

Phil 4/51042: Metaphysics

Deborah C. Smith (Dr. Deb), Professor of Philosophy

Spring 2024

MW 11:00-12:15 EST

Office: Bowman 320K

Phone: Office: 672-0275

Phil. Dept.: 672-2315

Email: dcsmith1@kent.edu

Office Hours: MW 9:30-11:00, MW 2:00-3:00, and by appointment

<http://philosophy.kent.edu>

Required Texts and Readings (available at the Bookstore):

Kim, Korman, and Sosa eds., *Metaphysics: An Anthology 2nd edition*

Additional photocopied articles

Course Description:

Do numbers and other abstract objects exist? Does Pegasus have to exist in order for us to say (truly) that Pegasus is a winged horse? Can there be distinct things that have all of their properties in common or is Leibniz' identity of indiscernibles correct? Are a statue and the hunk of bronze which composes it one and the same physical object? If not, is one a non-physical object or can distinct physical objects wholly overlap? How can I be one and the same person as I was a decade ago if I'm no longer composed of the same molecules that composed me a decade ago? Are physical objects 3-dimensional objects that "travel" through space or 4-dimensional space/time "worms"? What is a possible world and what are merely possible objects? Are there any impossible objects? When are two or more physical objects the parts of a larger object? Can there be atomless gunk or must there be smallest physical parts? This course will cover several topics in contemporary analytic metaphysics. Topics to be covered include existence, identity, things and their persistence over time, the nature of modalities and possible worlds, and the relationship between material parts and wholes.

Learning Outcomes:

To understand the ideas of major philosophers regarding various issues in contemporary metaphysics. To critically evaluate the motivations for and problems associated with various metaphysical views.

NOTICE OF MY COPYRIGHT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS.

Any intellectual property displayed or distributed to students during this course (including but not limited to powerpoints, notes, quizzes, examinations) by the professor remains the intellectual property of the professor. This means that the student may not distribute, publish or provide such intellectual property to any other person or entity for any reason, commercial or otherwise, without the express written permission of the professor.

Course Requirements:

Reading:

- You are to have completed the assigned reading before class on the day for which it was assigned.
- Most of the reading assignments are listed in the schedule of readings and assignments below, although I may add some additional reading assignments.
- The readings labeled '51042' are required for students in the 5K section and recommended for students in the 4K section.
- Although I have generally assigned less than forty pages of reading a week, the material is dense and can be quite technical. Expect to spend a relatively long time doing the reading.
- You should read the assigned material at least twice (once before we discuss it in class and once after) to make sure that you understand it.
- It is highly recommended that you take notes on the reading and write down any questions you have so that I can answer them in class.
- You will be required to submit a summary of one of the readings each week (see below).
- *You are responsible for all material covered in the assigned readings whether or not it is explicitly covered in class.*
- You are expected to bring all relevant reading material with you to class.

Attendance and class participation:

- You are expected to attend every class meeting and make a positive contribution to class discussion. Note that you cannot make a positive contribution to discussion if you have not done the assigned reading.
- Do not make a habit of coming to class late or leaving early. This is not only disruptive to the other students, but may also cause you to miss an important part of the lecture.
- It is worth noting that mere attendance is not sufficient for success in this class; it is also extremely important that you ask questions when you have them or let me know when something I have said makes little or no sense to you.
- Make sure that phones and other electronic devices are turned off prior to the start of class. Tablets or laptops should be used only for the purpose of taking notes.
- Unless you have received my explicit permission to do so, refrain from recording the lecture in any way.
- If, for any reason, you cannot avoid missing a class meeting, it is your responsibility to contact me before the class so that we can arrange for you to make up any assignments scheduled for that day. I also highly recommend that you borrow lecture notes from a classmate should you miss a class.

- In the event of a campus closure or instructor quarantine, we will meet virtually via Teams. You will be informed of such an occurrence via email and provided a Teams link.
- From time to time and for various reasons (e.g., campus closure, instructor illness, to catch up if we fall too far behind, to cover material for 51042 students), I may record a lecture and post it in Canvas. Students will be notified of any posted recordings via email and are expected to view such recordings prior to the next in-person class.
- *You are responsible for all material covered in lecture whether or not it is explicitly covered in the readings.*
- A portion of your grade will be reserved to reflect attendance and meaningful class participation (for more details, see Graded Material below).

Graded Material:

- With the exception of the first week of classes and weeks in which an essay exam is due, all students are expected to submit a **summary (500 words or less) of one of the week's readings** at the beginning of the class session for which it was assigned. (Note that on Monday of week 2, I will provide a sample summary of Quine's "On what there is." On Wednesday of week 2, all students will do a summary of Carnap's "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology.") Individual reading summaries will be "graded" on a plus, check, minus scale and will be factored into your attendance/participation points (see below).
 - As an alternative to writing a summary yourself, you may ask ChatGPT to write a 500 word summary of the relevant reading at the college level and then write up a criticism of ChatGPT's summary based on your understanding of the reading. Your criticism should also be 500 words or less. Turn in both ChatGPT's summary and your criticism thereof. This option is only available when ChatGPT is familiar with the reading in question. You may use this alternative a maximum of two times during the semester.

Note: any other use of ChatGPT or other generative AI in this course will constitute cheating and/or plagiarism and will result in an academic sanction per University policy 3-01.8.
- All students are required to complete **three essay exams** each worth 40 points. These exams will take the form of highly detailed essay answers to questions handed out in class approximately one week prior to their due date. The due date for each is listed in the schedule of readings and assignments below. If for some reason you cannot turn in an essay exam on the due date, talk to me beforehand. An unexcused, late essay exam will be docked 5 points if turned in by the next class period after which it is due and will not be accepted for points afterward.
- In addition to the three essay exams, students in 51042 will be required to give at least **one oral presentation** on one of the readings. Students are strongly encouraged to have a handout or PowerPoint to accompany their presentation. The oral presentation will be worth 40 points.

- An additional 40 points will be reserved to reflect each **student's participation in class discussion** and the extent to which that participation reflects that you have completed the reading. Participation includes but is not limited to:
 - asking questions concerning the readings and/or my lecture,
 - offering interpretations of a particular claim, argument, or view in the readings,
 - raising critical questions for and offering objections/responses to particular claims, arguments, or views in the readings and
 - thinking on one's feet by offering original views on the subject, defending them with cogent reasons, and entertaining philosophical criticism from one's classmates.

Note that, since this class meets only twice a week, every absence (even excused absences) will have a significant negative impact on this portion of your grade.

Grades and Grading:

- You must turn in all three essay exams to pass this course with a D or higher. (Students in 51042 must also give an oral presentation to pass the course.)
- To determine your final grade, I will first calculate your mean score on the graded elements of this class. This will be a number between 0 and 40.
 - Since there are four graded elements of this class (three essay exams, and participation) for 41042 students, I will divide the total points earned by each student at the 41042 level by four to produce the mean score.
 - Since there are five graded elements of this class (the four above and the oral presentation) for 51042 I will divide the total points earned by each student at the 51042 level by five to produce the mean score.
- Second, I will use the resulting mean scores of each student in the class to construct a curve noting the high, low, median, mode, and mathematical average of the scores.
- Final grades will be determined based partly on the shape of the curve of the mean scores and partly by reflecting on the scores thought of as grades on a 4 point scale (for example, 36 would be a 3.6—a low A-).

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

(This schedule is tentative. You are responsible for knowing about any changes announced in class.)

What is Metaphysics? Basic Concepts and Distinctions

Week 1 (January 14-20):

M **No Class** — Martin Luther King Jr. Day

W **Readings:** Preface, pp. xii-xiii.¹
 Plantinga, “Modalities: Basic Conceptions and Distinctions,” pp. 173-177.

Metaphysical Problems Concerning Existence

Week 2 (January 21-27):

M **Reading:** Quine: “On What There Is,” pp. 7-15.

W **Reading:** Carnap: “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology,” pp. 16-26.

Week 3 (January 28-February 3):

M **Reading:** Lewis and Lewis: “Holes,” pp. 27-31.

W **Reading:** Chisholm: “Beyond Being and Nonbeing,” pp. 32-39.

Week 4 (February 4-10):

M **Readings** Yablo: “Does Ontology Rest on a Mistake?,” pp. 40-58.

W **Readings:** Schaffer, “On What Grounds What,” pp. 73-95.
 (51042) Quine: “Ontological Relativity” (photocopy).

Essay Exam 1 handed out, due in class Wednesday of Week 5.

Metaphysical Problems Concerning Identity

Week 5 (February 11-17):

M **Reading:** Kripke: “Identity and Necessity,” pp. 122-140.

W **Reading:** Gibbard: “Contingent Identity,” pp. 141-157.

¹ All page references are to Kim, Korman and Sosa, *Metaphysics: An Anthology 2nd Edition*.

Week 6 (February 18-24):

- M **Reading:** Black: “The Identity of Indiscernibles,” pp. 103-108.
- W **Readings:** Adams: “Primitive Thisness and Primitive Identity,” pp. 109-121.
(51042) Stalnaker: “Vague Identity,” pp. 159-166.

Metaphysical Problems Concerning Things and Their Persistence

Week 7 (February 25-March 2):

- M **Reading:** Lewis: “The Problem of Temporary Intrinsic,” pp. 504-505.
- W **Reading:** Chisholm: “Identity through Time,” pp. 461-471.

Week 8 (March 3-9):

- M **Readings:** Quine: “Identity, Ostension, and Hypostasis,” pp. 472-479.
- W **Readings:** Haslanger: “Endurance and Temporary Intrinsic,” pp. 506-510.
(51042) Jarvis Thomson, “Parthood and Identity Across Time,” pp. 480-491.

Week 9 (March 10-16):

- M **Reading:** Heller: “Temporal Parts of Four-Dimensional Objects,” pp. 492-503.
- W **Reading:** Sider: “All the World’s a Stage,” pp. 511-526

Essay Exam 2 handed out, due in class Wednesday of Week 10.

Metaphysical Problems Concerning Modalities and Possible Worlds

Week 10 (March 17-23):

- M **Reading:** Plantinga: “Modalities: Basic Concepts and Distinctions,” pp. 173-187.
- W **Reading:** Adams: “Actualism and Thisness,” pp. 187-207.

Week 11 (March 24-30):

No classes — Spring Break

Week 12 (March 31-April 6):

- M **Reading:** Lewis: “A Philosopher’s Paradise,” pp. 208-230.
- W **Reading:** Stalnaker: “Possible Worlds,” pp. 230-235.

Week 13 (April 7-13):

M **Reading:** Rosen: “Modal Fictionalism,” pp. 236-254.

Metaphysical Problems Concerning Material Objects

W **Reading:** van Inwagen: “When are Objects Parts,” pp. 627-642.

Week 14 (April 14-20):

M **Reading:** Lewis: “Many, But Almost One,” pp. 642-651.

W **Reading:** Sosa: “Existential Relativity,” pp. 652-660.

Week 15 (April 21-27):

M **Reading:** Sider: “The Argument from Vagueness,” pp. 661-672.

W **Reading:** Merricks: Epiphenomenalism and Eliminativism,” pp. 673-685.

Essay Exam 3 handed out, due by 10:15 a.m., Monday, May 6th (this is the time scheduled for a final exam in this course).

Week 16 (April 28-May 4):

M **Reading:** Hirsch: “Against Revisionary Ontology,” pp. 686-702.

W **Reading:** Smith: “Gunky Objects, Junky Worlds, and Weak Mereological Universalism,” (Photocopy).

Final Exam Period: Monday, May 6th 10:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. — we will meet at this time to hand in Essay Exam 3 and (if necessary) to finish discussing the final readings.

Official Syllabus Statements

PHIL4/51042: Metaphysics Spring 2024: MW 12:30-1:45 EST

Deborah C. Smith, Professor of Philosophy

Office: Bowman 320K

Email: dcsmith1@kent.edu

Office Hours: MW 9:30-11:00, 2:00-3:00, and by appointment

Course Specific Statements:

Attendance Policy: I will hand out a sign-up sheet or otherwise take note of those present at the beginning of class. You are responsible for all material covered in lecture whether or not it is explicitly covered in the readings. Attendance and participation will account for 25% of the final grade for Phil 41042 and 20% of the final grade for Phil 51042.

Final: There is no final exam in this class. The third of three essay exams will be due in class on the day and time scheduled for the final.

For more information about course content and requirements, see the detailed course syllabus.

General Statements:

Notice of My Copyright and Intellectual Property Rights: Any intellectual property displayed or distributed to students during this course (including but not limited to PowerPoints, recordings of lectures, notes, content handouts, quizzes, examinations) by the professor remains the intellectual property of the professor. This means that the student may not distribute, publish or provide such intellectual property to any other person or entity for any reason, commercial or otherwise, without the express written permission of the professor. Additionally, students may not distribute or publish recordings and/or links to live classroom presentations, lectures, and/or class discussions.

Students with Disabilities: University policy 3-01.3 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through Student Accessibility Services (contact 330-672-3391 or visit www.kent.edu/sas for more information on registration procedures).

Academic Complaints: The Philosophy Department Grievance Procedure for handling student grievances is in conformity with the Student Academic Complaint Policy and Procedures set down as University Policy 3342-16 in the *University Policy Register*. For information concerning the details of the grievance procedure, please see the departmental chairperson.

Academic Dishonesty: University policy 3-01.8 deals with the problem of academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism. None of these will be tolerated in this class. The sanctions provided in this policy will be used to deal with any violations. If you have any questions, please read the policy at http://www.kent.edu/policyreg/policydetails.cfm?customel_datapageid_1976529=2037779.

Religion Accommodations: The University welcomes individuals from all different faiths, philosophies, religious traditions, and other systems of belief, and supports their respective practices. In compliance with University policy and the Ohio Revised Code, the University permits students to request class absences for up to three (3) days, per term, in order to participate in organized activities conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination, church, or other religious or spiritual organization. Students will not be penalized as a result of any of these excused absences.

The request for excusal must be made, in writing, during the first fourteen (14) days of the semester and include the date(s) of each proposed absence or request for alternative religious accommodation. The request must clearly state that the proposed absence is to participate in religious activities. The request must also provide the particular accommodation(s) you desire.

You will be notified by me if your request is approved, or, if it is approved with modification. I will work with you in an effort to arrange a mutually agreeable alternative arrangement. For more information regarding this Policy you may contact the Student Ombuds (ombuds@kent.edu).

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement: Kent State University is committed to the creation and maintenance of equitable and inclusive learning spaces. This course is a learning environment where all will be treated with respect and dignity, and where all individuals will have an equitable opportunity to succeed. The diversity that each student brings to this course is viewed as a strength and a benefit. Dimensions of diversity and their intersections include but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, national origin, primary language, age, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, mental and physical abilities, socio-economic status, family/caregiver status, and veteran status.

Land Acknowledgement Statement: We acknowledge that the lands of Kent State University were the previous homes of people who were removed from this area without their consent by the colonial practices of the United States government. Before removal, these groups created networks that extended from Wyoming to the Florida Coast and Appalachia and to the northern reaches of Lake Superior. These societies included people of the Shawnee, Seneca-Cayuga, Delaware, Wyandots, Ottawa and Miami. We honor their lives – both past and present – and strive to move beyond remembrance toward reflection and responsibility through honest accounts of the past and the development of cultural knowledge and community.