

# PHL 331: Metaphysics

University of Toronto, Fall 2019

*Instructor: Dr. Owen Pikkert, [owen.pikkert@mail.utoronto.ca](mailto:owen.pikkert@mail.utoronto.ca)*

*Lecture hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 12:00 to 1:30 in UC 52*

*Office hours: Thursdays 1:30 to 3:30 in JHB 433*

## Course description

This course is an examination of naturalism, roughly the view that all of reality is ultimately or exclusively physical. We'll begin by examining some foundational texts that contributed towards the rise of naturalism as a dominant position within analytic metaphysics. We'll then proceed to examine four different objections to naturalism: that naturalism leaves some comparatively fundamental features of the universe unexplained; that naturalism cannot accommodate truths that seem to refer to abstract entities; that evolution renders naturalism self-defeating; and that the formulation of naturalism suffers from various scope dilemmas. By way of application, we'll conclude by briefly considering some different views on naturalism and the meaning of life.

## Logistics

*Evaluation:* A midterm at 25% (on 23 Oct), two papers at 25% each (due 30 Oct and 4 Dec), and a final exam at 25% (date determined by the Registrar's Office for Dec).

*Readings:* All of the readings are freely available via Quercus.

*Papers:* Each paper will be from a choice of three topics, all of which concern readings assigned in this course. Topics and instructions will be posted to Quercus well before the due dates, and papers must be submitted online via Quercus.

*Midterm and final exam:* The midterm is on the material covered in lectures up to and including Lewis. The final exam is on all the material covered in lectures after Lewis.

*Late submissions, extensions, and missed midterms:* Late papers will be penalized at 5% for each calendar day, and papers more than one week late will not be accepted. To request an extension for a paper or an alternative date to write a missed midterm, you must submit one of the following types of documentation deemed official by the University: a [Verification of Student Illness or Injury Form](#), a Student Health or Disability Related Certificate, a College Registrar's Letter, or an Accessibility Services Letter.

*Email:* Only use email for short logistical questions that are not already answered on the syllabus. Philosophical and textual questions are best saved for office hours.

*Turnitin.com*: Normally, students will be required to submit their papers to Turnitin.com (now incorporated into Quercus) for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their papers to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com website.

## Academic integrity

All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be investigated following procedures outlined in the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters. If you have questions or concerns about what constitutes appropriate academic behaviour or appropriate research and citation methods, please reach out to me. Note that you are expected to seek out additional information on academic integrity from me or from other [institutional resources](#).

## Lecture schedule

9 Sep Introduction

### *The rise of naturalism*

11 Sep Locke on empiricism

*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, I.i-iii

16 Sep Hume on miracles

*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, chapter X

18 Sep Ayer on verificationism

*Language, Truth, and Logic*, chapter 1

23 Sep Mackie on the problem of evil

"Evil and Omnipotence"

25 Sep Smart on the identity theory

"Sensations and Brain Processes"

30 Sep Putnam on functionalism

"The Nature of Mental States"

2 Oct Armstrong on the causal closure of the physical

"Naturalism, Materialism and First Philosophy"

### *The fundamentality objection*

7 Oct Dasgupta on the principle of sufficient reason

"Metaphysical Rationalism"

9 Oct Leibniz on the world's existence

"On the Ultimate Origination of Things"

- 14 Oct Thanksgiving Day  
 16 Oct Parfit on fine-tuning  
           “Why anything? Why this?”  
 21 Oct Lewis on modal realism  
           From *On the Plurality of Worlds*, pp. 1-8, 13-17, 20-27, 69-78, 92-96  
 23 Oct **Midterm**

*The reference objection*

- 28 Oct Quine on ontological commitment  
           “On What There Is”  
 30 Oct Carnap on internal and external questions, **Paper 1 due**  
           “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology”  
 4 Nov Reading week  
 6 Nov Reading week  
 11 Nov Schaffer on grounding  
           “On What Grounds What”

*The evolutionary objection*

- 13 Nov Plantinga on evolution and our cognitive faculties  
           From *Where the Conflict Really Lies*, chapter 10  
 18 Nov Street on evolution and our evaluative judgments  
           “A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value”, §1-6

*The scope objection*

- 20 Nov Stroud, Williamson, and Rosenberg on restrictive vs. unrestricted naturalism  
           Stroud, “The Charm of Naturalism”; Williamson, “What is Naturalism?”; Rosenberg “Why I am a Naturalist”

*Naturalism and the meaning of life*

- 25 Nov Pascal on theism  
           From the *Pensées* (various sections)  
 27 Nov Sartre on existentialism  
           “Existentialism and Humanism”  
 2 Dec Wolf on hybrid naturalism  
           “Meaning in Life and Why It Matters: Lecture I”  
 4 Dec Envoi, **Paper 2 due**  
 Dec **Final exam**