parts as well as spatial parts?
3. The Paradox of Material Constitution: Is the statue identical with the piece of clay that constitutes it?
4. Neo-Aristotelian approaches to Identity and Individuation: Are objects complexes of 'matter' and 'form'?
5. Persons and personal identity: Does personal identity consist in the identity of a body or of psychological continuity?
6. Parfit on Persons: Is personal identity something we really care about?
7. Persons and Selves: What is the Self? Do Selves exist?
8. Buddhist reductionism and eliminativism about the persons and the self

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Understand, analyse and apply key theoretical approaches in contemporary metaphysics, and explain the issues at stake in debates between them.
- Identify and assess different argumentative strategies used in metaphysics to address specific questions, and articulate central theoretical concepts that inform different answers to those questions.
- Develop and defend their own judgement about competing views in metaphysics, and express themselves clearly and with precision.

Indicative reading list

Many of the key texts will be taken from the anthology:

Jaegwon Kim, Daniel Korman and Ernest Sosa (eds.) *Metaphysics: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012).

Additional illustrative bibliography

Introductory:

Michael J. Loux, and Thomas Crisp, *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, 4th edition, (London: Routledge, 2017)

Ted Sider, John Hawthorne and Dean Zimmerman, *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 2008)

Katherine Hawley, *How Things Persist*. (Oxford: O.U.P., 2001)

Ted Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time* (Oxford, O.U.P., 2001)

David Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance Renewed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)

Eric Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity without Psychology* (Oxford. O.U.P., 1997).

Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford, O.U.P., 1984)

Lynne Rudder Baker. 2007. *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life: An Essay in Practical Realism*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*, (Oxford, O.U.P., 2007).

Jan Westerhoff. 2009. *Nagarjuna's Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri. 2020. *Classical Indian Philosophy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Lynne Rudder Baker. 2000. *Persons and Bodies. A Constitution View*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Jay Garfield. 2015. *Engaging Buddhism: Why it Matters to Philosophy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Jay Garfield (translation and commentary) 2015. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika*. Oxford, Oxford University Press. A very helpful translation and commentary of Nagarjuna's Madhyamaka.

Subject specific skills

Students will be challenged to scrutinize their everyday conceptions of such things as 'material objects' and to defend these ordinary conceptions in the face of philosophical challenges (for example, the argument from temporary intrinsics or the paradoxes of material constitution). This will require close attention to a number of closely related arguments that exploit commonsense ideas about identity to arrive at radical conclusions. We will look at these arguments carefully to attempt to diagnose the problems and to creatively respond. Students will be encouraged to then apply these ideas about identity to the literature about persons and the problem of personal identity over time.

Transferable skills

Students will learn skills of close reading, analysis and creative problem-solving. They will develop and defend their own judgement about competing views in metaphysics. They will develop the ability to express themselves clearly and with precision in written work.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	18 sessions of 1 hour (12%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Private study	123 hours (82%)
Total	150 hours

Private study description

Private study, seminar preparation and reading.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

Assessment group A2

	Weighting	Study time
1000 word essay	20%	
2500 word essay	80%	

Feedback on assessment

Feedback provided on unassessed essay midway through term and on assessed essay if submitted

as final assessment method. General feedback in formation of examiners report given on exam.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core for:

- UPHA-VL78 BA in Philosophy with Psychology
 - Year 2 of VL78 Philosophy with Psychology
 - Year 3 of VL78 Philosophy with Psychology

This module is Optional for:

- UMAA-GV17 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy
 - Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
 - Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
 - Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
 - Year 3 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
 - Year 3 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
 - Year 3 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
- UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations
 - Year 2 of GV19 Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations
 - Year 3 of GV19 Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations
 - Year 4 of GV19 Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations
- UPHA-V700 Undergraduate Philosophy
 - Year 2 of V700 Philosophy
 - Year 2 of V700 Philosophy
 - Year 3 of V700 Philosophy
 - Year 3 of V700 Philosophy
- UPHA-V7Q8 Undergraduate Philosophy with Classical Civilisation
 - Year 2 of V7Q8 Philosophy with Classical Civilisation
 - Year 3 of V7Q8 Philosophy with Classical Civilisation
- UPHA-VQ52 Undergraduate Philosophy, Literature and Classics
 - Year 2 of VQ52 Philosophy, Literature and Classics
 - Year 3 of VQ52 Philosophy, Literature and Classics
- UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics
 - Year 2 of all
 - Year 3 of all