

# PHIL 460: Metaphysics

Andrew Bacon

This course serves as an introduction to metaphysics aimed at advanced undergraduates. Metaphysics concerns itself with general philosophical questions about the structure of reality and about how the ordinary world we see around us fits into that story. The course will focus on three central topics in metaphysics – space and time, modality and material objects.

Here are a few questions that you will encounter during this course. Would a universe in which every single object is displaced by one meter in a fixed direction be any different from our own? Your current location in time, the present, seems to be special in a way in which your current location in space is not – is this asymmetry real, and if so, in what does this specialness consist? Is the fact that a ball could have been green all over, but not green all over and red all over, an objective feature of the world, and if not where do facts like these fit into the picture? Could two objects be in the same place at the same time? Are material objects, such as tables and chairs or even people, just fusions of smaller objects such as particles?

**PREREQUISITES:** There are no official prerequisites for this course but it would be useful to have taken one or more philosophy courses and to have taken a logic course.

## 1 Course Details

**CLASSES:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 11-12.00, VKC 207

**OFFICE HOURS:** Tuesdays 15.30-17.30 224 Stonier Hall

**WEBSITE:** Blackboard will be used.

**PHONES:** Phones must be on silent and out of sight during class.

**TEXTS:** We will be working primarily from

‘Metaphysics: The Big Questions’, Second Edition, Blackwell Publishing, 2012, (eds. van Inwagen and Zimmerman.)

Everyone will need a copy of this book.

Texts will be selected each week and must be read before the corresponding class. You will most likely need to read each text more than once so leave plenty of time.

**GRADING:** You will be assessed on the basis of weekly reading questions (marked as ‘pass’ or ‘fail’), two writing assignments, a peer review exercise and class participation. The writing assignments will consist of short papers (around

2000 words each.) In the peer review exercise you will be required to comment anonymously on a randomly assigned draft of one of your fellow students.

Grading. First paper: 25%, second paper: 30%, peer review exercise: 15%, weekly questions 15%, class participation 15%.

STATEMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov/>. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

## 2 Preliminary Schedule

This is a *preliminary* schedule – the topics listed here are subject to change. ‘MBQ’ refers to ‘Metaphysics: The Big Questions’ (see required texts above.)

### SPACE AND TIME

1. Zeno's paradoxes: The Racetrack (Max Black (MBQ), Sainsbury (Blackboard).)
2. Zeno's paradoxes: The Arrow (Wesley Salmon (MBQ).)
3. Four dimensionalism (Sider reading (Blackboard).)
4. Higher dimensions (Gardener, Van Cleve (MBQ).)
5. Absolute and relative space and time. (Sider, Maudlin (Blackboard).)
6. The tensed theory of time (Prior ‘Changes in Events and Changes in Things’ (Blackboard))

### MODALITY

7. Modality (Loux Chapter 5 from ‘Metaphysics’ (Blackboard), Loux introduction ‘The Actual and the Possible’ (Blackboard).)
8. Modal realism (Lewis (MBQ).)
9. Ersatz theories (Stalnaker, Plantinga, Lewis (Blackboard).)
10. Counterpart theory (Plantinga ‘Transworld Identity or Worldbound Individuals?’ (Blackboard), Lewis (MBQ).)

11. Necessary existence (Plantinga 'On Existentialism', Williamson 'Bare Possibilia', 'Necessary Existents'.)

MATERIAL OBJECTS

12. Holes and Shadows (Lewis & Lewis (MBQ), Sorensen.)

13. When do things compose? (TBD)

14. Paradoxes of constitution (TBD)

15. Overflow