Metaphysics

Course Leader: Dr. Gary Banham

g.banham@mmu.ac.uk

www.garybanham.net

Room 3.09

Tel. Ext.: 3036

CORE OPTION: LEVEL II PHILOSOPHY COURSE

CREDIT VALUE:

20 Credits

Core Topics:

Simple Ideas and Simple Modes; Power and Causation; Substance; Knowledge; Primary and Secondary Qualities; Motion and Force; Space and Time.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

1. To ensure that students develop an appreciation and critical grasp of the central debates within metaphysics.
2. To increase understanding of the development of concepts in the history of metaphysics.

COURSEWORK:

Assessment: two 3,000-word essays, one on topics from the first term, one on topics from the second term, each is worth 50% of the total marks on the course.

PENALTIES: Students who submit coursework late may expect to receive a maximum mark of 40% for the work, providing it is of a pass standard. You are advised to see the Programme Handbook (2005/6) for details of the absolutely final deadline after which coursework will not be accepted for formal assessment and will therefore attract a mark of zero.
A WARNING ON PLAGIARISM:

Students are warned that Faculty procedures will be set in motion to investigate suspected cases of plagiarism. The Faculty student handbook defines plagiarism as:

i. the wilful representation of another person’s work, without acknowledgement of the source, as one’s own; or:

ii. the deliberate and unacknowledged incorporation in a student’s work of material derived from the work (published or otherwise) of another, examples of which are:
   a. the unacknowledged use of more than a single phrase from another person’s work without the use of quotation marks;
   b. the unacknowledged summarising of another person’s work by simply changing a few words or altering the order of presentation;
   c. the acknowledged and/or unauthorised use of the ideas of another;
   d. copying the work of another person with or without that person’s knowledge or agreement or presenting it as one’s own.

Students are reminded that the criteria covers electronic sources such as Internet sites – hence all www/http websites should be fully listed.

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS:

1. The Course Tutor will make available an alternative page coloured version of this document if you think that this would be more appropriate to your learning needs.

2. Students with Special Educational Needs should make an appointment with the Course Tutor to discuss ways in which lectures, classes and supporting handout material can be effectively organised to meet their educational needs.

INDICATIVE READING:

Roger Scruton (1999) *Spinoza* (Routledge)
ATTENDANCE:

**Important:** Seminar/Class attendance is compulsory. Absences should be authorised by the Course Tutor. Any unauthorised absences will be reported to the Programme Leader of your respective degree programme. The University is under a statutory obligation to notify LEA’s of regular student absenteeism.

**COURSE OUTLINE:**

**Term 1**

**Week 1:** Introduction

**Week 2:** Descartes on Simple Ideas (1)
*Rules for the Direction of the Mind: Rules 1-10*

**Week 3:** Descartes on Simple Ideas (2)
*Rules for the Direction of the Mind Rules 11-14*

**Week 4:** Locke on the Simple Modes of Space and Time
*Essay on Human Understanding Book II Chapters XIII-XV*

**Week 5:** Locke on Power (1)
*Essay on Human Understanding Book II Chapter XXI*

**Week 6:** PDP Week

**Week 7:** Locke on Power (2)
*Essay on Human Understanding Book II Chapter XXI*

**Week 8:** Descartes on Knowledge
*Principles of Philosophy* Part 1

**Week 9:** Descartes’ Laws of Nature
*Principles of Philosophy* Part 2, paragraphs 1-44.

**Week 10:** Spinoza on Descartes’ Laws
Spinoza *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* Part 2

**Week 11:** Spinoza on Substance
Spinoza *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy* Part 1
Spinoza *Ethics* Part 1
Term 2:

Week 1: Occasionalism
Malebranche *Search After Truth* Book VI, Part 2, Chapter 2 and Elucidation XV

Week 2: Primary and Secondary Qualities
Locke *Essay* Book 2 Chapter XXIII + XXIV
Berkeley *Principles of Human Knowledge* paragraphs 1-25

Week 3: Matter and God
Berkeley *Principles of Human Knowledge* paragraphs 26-52

Week 4: Hobbes and Leibniz on Motion
Hobbes *On Body* Part 2 Chapter 8
Leibniz *Studies in Physics and the Nature of Body*

Week 5: PDP Week

Week 6: Leibniz on Descartes’ *Principles*
Leibniz *Critical Thoughts on the General Part of the Principles of Descartes*

Week 7: Leibniz on Force
Leibniz *New System of the Nature and Communication of Substances*
Leibniz *Nature Itself*

Week 8: Space and Time in Leibniz and Newton (1)
Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence

Week 9: Space and Time in Leibniz and Newton (2)
Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence

Week 10: Hume on Causation (1)
Hume *Treatise* Book 1, Part 3, sections 2-6

Week 11: Hume on Causation (2)
Hume *Treatise* Book 1, Part 3, sections 8-9, 12, 14-15
ESSAY QUESTIONS:

Term 1:

1. How does Descartes’ view of simple ideas help us to understand his view of metaphysics?
2. Why does Locke present space and time as simple modes and is he right?
3. “Locke’s account of power is full of confusions.” Do you agree?
4. Critically examine Locke’s positive account of power.
5. Is Descartes’ account of knowledge in the Principles similar or different to his account of ideas in the Rules?
6. By what method does Descartes arrive at the statement of his three laws of nature?
7. Why is it important for Descartes to distinguish motion from its cause and what is the result of this distinction?
9. How does Spinoza’s view of substance respond to Descartes’ account of knowledge?

Term 2:

1. What is the importance of occasionalism for modern metaphysics?
2. Is there a defensible distinction between primary and secondary qualities?
3. Critically assess Berkeley’s argument for the existence of God.
4. How does Leibniz’s early view of motion differ from that of Hobbes? Which view is preferable and why?
5. Is Leibniz’s account of Descartes’ laws of nature accurate?
6. Does Leibniz succeed in refuting occasionalism?
7. What are the main points of dispute concerning the nature of space and time between Leibniz and Clarke and why is the dispute significant?
8. Does either Leibniz or Clarke offer clearer and better arguments for their view? Which position is preferable?
9. What are the main points of Hume’s critique of causation?
10. Critically assess Hume’s positive account of causation.
**FURTHER READING:**


B. Russell (1937) *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (George Allen & Unwin)


J. Brindley (1973) *Lectures on the Philosophy of Leibniz* (Greenwood Press)


H. Ishiguro (1972) *Leibniz’s Philosophy of Logic and Language* (Duckworth)


G. Fuller et. al. (eds.) (2000) *John Locke: an essay concerning human understanding in focus* (Routledge)


J.L. Mackie “Locke on Primary and Secondary Qualities” (SHORT LOAN)


H.H. Joachim (1901) *A Study of the Ethics of Spinoza*


Roger Scruton (1999) *Spinoza* (Routledge)


V.C. Chappell (1968) *Hume* (Macmillan)


Metaphysics is the most abstract branch of philosophy. It's the branch that deals with the first principles of existence, seeking to define basic concepts like existence, being, causality, substance, time, and space. Within metaphysics, one of the main sub-branches is ontology, or the study of being. These two terms are so closely related that you can often hear people use interchangeably. Metaphysics. Quite the same Wikipedia. Just better. Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy investigating the fundamental nature of being and the world that encompasses it.[1] Metaphysics attempts to answer two basic questions.[2] Ultimately, what is there? What is it like? Topics of metaphysical investigation include existence, objects and their properties, space and time, cause and effect, and possibility. Metaphysics. First published Mon Sep 10, 2007; substantive revision Fri Oct 31, 2014. It is not easy to say what metaphysics is. Ancient and Medieval philosophers might have defined metaphysics that way, for two reasons. First, a philosopher who denied the existence of those things that had once been seen as constituting the subject-matter of metaphysics—first causes or unchanging things—would now be considered to be making thereby a metaphysical assertion.