



# MLitt2 Metaphysics

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## 1. Overview

This course will cover a selection of some of the most important areas of contemporary metaphysical inquiry, many of which are crucial to various philosophical debates outside metaphysics proper. These include notably: modality, causation, reduction, part/whole relations, the reality of time, persistence through time and material constitution.

The module will appeal both to those who have an interest in the more 'fundamental' areas of philosophical inquiry and to those who wish to consolidate their knowledge of various foundational issues that arise in the more 'applied' sectors of philosophy.

## 2. Teaching methods

The course will consist of 6 x 2-hour fortnightly seminars per term (i.e. 12 in total). For each session, students will be expected to:

- have covered the set reading
- have submitted a detailed essay plan (or essay + essay plan) to the relevant tutor at least 24 hours beforehand

## 3. Assessment

Assessed will be carried out by formal examination at the end of each term (details TBA).

## 4. Time & location

TBA

## 5. Course structure

*Term 1*

1. Modality and possible worlds
2. Possible worlds and counterfactuals

3. Counterfactuals and causation (I)
4. Counterfactuals and causation (II)
5. Dispositions
6. Reduction and supervenience

*Term 2*

7. Mereology
8. Truthmakers
9. Presentism/Eternalism
10. Temporary Intrinsic
11. Material Constitution
12. Defining Persistence

## 6. Reading

### 1. Modality and possible worlds

- Compulsory:
  - Lewis, D. [1986]: *On the Plurality of Worlds*. Oxford: Blackwell. Chapter 1 'A Philosopher's Paradise' (excluding sections 1.3 to 1.5. inclusive), Chapter 2 'Paradox in Paradise'
  - Stalnaker, R. [1976]: 'Possible Worlds', *Nous* 10: 65-75.
- Optional:
  - Bricker, P [2006]: 'David Lewis *On the Plurality of Worlds*', in *Central Works of Philosophy, Vol. 5: The Twentieth Century: Quine and After*, Acumen Publishing (useful overview of Lewis' book – start here if you have initial difficulties with Lewis)
  - Lewis, D. [1986]: *On the Plurality of Worlds*. Oxford: Blackwell. Chapter 3 'Paradise on the Cheap?' (objects to various alternative construals of possible worlds)
  - Melia, J. [2003] *Modality*. Chesham: Acumen. Ch2 'Modal Language and Modal Logic' & Ch4 'Modalism' (for some introductory background on the logical appeal of being able to quantify over possible worlds); Ch5 'Extreme Realism' & Ch6 'Quiet Moderate Realism' (for an easy overview of Lewis and some alternatives, respectively)
  - Stalnaker, R. [1988]: 'Critical Notice of *On the Plurality of Worlds*', *Mind* 97, pp 117-128. (Stalnaker critically reviews Lewis' book)

### 2. Possible worlds and counterfactuals

- Compulsory:
  - Goodman, N. [1947]: 'The Problem of Counterfactual Conditionals', *Journal of Philosophy* 44, pp 113-128.

- Lewis, D.K. [1973]: *Counterfactuals*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Ch 1 'An Analysis of Counterfactuals' and Ch 3 'Comparisons'.
- Optional:
  - Bennett, J. [2003]: *A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals*. Oxford: OUP. Ch 10-21 (recent overview of the literature - contains a huge amount of material).
  - Edgington, D. [1995]: 'On Conditionals', *Mind* 104(414): 235-329. Sections 1, 3, 4 (classic overview and a good place to start)
  - Lewis, D. [1979]: 'Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow', *Nous* 13(4), pp 455-476. (another important paper of Lewis')
  - Lowe, E. J. [2002]: *A Survey of Metaphysics*. Oxford: OUP. Ch 8 'Counterfactual conditionals' (a short textbook overview)
  - Stalnaker, R. [1968]: 'A Theory of Conditionals', *Studies in Logical Theory: American Philosophical Quarterly Monograph Series 2*: 98–112; repr. in W.L. Harper, R. Stalnaker and G. Pearce (eds) *IFS: Conditionals, Belief, Decision, Chance, and Time*, Dordrecht and Boston, MA: Reidel, 1981, 41–56. (for Stalnaker's account)

### 3. Counterfactuals and causation (I)

- Compulsory:
  - Lewis, D. [1973]: 'Causation', *Journal of Philosophy* 70: 556-67. (for Lewis's account)
- Optional:
  - Hall, N. & L. A. Paul [forthcoming]: *Causation and its Counterexamples: A Traveler's Guide*. Oxford: OUP. (a book-length overview of the literature on causation, covering this week's topic and far more besides - excellent but somewhat detailed)
  - Kim, J. (1973) 'Causes and Counterfactuals', *Journal of Philosophy* 70:570-572. [for a criticism of Lewis (1973)]
  - Lewis, D. [1986]: 'Postscripts to 'Causation'', in his *Philosophical Papers: Volume II*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (further – important – elaborations of Lewis' views)
  - Menzies, P. [2001]: 'Counterfactual Theories of Causation' in E. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Sections 1-3 (skip 4. recent developments) (overview of Lewis' 1986 account and some of the objections thereto)
  - McDermott M. [1995]: 'Redundant Causation', *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 46:523-40. (Read part 1 only for a few criticisms of Lewis' early theory of causation)

### 4. Counterfactuals and causation (II)

- Compulsory:
  - Lewis, D. [2000]: 'Causation as influence', *Journal of Philosophy*, 97, 182–197 (Lewis' 'new and improved' account)
- Optional:

- Choi, S. [2005]: 'Understanding the Influence Theory of Causation: A Critique of Strevens', *Erkenntnis* 63(1): 101-118. (replies to Strevens [2003])
- Dowe, P. [unpublished]: 'Is Causation Influence?'. (critique of Lewis' new account)
- Schaffer, J. [2000] 'Trumping preemption', *Journal of Philosophy*, 97, 165–181. (introduces the famous trumping pre-emption cases)
- Schaffer, J. [2001] 'Causation, influence, and effluence', *Analysis*, 61(1), 11–19. (critique of Lewis' new account)
- Strevens, M. [2003] 'Against Lewis's new theory of causation: A story with three morals', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 84, 398–412. (critique of Lewis' new account)

## 5. Dispositions

- Compulsory:
  - Martin, C. B. [1994]: 'Dispositions and Conditionals', *Philosophical Quarterly* 44: 1-8. (introduces 'finkish' dispositions as counterexamples to the simple conditional analysis)
- Optional:
  - Bird, A. [1998]: 'Dispositions and Antidotes', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 48: 227–234. (presents a counterexample to the conditional analysis)
  - Lewis, D. [1997]: 'Finkish dispositions', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 47: 143-58. (offers a revised version of the simple conditional analysis)
  - Mumford, S. [2005]: 'Dispositions', In E. Craig (Ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. London: Routledge. (introductory overview of the issues)
  - Ryle, G. [1949]: *The Concept of Mind*, London: Hutchinson. Ch 5 'Dispositions and Occurrences' (offers a simple conditional analysis of dispositions)

## 6. Reduction and supervenience

- Compulsory:
  - Fodor, J.A. (1974) 'Special Sciences - or the Disunity of Science as a Working Hypothesis', *Synthese* 28: 97-115.
- Optional:
  - Bickle, J. [2003]: 'Multiple Realisability', in E. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (overview of the 'multiple realisability' debate)
  - Fodor, J. [1997]: 'Special Sciences: Still Autonomous after all These Years'. *Philosophical Perspectives* 11: 149-163. [replies to Kim (1992)]
  - Kim, J. [1992]: 'Multiple Realization and the Metaphysics of Reduction', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52: 1-26. (important discussion of the multiple realisability argument)

- Klee, R. [1997]: *Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*. Oxford: OUP. Ch 5 'Reductionism, Anitreductionism and Supervenience' (decent overview of what is mentioned in its title – good introductory background reading)

7. *Mereology*

TBA

8. *Truthmakers*

TBA

9. *Presentism/Eternalism*

TBA

10. *Temporary Intrinsic*

TBA

11. *Material Constitution*

TBA

12. *Defining Persistence*

TBA