



School of Humanities and Languages

**ARTS3372: Contemporary Metaphysics  
S2, 2014**

Mondays 9–12, MB G4

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## 1. Course Staff and Contact Details

Course convenor and lecturer			
Name	Professor Stephen Hetherington	Room	MB337
Phone	9385 2318	Email	s.hetherington@unsw.edu.au
Consultation Time	Mondays 12 – 2		

## 2. Course Details

Units of Credit (UoC)	6	
Course Description	<p>This is a course in metaphysics, one of the core areas of philosophy. Metaphysics is the philosophical study of what it is for something to <i>exist</i> — and of what fundamental <i>kinds</i> of thing exist. We will study these general metaphysical topics:</p> <p><i>externality</i> Is there a world external to your mind? Is there a physical and non-mental world?</p> <p><i>objectivity</i> Is there a world with features about which we might all be mistaken? Is there a world we do not create?</p> <p><i>possibility</i> Do possibilities literally exist? Where? Are there necessities? Where? Within things? Are some aspects of things essential to them? Are there counterfactual possibilities? Can an individual exist as part of more than one possible state of affairs?</p> <p><i>ultimate being</i> Is there a God? How well can we argue for the existence of such a being?</p> <p><i>existence</i> Why is there anything at all? Are there things that do not exist?</p> <p><i>properties</i> How do things have characteristics? Are there essential properties?</p> <p><i>people</i> What is a person? Do people have free will? Are people ever morally responsible for their actions?</p>	
Course Aims	1.	The philosophical aim is for students to gain an awareness of some historically and philosophically important ideas and ways of thinking
Student Learning Outcomes	1.	An increased ability to engage critically and imaginatively with those ideas and those ways of thinking.
Graduate Attributes	1.	Being capable of independent and collaborative enquiry
	2.	Being rigorous in analysis, critique, and reflection
	3.	Being capable of effective communication

### 3. Learning and Teaching Rationale

The course will be taught via what is usually called the *Socratic* method. This means that the emphasis will not simply be on my presenting what I regard as the correct answers to the philosophical questions being discussed. Each meeting will be conducted as a guided but shared inquiry. In other words, it will be a seminar, in which I will lead the discussion. I will begin each meeting by presenting some of the main issues, claims, and concepts that are to be found in the reading for that week. I will then pose questions for discussion. These are intended to encourage students to reflect critically and imaginatively upon those issues, claims, and concepts. I will encourage you to follow through the implications and subtleties of their comments and suggestions. You will be encouraged to interact with your fellow students in those ways, too. What is sought is an atmosphere of inquiry — *active* learning.

This is sought because, for most students, it is a particularly effective way to gain — and to retain — a deeper sense of what philosophical thinking involves. Not coincidentally, it also reflects the way in which philosophy is actually conducted among professional philosophers. Philosophy is a discipline within which there is much critical debate. This can be a way of showing respect for someone's ideas. It can also be about what might appear to be the simplest aspects of an issue. For it is all too easy to take for granted — as being quite clear and simple — much that is actually not so clear or simple. A great deal of philosophical discussion thus tries to clarify questions, before offering and assessing answers to them. In this class we will aim to become better at posing, *and* at answering, some fundamental epistemological questions. Skills of understanding, analysing, reasoning, and imagining will be called upon — and strengthened, hopefully.

I will not 'spoon-feed' you, such as by dictating lectures, or by distributing notes or posting web material, for you merely to absorb. This is a course in which you will have a marked opportunity to *think* — and to think for yourself. This opportunity to improve your ability to think well and philosophically will also place more *responsibility* upon you to do so. It will be up to you to pay attention, to be ready for potentially surprising changes of direction in discussion (always knowing that I will not allow these to divert us too far from the day's main questions), and to note important points without my always having to say which are important points.

You are never required to agree with what you read for the course. But if you do disagree with it, you should think of *good reasons* for why, in your view, it is mistaken.

### 4. Teaching Strategies

See section 3 above

### 5. Course Assessment

Assessment Task	Length	Weight	Learning Outcomes Assessed	Graduate Attributes Assessed	Due Date
Essay	3000 words	40%	1	1, 2, 3	10 September (Wed of week 7)
Final exam	2 hours	60%	1	1, 2, 3	UNSW exam period

The essay will be on topics from meetings 1 through 6. The final exam will be on topics from meetings 7 through 12.

**Please Note:** In addition to fulfilling the above assessment requirements, students are expected to attend at least 80% of their lectures and tutorials in order to pass the course.

## Formal Examination

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This course has a formal examination which will be scheduled in the formal examination period from 7 – 22 November 2014. Students are expected to give their studies priority and this includes making themselves available for the entire examination period. Travel commitments made prior to the publication of the final examination timetable are not a valid reason for alternate assessment.

## Grades

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All results are reviewed at the end of each semester and may be adjusted to ensure equitable marking across the School.

The proportion of marks lying in each grading range is determined not by any formula or quota system, but by the way that students respond to assessment tasks and how well they meet the objectives of the course. Nevertheless, since higher grades imply performance that is well above average, the number of distinctions and high distinctions awarded in a typical course is relatively small. At the other extreme, on average 6.1% of students do not meet minimum standards and a little more (8.6%) in first year courses. For more information on the grading categories see

<https://my.unsw.edu.au/student/academiclife/assessment/GuideToUNSWGrades.html>

## Submission of Assessment Tasks

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Assignments which are submitted to the School Assignment Box must have a properly completed School Assessment Coversheet, with the declaration signed and dated by hand. The Coversheet can be downloaded from

<https://hal.arts.unsw.edu.au/students/courses/course-outlines/>. It is your responsibility to make a backup copy of the assignment prior to submission and retain it.

Assignments must be submitted before 4:00pm on the due date. Assignments received after this time will be marked as having been received late.

## Late Submission of Assignments

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Late assignments will attract a penalty. The essay will be marked out of 40. For the first week or less of being late, 1 point will be deducted for each day of such lateness (with Saturday and Sunday counting as two days). A further 4 points (=10%) will be deducted each further week (or part of each such week) of lateness for the essay.

The penalty may not apply where students are able to provide documentary evidence of illness or serious misadventure. Time pressure resulting from undertaking assignments for other courses does not constitute an acceptable excuse for lateness.

## 6. Attendance/Class Clash

### Attendance

Students are expected to be regular and punctual in attendance at all classes in the courses in which they are enrolled. Explanations of absences from classes or requests for permission to be absent from classes should be discussed with the teacher and where applicable accompanied by a medical certificate. If students attend less than 80% of their possible classes they may be refused final assessment.

**Students who falsify their attendance or falsify attendance on behalf of another student will be dealt with under the student misconduct policy.**

### Class Clash

A student who is approved a permissible clash must fulfil the following requirements:

- a. The student must provide the Course Convenor with copies of lecture notes from those lectures missed on a regular basis as agreed by the Course Convenor and the student.
- b. If a student does attend a lecture for which they had secured a permitted clash they will still submit lecture notes as evidence of attendance.
- c. **Failure to meet these requirements is regarded as unsatisfactory performance in the course and a failure to meet the Faculty's course attendance requirement. Accordingly, Course Convenors will fail students who do not meet this performance/attendance requirement.**
- d. Students must attend the clashed lecture on a specific date if that lecture contains an assessment task for the course such as a quiz or test. Inability to meet this requirement would be grounds for a Course Convenor refusing the application. If the student misses the said lecture there is no obligation on the Course Convenor to schedule a make-up quiz or test and the student can receive zero for the assessment task. It should be noted that in many courses a failure to complete an assessment task can be grounds for course failure.

## 7. Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

Plagiarism is presenting someone else's thoughts or work as your own. It can take many forms, from not having appropriate academic referencing to deliberate cheating.

In many cases plagiarism is the result of inexperience about academic conventions. The University has resources and information to assist you to avoid plagiarism.

The Learning Centre assists students with understanding academic integrity and how to not plagiarise. Information is available on their website: <http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/plagiarism/>. They also hold workshops and can help students one-on-one.

If plagiarism is found in your work when you are in first year, your lecturer will offer you assistance to improve your academic skills. They may ask you to look at some online resources, attend the Learning Centre, or sometimes resubmit your work with the problem fixed. However, more serious instances in first year, such as stealing another student's work or paying someone to do your work, may be investigated under the Student Misconduct Procedures.

Repeated plagiarism (even in first year), plagiarism after first year, or serious instances, may also be investigated under the Student Misconduct Procedures. The penalties under the procedures can include a reduction in marks, failing a course or for the most serious matters (like plagiarism in an Honours thesis) or even suspension from the university. The Student Misconduct Procedures are available here:

<http://www.gs.unsw.edu.au/policy/documents/studentmisconductprocedures.pdf>

<b>8.</b>	<b>Course Schedule</b>	<b>To view course timetable, please visit: <a href="http://www.timetable.unsw.edu.au/">http://www.timetable.unsw.edu.au/</a></b>
<b>Week commencing</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>
28 July [meeting 1]	The external world	PVI [textbook – see below], chs. 1 & 3; Russell, <i>The Problems of Philosophy</i> , ch. 1; Putnam, <i>Reason, Truth and History</i> , ch. 1
4 August [meeting 2]	The objective world	PVI, ch. 5; Searle, <i>The Construction of Social Reality</i> , ch. 7; Nagel, <i>The View From Nowhere</i> , ch. II
11 August [meeting 3]	Truth and social reality	Armstrong, <i>Truth and Truthmakers</i> , pp. 1-7, 9-10, 16-17, 19-25; Searle, <i>Mind, Language and Society</i> , ch. 5
18 August [meeting 4]	Possible worlds	Plantinga, <i>The Nature of Necessity</i> , pp. 44-5, 46-9; Lewis, <i>Counterfactuals</i> , pp. 84-9; Stalnaker, 'Possible worlds'; Armstrong, <i>A Combinatorial Theory of Possibility</i> , ch. 1
25 August [meeting 5]	Essences	Lowe, <i>A Survey of Metaphysics</i> , pp. 96-104; Kripke, <i>Naming and Necessity</i> , pp. 110-34; Plantinga, <i>The Nature of Necessity</i> , pp. 60-2, 65-9
1 September [meeting 6]	Counterfactuals and transworld identity	Stalnaker, 'A theory of conditionals', pp. 98-102; Lewis, <i>On the Plurality of Worlds</i> , pp. 20-3; Lewis, 'Causation'; Chisholm, 'Identity through possible worlds: Some questions'
8 September [meeting 7]	Universals	Armstrong, <i>Nominalism and Realism</i> , ch. 2; Campbell, <i>Abstract Particulars</i> , pp. 1-4, 17-26; PVI, pp. 297-305
15 September [meeting 8]	Arguments for God's existing	PVI, chs. 6 & 7; Plantinga, <i>God, Freedom, and Evil</i> , pp. 85-112

22 September [meeting 9]	Existence	Rescher, <i>Nature and Understanding</i> , ch. 8; Parsons, <i>Nonexistent Objects</i> , pp. 1-9, 30-44; PVI, pp. 292-7
13 October [meeting 10]	Persons	PVI, ch. 11; Olson, 'An argument for animalism'
20 October [meeting 11]	Free will	PVI, ch. 12; Aristotle, <i>De Interpretatione</i> , ch. 9
27 October [meeting 12]	Moral responsibility	Frankfurt, 'Alternate possibilities and moral responsibility'; Fischer, 'Introduction: Responsibility and freedom', pp. 9-21; PVI, ch. 13

## 9. Course Resources

### Textbook Details

*Metaphysics*, by Peter van Inwagen (third edition) – available from UNSW bookshop  
[referred to in section 8 above as 'PVI']

### Additional Readings

Course readings booklet – available from UNSW bookshop  
[containing all of the other readings listed in section 8 above]

## 10. Course Evaluation and Development

Courses are periodically reviewed and students' feedback is used to improve them. Feedback is gathered using various means including UNSW's Course and Teaching Evaluation and Improvement (CATEI) process.

## 11. Student Support

The Learning Centre is available for individual consultation and workshops on academic skills. Find out more by visiting the Centre's website at:  
<http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au>

## 12. Grievances

All students should be treated fairly in the course of their studies at UNSW. Students who feel they have not been dealt with fairly should, in the first instance, attempt to resolve any issues with their tutor or the course convenors.

If such an approach fails to resolve the matter, the School of Humanities and Languages has an academic member of staff who acts as a Grievance Officer for the School. This staff member is identified on the notice board in the School of Humanities and languages. Further information about UNSW grievance procedures is available at:  
<https://my.unsw.edu.au/student/atoz/Complaints.html>

## 13. Other Information

### myUNSW

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myUNSW is the online access point for UNSW services and information, integrating online services for applicants, commencing and current students and UNSW staff. To visit myUNSW please visit either of the below links:

<https://my.unsw.edu.au>

<https://my.unsw.edu.au/student/atoz/ABC.html>

### OHS

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UNSW's Occupational Health and Safety Policy requires each person to work safely and responsibly, in order to avoid personal injury and to protect the safety of others. For all matters relating to Occupational Health, Safety and environment, see

<http://www.ohs.unsw.edu.au/>

### Special Consideration

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In cases where illness or other circumstances produce repeated or sustained absence, students should apply for Special Consideration as soon as possible.

The application must be made via Online Services in myUNSW. Log into myUNSW and go to My Student Profile tab > My Student Services channel > Online Services > Special Consideration.

Applications on the grounds of illness must be filled in by a medical practitioner. Further information is available at:

<https://my.unsw.edu.au/student/atoz/SpecialConsideration.html>

### Student Equity and Disabilities Unit

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Students who have a disability that requires some adjustment in their learning and teaching environment are encouraged to discuss their study needs with the course convener prior to or at the commencement of the course, or with the Student Equity Officers (Disability) in the Student Equity and Disabilities Unit (9385 4734). Information for students with disabilities is available at: <http://www.studentequity.unsw.edu.au>

Issues that can be discussed may include access to materials, signers or note-takers, the provision of services and additional examination and assessment arrangements. Early notification is essential to enable any necessary adjustments to be made.