

Dr Luca Moretti

Topics in Contemporary Metaphysics
(2nd year undergraduate)

The tutorial will provide a survey of metaphysical issues, positions, arguments and concepts. Readings will include selections from the writings of major contemporary metaphysicians.

Class participation (questioning, commenting, arguing) is expected. The student is asked to read the papers relevant for the topic of each session (see the list below) *before* each session.

For each topic, the papers in the reading list are chosen to give contrasting answers to the questions asked. The student is required to choose one question for each topic, and to write his/her own answer by *analysing* and *evaluating* divergent theses maintained in the relevant papers. Each answer should result in a 500/2000-word essay. Each essay must be handed in to me before the beginning of the relative tutorial.

Each essay must begin with an introduction in which the author briefly presents the topic and explicitly says what he/she is going to show (for instance, that a given thesis is true, false, unjustified, implausible, etc.). *Arguments* – clearly formulated – for the looked-for conclusions should then follow. The final section of the essay should recap the results attained and may briefly present interesting or problematic consequences that follow from those results. Originality is NOT required. Importantly, any essay should be *self-contained* (for instance, if the author aims to criticise a given thesis or a given argument, the author must present that thesis or that argument *in full*). All essays should include an additional page for bibliographical references.

For further advice about how to read a philosophical paper and how to write an essay in philosophy, all students are invited to read carefully the Ch. 1 of *The London Philosophy Study Guide*. In particular, Sect. 2: “Reading Philosophy”, Sect 3: “Writing Philosophy”, and Sect 5: “Plagiarism”.

A free copy of the *Guide* can be downloaded at: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/philosophy/studyguide.htm>

Two anthologies that may prove helpful for understanding issues in metaphysics are the *Blackwell Companion to Metaphysics* (J. Kim and E. Sosa eds.) and *Philosophy: a Guide Through the Subjects* (A. C. Grayling ed., Oxford University Press).

The topics

1. *Proprieties*

Essay questions: Are properties sets?
Are the proprieties of individuals themselves individuals?
Do universals exist?

Reading list:

D. M Armstrong, *Universals: an Optioned Introduction*, Chs 1-6.

D. Lewis, “New Work for a Theory of Universals”.

T. Crane, “Universals”.

2. *Causation*

Essay questions: Can causation be analysed in terms of necessity and sufficiency?
Is there any workable reductive account of causality?

Reading list:

J. L. Mackie, “Causes and Conditions”.

D. Lewis, "Causation".

E. Anscombe, "Causality and Determinism".

3. *Identity and Individuation*

Essay questions: When are material object identical?

Can different things have all the same parts?

Reading list:

D. Wiggins, "On Being In the Same Place at the same time".

P. van Inwagen, *Material Beings*, Ch. 13.

M. R. Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology*, Vol. 2, Sects I and III.

4. *Change and Persistence*

Essay questions: Do (changing) things have temporal parts?

How change is possible?

Reading list:

D. Lewis, *On the Plurality of the Worlds*, pp. 203-205.

S. Haslinger "Endurance and Temporary Intrinsic".

P. van Inwagen, "Four Dimensional Objects".

5. *Events*

Essay questions: When are events identical?

Are events individuated by they causes and effects?

Reading list:

D. Davidson, "The Individuations of Events".

J. Kim, "Events as Properties Exemplifications".

D. Lewis, "Events".

6. *Mental States and Physical States*

Essay questions: Is pain a physical state?

Is the connection between being in a certain neurological state and being in pain necessary or contingent?

Reading list:

D. Lewis, "An Argument for the Identity Theory".

S. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture III.

F. Jackson "What Mary did not Know".

7. *Persons, Bodies, and Minds*

Essay questions: Am I my Body?

Do I have different kind of essence from the essence of any purely physical thing?

Reading list:

R. Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, pp. 322-332.

S. Shoemaker, "On an argument for Dualism".

B. Williams, "Are Persons Bodies?"

8. *Personal Identity*

Essay questions: Is psychological continuity necessary or sufficient for personal identity through time?

Is bodily continuity necessary or sufficient for personal identity through time?

Reading list:

S. Shoemaker, "Personal Identity: a Materialist Account".

B. Williams, "Personal Identity and Individuation".

E. Olson, *The Human Animal*, Chs 2-5.

9. *Freedom and Determinism*

Essay questions: Is determinism compatible with freedom?

Is *indeterminism* compatible with freedom?

Reading list:

P. van Inwagen "Three arguments for Incompatibilism".

H. Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility".

A. J. Ayer, "Freedom and Necessity".