

Metaphysics

Philosophy 310
MWF 1:50 –2:50pm
Howard 116
Fall 2016



Photographer: Brian Durham

My Information

Here is my information:

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Course Introduction

This is a course in metaphysics. Here are some of the questions we will be considering in this course:

- Suppose I ask, “How many objects are there in our classroom?” Is there a single, correct answer to this question? Does the answer depend on what is meant by ‘object’ or what our concept OBJECT is? If so, does that mean the world depends on how we think about it? If so, is this true of everything that exists or only some things - the “socially constructed” things? What is social construction?
- You might have never been a student at Lewis & Clark; it is sad but true. $F = ma$ might have been true. However, it seems that bachelors could never have been married men or $2 + 2 = 5$. What accounts for the difference between what might be the case, what must be the case, what couldn’t be the case, and what is the case? Are there *really* such differences?
- What if you had an identical twin? I mean, a qualitatively identical twin. The two of you have exactly the same properties. But, if you have all the same properties wouldn’t there be one one of you? And, what is a property? Cherries and apples are red. For this to be true, they both must share some feature *redness*. What in the world is *redness*? It is an electromagnetic property of surfaces, a relational property between perceivers and stuff, or really nothing more than a name?
- Suppose you are in a marine biology lab and you bisect a starfish. Call the left half a and right b . Both sides regrow a full complement. Let’s call the starfish before the bisection ‘Stan’ who was $a + b$.

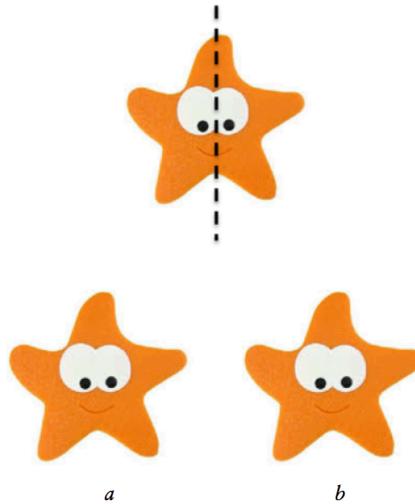


Figure 1

Either (1) Stan = a or Stan = b but not both, (2) Stan = $a = b$, or (3) Stan ceases to exist once bisected. He cannot be identical to one of his halves since there is no good reason for him to be identical to one of the halves but not the other. He cannot be identical to both since they have different properties (e.g. location). Thus, after being bisected Stan must have ceased to exist. But, if we had cut into $\frac{2}{3}$ and $\frac{1}{3}$, he would still exist. How can this be right?!?

- Whatever else you might be, you are a person. Presumably you will still be a person if your hair is cut or if you gain a few pounds. However, there are certain changes as a person you could not sustain and yet be you. For example, would you still be you if you permanently lost all of your memories? What makes you the same person over time?
- You have lots of properties. Some matter enormously to your health, wealth, and safety. Two that seem to fit this category are *race* and *gender*. Both of these categories are controversial. First, some wonder are they real? Some claim that if we didn't classify each other into races or genders, then there would be no kinds. Second, if this is right, then they are socially constructed. But, these categories seem to make

real differences to how a human life goes. Can they both be real and constructed? Third, if they are constructed, are we better off “deconstructing” them; namely, refusing to categorize each other using those kinds and thus eliminating them? Here we bring all of the metaphysical tools we have developed to bear on these social complicated topics. We will ask whether these kinds are real, constructed, and should they be eliminated.

Course Materials

There is one required text, which will be supplemented with other e-readings through Dropbox.

- Kim, J., D. Korman, and E. Sosa (2011) *Metaphysics: An Anthology*. Wiley-Blackwell. 2nd edition.

Course Requirements

In this course, your grade will be determined by your choice between the following:

- Four exams ($4 \times 25\%$) *or*
- Three exams ($3 \times 25\%$) and a Final Paper (25%)

Exams

You will be given 4 (or 3) exams. I will circulate questions a week in advance (e.g. eight questions) and will pick a subset (e.g. four questions) to answer.

Papers

You can write one 10 page paper that should have a well-defined thesis that is clearly argued. The essay should be without spelling and grammatical errors. What follows is a rough indication of what I look for in grading papers.

A, 90+, Excellent – Papers receiving a grade in this range clearly demonstrate advanced understanding of the basic concepts and issues in the text(s). In addition, these papers provide a sustained argument and critique of the text or provide substantial and interesting questions concerning the interpretation of the text. The paper as a whole is tightly focused and well-organized. Errors in grammar or spelling are nonexistent.

B, 80-89, Good – Papers receiving a grade in this range demonstrate a basic, but thorough, understanding of basic concepts and issues. Where understanding is lacking, an earnest attempt at interpreting the author is evident. In addition, these responses show a somewhat successful attempt at critical examination, argument, or questioning of the text. The paper as a whole is mostly focused and well-organized. Errors in grammar and spelling are minimal.

C, 70-79, Satisfactory – Papers receiving a grade in this range demonstrate some (possibly incomplete) understanding of basic concepts and issues. In addition, these responses show little or no earnest attempt at interpretation, critical examination, or questioning of the text. Paper lacks focus and is poorly organized. Errors in grammar or spelling are frequent.

D - F, Unsatisfactory – Papers receiving a grade in this range have failed to demonstrate any degree of real understanding of basic concepts and issues, and lack evidence of an earnest attempt to do so.

Late work

All assignments are due on the scheduled dates. However, if you come to me at least *one full day in advance* you may have one week's extension, no excuse required. If you do not have an extension, for every day your assignment is not turned in, your assignment is lowered one letter grade. Be aware that turning in a paper by extension will delay feedback and that you may not have the time you need to improve and develop before the next assignment.

Attendance

Metaphysics is difficult for some students; however, the biggest difficulties arise because students get behind in the readings. To prevent this, you should attend class regularly. Thus, I will allow you to miss a maximum of five classes unpenalized but for each class thereafter you will lose 1% of your final grade.

Grade Scale

The course grading scale is as follows:

A = 93 – 100, A- = 90 – 92, B+ = 86 – 89, B = 83 – 85, B- = 80 – 82, C+ = 76 – 79, C = 73 – 75, C- = 70 – 72, D+ = 66 – 69, D = 60 – 65, F = 0 – 59

It is impossible to do well in this course without reading and studying. I suggest that you *carefully* read the assigned material taking notes on what you read. You are strongly encouraged to discuss the course material with others outside of class. I am happy to help you outside of class. That is why I keep office hours.

Plagiarism

All students are expected to follow Lewis & Clark College's Academic Integrity Policy. This is stated in Lewis Clark College's College Catalog. Generally, plagiarizers and cheaters will be given an F for the entire course (they will not be allowed to drop or withdraw from the course). Also, your case will be given to the Honor Board where in addition to a failing grade you will receive disciplinary action.

Learning Differences

If you have been diagnosed with a learning difference and are seeking an accommodation, please provide me, as soon as possible, with a "Notice of Disability and Statement of Accommodation" from Dale Hollaway, Coordinator of Student Support Services.

Tentative Schedule

Here is our schedule which is of course revisable.

Week 1 Ontology

- Course Introduction
- “On What There is” (W. V. Quine)

Week 2 Modality

- “Modalities: Basic Concepts and Distinctions” (Alvin Plantinga)
- “A Philosopher’s Paradise: The Plurality of Worlds” (David Lewis)

Week 3 Modality & Properties

- “Possible Worlds” (Robert Stalnaker)
- “Natural Kinds” (W. V. Quine).

Week 4 Properties

- “New Work for a Theory of Universals” (David Lewis)
- “Universals as Attributes” (D. M. Armstrong)

FIRST EXAM

Week 5 Persistence

- “Parthood and Identity Across Time” (Judith Jarvis Thomson)
- “Temporal Parts of Four-Dimensional Objects” (Mark Heller)

Week 6 Persistence & Persons

- “Parthood and Identity Across Time” (Judith Jarvis Thomson)
- “Personal Identity” (Derek Parfit)

Week 7 Persons

- “The Ontological Status of Persons” (Lynne Rudder Baker)
- “An Argument for Animalism” (Eric T. Olson)

Week 8 Objects

- “When are Objects Parts? (Peter van Inwagen)
- “The Argument from Vagueness” (Theodore Sider)

SECOND EXAM

Week 9 Objects & the Non-Fundamental

- “Epiphenomenalism and Eliminativism” (Trenton Merricks)
- “Going Beyond the Fundamental: Feminism in Contemporary Metaphysics” (Elizabeth Barnes)

Week 10 Race

- “Why there are no races” (Kwame Anthony Appiah)
- “Basic racial realism” (Joshua Glasgow & Johnathon Woodward)

Week 11 Race

- “A radical solution to the race problem” (Quayshawn Spencer)
- “Passing, Traveling, and Reality: Social Construction and the Metaphysics of Race” (Ron Mallon)

THIRD EXAM

Week 12 Race & Gender

- “Gender and Race: (What) Are they? (What) Do we want them to be?” (Sally Haslanger)
- “What is Gender Essentialism?” (Charlotte Witt)

Week 14 Gender

- “The Metaphysics of Sex and Gender” (Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdór)
- “Born That Way? The Metaphysics of the Queer Liberation” (Mahren Berhensen)

Week 15

- Wrap-up or Additional Readings...

FOURTH EXAM OR PAPER