

Philosophy 125 — Day 1: Overview

- Welcome! Are you in the right place? PHIL 125 (Metaphysics)
- Overview of Today's Class
 1. **Us:** Branden (Professor), Vanessa & Josh (GSIs) — Brief Intro.'s
 2. **You:** 3 × 5 cards (name, year, major, # phil. courses, why this course?)
 3. **The Course:**
 - Administrative Stuff
 - * Website & Syllabus (lots of stuff here ...)
 - * Sections (assignments, times, *etc.*)
 - Introduction to & Overview of “Metaphysics”
 - * What is Metaphysics? (What is *not* Metaphysics!)
 - * Metaphysics as Contrasted with Epistemology
 - * Two Conceptions of Metaphysics (Aristotle *vs* Kant)
 - * Contemporary Metaphysics: Content & Methodology



Administrative Stuff I: Website & Syllabus

- The **Course Website** (*the* source for course information & content) is:
<http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~fitelson/125/>
 The best way to discuss the website is interactively, so here's a brief tour. . .
- The **Syllabus** (the last part of our website tour)
 1. **Prerequisites:** at least two previous courses in philosophy (enforced)
 2. **Texts:** (MCI) and (MCR), both by Michael J. Loux — in Bookstore now
 3. **Requirements:** Two Sets of Study Questions (25%), Two 5 page Papers (50%), Final Exam (25%) — *Thursday, 12/11/03, 12:30–3:30pm, here*
 4. **Sections:** Assignments, Times, Places, to be determined (next slide!)
 5. **Website:** Brought to you by the Department of Redundancy Department
 6. **Synopsis:** Universals, Particulars, Modality, Causation, Anti-Realism
 7. **Tentative Schedule:** This is subject to change, so stay tuned!



Administrative Stuff II: Sections

- Vanessa & Josh wil run six (undergraduate^a) sections, at the following times:
 1. Monday 12–1
 2. Monday 1–2
 3. Monday 3–4
 4. Wednesday 11–12
 5. Wednesday 1–2
 6. Thursday 10–11
- Please indicate on the roster (going around) sections you can (cannot) attend
- Attendance & participation in sections is not formally graded, but enthusiastic section performance can help you if you have a borderline grade in the course
- Sections begin **next** week (I will announce section assignments & places asap)

^aGraduate Students should see me about requirements/section, which will be different/run by me



“What is Metaphysics?” I — Multiple Meanings

- In modern English, “Metaphysics” has various meanings. See this URL:
<http://websyte.com/alan/metamul.htm>
- Many of these meanings involve **non**-philosophical topics (from our POV)
- In most Bookstores, the “Metaphysics” sections are **not** relevant to this course
- Rule of thumb: the Occult, Mysticism, and related topics are **not** salient here
- So, what is *philosophical* metaphysics?
 - Short Answer: The philosophical analysis of arguments arising from various reflections on the fundamental nature of reality.
 - Long Answer: That into which this course provides a contemporary glimpse (that glimpse being all we discuss for the next 15 weeks ...)
- Now, I'll try to say some more useful things, by way of background ...



“What is Metaphysics?” II — Metaphysics vs Epistemology

- It sometimes helps to contrast Metaphysics with other branches of philosophy
- Epistemology is another branch of philosophy, which is concerned with the possibility and nature of (human) **knowledge about** reality (broadly)
- Metaphysics, on the other hand, is supposed to be the study of the fundamental nature of reality (**not** how or what we know about reality)
- As we will see (especially, in the final unit of the course!), this distinction between M&E (as they are called in the biz) is not always so easy to make out
- Nonetheless, trying to contrast Metaphysics and Epistemology can be a useful first step in getting a better grip on both subjects
- Another way to start thinking about Metaphysics is to compare and contrast some historical conceptions of the field (philosophers from different epochs)
- Basically, that is what Loux does in his Introduction in (MCI) ...



“What is Metaphysics?” III — Aristotle vs Kant (Aristotle 1)

- Aristotle discussed two conceptions of (one and the same field?) Metaphysics
 1. The Science of Being *Qua* Being
 - A Universal Discipline, concerned with all existents (contrast physics)
 - Only concerned with beings insofar as they are beings (contrast physics)
 - Thus: unity or identity, difference, similarity (that apply to everything)
 - A Science of Categories: Fundamental Kinds under which all things fall
 2. The Science of First Causes
 - A Departmental Discipline, concerned only with First Causes
 - The Unmoved Mover (viz., God) is the central subject of inquiry
 - Later came to include what is now called Philosophical Theology
 - The same discipline (for Aristotle) as the Science of Being *Qua* Being
- Loux (page 4) briefly discusses Aristotle's attempt to show that (1) and (2) are really one and the same science of Metaphysics. Can you flesh this out? And, do you think this makes sense? This is your first Study Question.



“What is Metaphysics?” III — Aristotle vs Kant (Aristotle 2)

- Medieval Aristotelian Metaphysics was broadened to include:
 1. The Science of Being *Qua* Being
 2. The Science of First Causes (*i.e.*, Divine Substance)
 3. The mind/body distinction (and their relationship in human beings)
 4. The nature and extent of freedom of the will
- Rationalists (17th Century) viewed Metaphysics from various perspectives:
 1. General Metaphysics (Aristotelian Science of Being *Qua* Being)
 2. Special Metaphysics (various perspectives on being)
 - Being from the perspective of its being changeable (Cosmology)
 - Being as it is found in rational beings (Rational Psychology)
 - Being as it is exhibited in the Divine Case (Natural Theology)
- Rationalistic Metaphysics was also more liberal methodologically. Aristotle sought fit with commonsense, prephilosophical intuition (Rationalists did not).



“What is Metaphysics?” III — Aristotle vs Kant (Kant 1)

- Empiricists (18th C.) balked at the extravagant Rationalistic Metaphysics
- Empiricist worries about Rationalistic Metaphysics are Epistemological:
 - Scientific knowledge about the nature of reality requires justification by reference to sensory experience
 - No sensory experience could ever figure in a (legitimate) justification the theoretical claims of Rationalistic Metaphysics
 - Therefore, Rationalist Metaphysicians' claims to scientific knowledge of the nature of reality are spurious
- Some Empiricists even claim that Rationalistic Metaphysics is *meaningless*, since it can never be confirmed (or refuted) on the basis of sensory experience
- Similar objections can be made to Aristotelian Metaphysics (but, Aristotle was more conservative and more “tethered” to commonsense knowledge)



“What is Metaphysics?” III — Aristotle vs Kant (Kant 2)

- Kant’s critique has different (not purely Empiricist, but “epistemic”) premises
 - An object of knowledge is produced by the application of innate conceptual structures (of appr. kind) to raw sensory contents (of appr. kind)
 - Metaphysicians (either Aristotelian or Rationalistic) employ conceptual structures that underlie mundane forms of knowledge (*e.g.*, knowledge concerning substances, causation, events, *etc.*).
 - These conceptual structures yield objects of knowledge only when they are applied to the raw data of certain kinds of (mundane) sensory experience
 - But, the Metaphysician applies them inappropriately, in contexts where they are unable to combine with their suited empirical data
 - So, the Metaphysician’s use of those structures to answer questions of metaphysics cannot generate objects of knowledge, as promised
 - Therefore, Metaphysicians’ claims to knowledge are spurious



“What is Metaphysics?” III — Aristotle vs Kant (Kant 3)

- Kant distinguishes two kinds of Metaphysics
 - **Critical Metaphysics**: the study of the nature and limits of human conceptual structures, schemes, or representations (legitimate)
 - **Transcendent Metaphysics**: the study of the way the world really is, independently of human cognitive capacities or structures (illegitimate)
- For Kant, transcendent (*e.g.*, Aristotelian or Rationalistic) metaphysics is not a legitimate enterprise, since it seeks knowledge that is “beyond our ken”
- Critical Metaphysics, on the other hand, is legitimate, since it only involves things “within” our cognitive capacities (Kant presumes this understandable)
- As Loux points out, it’s by no means obvious why critical metaphysics should be any more doable than transcendent metaphysics (*e.g.*, Does it follow from the fact that critical metaphysics is *about* things within our cognitive apparatus that its claims can *themselves* be objects of knowledge in Kant’s sense?)



“What is Metaphysics?” IV — “Conceptual Schemers”

- Since Kant, various philosophers have become enamored with the idea of human “conceptual schemes” that mediate and delimit all human knowledge
- Many modern schemers disagree with the details of Kant’s epistemology, but they share his critical attitude about Metaphysics (*why?* this is S.Q. #2)
- According to schemers, Metaphysics is a descriptive enterprise, which aims only to characterize the landscape of human schemes (or world-views)
- Some schemers believe in a single, unchanging human conceptual structure, while others think schemes are dynamic (which leads to comparative studies)
- The most radical form of this view is **idealism**, which holds that there are *nothing but* conceptual schemes (can they claim to *know* that this is true?)
- It is difficult to precisely formulate such radical **anti-realist** views, but we will carefully study a few contemporary varieties in the final unit of the course



“What is Metaphysics?” V — Metaphysics as Category Theory 1

- A contemporary gloss on the Aristotelian conception of Metaphysics as the science of being *qua* being: Metaphysics is in the business of identifying the most basic categories or kinds of beings (Question Form: “Are there Xs?”)
- This is a more restricted view of Metaphysics than one sees in many modern texts (which often include questions about God, mind/body, free will, *etc.*)
- In this course, we will focus on just a few instances of the Question Form:
 - Are there properties (or universals)? Are there relations?
 - Are there substances (*i.e.*, Are there various sorts of particulars)?
 - Are there possible worlds?
 - Are there propositions? Are there events? Are there states of affairs?
 - Are there causes and effects (*i.e.*, Are there causal relations)?
- Metaphysics is also interested in the *nature* of Xs (if there are any).



“What is Metaphysics?” V — Metaphysics as Category Theory 2

- There are many questions of the form “Are there Xs (and if so, what is there nature)?”. Are all such questions to be classified as Metaphysical questions?
- We can imagine the following “debate” on “Are there summersaults?”:

Realist: Yes, there are summersaults. We see people do them all the time!

Non-Realist: I agree that sentences like “John did a summersault” can be true.
But, this doesn’t imply that there are summersaults. There are persons with bodies that move in various ways, and that’s all.

Realist: So, you agree that there are summersaults.

Non-Realist: If you’re asking whether there are people turning over their bodies, then yes. But, summersaults do not exist *independently of* (or *separate from*) persons, bodies, and movement.
- What’s going on here? The Non-Realist is arguing that talk of “summersaults” can be eliminated in favor of talk about persons, bodies, and movement.
- The Non-Realist is arguing that “summersault” is not a **primitive** category.



“What is Metaphysics?” V — Metaphysics as Category Theory 3

- Realists and Non-Realists disagree about which categories should be included in our basic stock of fundamental (or primitive – see S.Q. #3) categories (from which other categories may be derived). This is about our **Ontology**.
- Questions about categories that are clearly non-fundamental (e.g., “Are there Deputy Assistant Directors?”) are usually not taken to be Metaphysical *per se*. However, we can engage in Metaphysical inquiry into such categories.
- Analogy: Scientists often posit categories. Physicists often postulate fundamental or primitive natural kinds (e.g., Quark). Some (non-realist?) naturalists would say that these are also the primitive Metaphysical categories.
- However, Metaphysicians (in the traditional sense) are primarily interested in (*prima facie*) non-material categories (e.g., Universal, Proposition, *etc.*).
- Mostly, we will focus on the traditional Metaphysical questions listed above. We will have one unit on causation (which is also of interest to scientists).



“What is Metaphysics?” VI — Sidebar: Scientific Realism

- In the contemporary analytic philosophy literature, there is another important kind of realism/non-realism debate concerning *scientific* realism.
- As we have been discussing, traditional metaphysical realism usually has to do with categories like Universal, Proposition, and the like, which are (at least, on their face) non-material (or non-physical) categories.
- Scientific realism is concerned with theoretical (physical) categories introduced by scientific theories (e.g., Quark, Electron, Muon).
- Scientific realism is the view that the theoretical categories (and, more generally, theoretical terms) of our best scientific theories are non-empty.
- E.g., scientific realists believe that there are such things as quarks, electrons, *etc.*, which are posited by modern physics (but are not directly observable). Scientific empiricists do not include such things in their (physical) ontology.
- In Unit #1, I have included several “further readings” on scientific realism.



“What is Metaphysics?” VII — Methodological Remarks

- A distinguishing feature of *philosophical* metaphysics (of any variety) is the emphasis it places on *arguments* and *reasoning* in its methodology.
- As far as I am concerned, the most important thing you can take away from this course is a better understanding of the arguments (or argumentative strategies) that we find in the readings (not the *positions*, but the *reasoning*).
- As such, the main focus of the course will be on careful reconstruction and analysis of arguments in the readings. Here, a few things are important:
 - Charity: assume there is a decent (non-silly) argument in the passage
 - Logic: try to characterize the logical structure of the arguments
 - Truth of Premises: use examples, thought experiments, *etc.* to analyze and assess. Here, I recommend Pryor’s discussions of arguments & analyses at:

<http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/general/vocab/argument.html>

<http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/general/vocab/analyses.html>



Unit #1: Universals

- The first unit of the course is concerned with both realist and non-realist perspectives on the question “Are there universals (or properties)?”
- Chapter 1 of Loux’s (MCI) is a nice guide to the first part of unit #1. You should also read the papers by Russell and Armstrong in Loux’s (MCR).
- The first part of unit #1 involves Realism about universals. Focus on the arguments and reasoning in the readings. That is, try to understand *why* Realists are Realists (Charity: there must be *some* decent reasons!).
- I will be posting study questions on a continuous “flowing” basis (check site regularly). These questions can be useful for focusing your attention in the readings, and for providing some potential discussion topics for sections.
- Try to answer all study questions (and type your answers to the **boldface** questions on the website — these will be collected later in the semester).
- Grad Students: try to read the “further readings” (esp., the ones with arrows!)

