

## Lecture 1: Admin, Methodology & Overview

1. Admin
2. Methodology
  - ...2.1. Arguments
  - ...2.2. Study Skills
    - .....2.2.1. Reading and Note-Taking
    - .....2.2.2. Essay-Writing
3. Overview

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### 1. Admin

- *Enrollment receipts?*
- *Class register*
- *Class representative*
- *Email addresses*
- *Class structure* (tentative):
  - Lecture (1hr 20 mn )
  - Class discussion (40 mn):
    - n groups, 1 for each view
    - Each group finds a number of objections to opposing views
    - Opposing groups respond
- *Reading:*
  - 1 compulsory piece + optional readings

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- Set text: Loux, M.J. (2002) *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*.
- Recommended: Loux, M.J. (ed.) (2001) *Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings*.
- Further reading as well as compulsory reading not included in Loux textbook available on WebCT course page.
- Feel free to ask me for even further reading suggestions.
- *Course website:*
  - Login to WebCT at <http://vle.bbk.ac.uk/>
  - Includes syllabus + some reading + essay titles + lecture notes.
  - Lecture notes posted 2-3 days after lecture.
- *Assignments, grading and plagiarism:*
  - Students should have attended at least 50% of meetings to qualify for assessment.
  - Two essays of 1 000 – 2 000 words each. Each essay must:

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- be word-processed,
- be double-spaced,
- be fully referenced and accompanied by a bibliography,
- include a word count,
- be accompanied by a completed and signed Individual Assessment Cover Sheet.
- Essay topics:
  - pre-assigned titles will be given to avoid pieces taken from 'paper mills'.
  - titles will be posted on website in due course.
- Keep a personal copy of all essays.
- When the essays are returned to you, it is *your* responsibility to keep both the essay and the assessment cover sheet as you will be asked to submit a folder of all your assessments at the end of the class.

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- Essay deadlines:
  - Essay 1: lecture of week 5 (25th of October),
  - Essay 2: lecture of week 10 (29th of November).
- Grading policy is outlined in your handbook pp 39-41. All marks are provisional and are subject to moderation by further assessors.
- Late submission & mitigating circumstances (see student handbook p 26):
  - If you have good reason to hand in your work late, you need to fill in a Late Submission Approval Form 2 weeks before the deadline of the final assessment
  - If you feel that you have mitigating circumstances negatively affecting your performance you need to fill in Mitigating Circumstances Form.
  - Forms available from: Assessment Office, Subject Executive Officer and Programme Manager.

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- Plagiarism (See student handbook p22 ):
  - Easy to get caught (e.g. text matching tools such as JISC, etc.),
  - Serious consequences (disqualification from assessment).
- *To contact me:*
  - Email: [j.chandler@lse.ac.uk](mailto:j.chandler@lse.ac.uk)
  - Postal: Dr J. Chandler, Center for Philosophy of Natural and Social Science, Lakatos Building, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE

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### 2. Methodology > 2.1. Arguments

- Strong emphasis on arguments in this course: recognition, evaluation & response. Crucial skills in Philosophy and outside the discipline.
- Good idea to read up on the basics of argument evaluation:
  - Try Joseph Lau's *Miniguide to Critical Thinking* (available in course reader).
  - Jim Prior's notes: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html>
- An argument is a set of statements which includes a number of premises and a conclusion. The premises are intended to be such that they will be endorsed by the hearer. Furthermore, the hearer should – if rational – be moved to endorse the conclusion on the basis of these premises.
- An argument that is such that the truth of the premises would confer a high probability on the truth of the conclusion is said to be 'valid'. If it confers a probability of 1 it is said to be deductively valid, if it confers a high probability that is strictly inferior to 1, it is said to be inductively valid.

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### 2. Methodology > 2.1. Arguments

- Examples of deductively valid argument forms include for e.g.:
  - Modus ponens: (i) if P then Q, (ii) P, therefore (iii) Q.
  - Modus tollens: (i) if P then Q, (ii) not Q, therefore (iii) not P.
  - Disjunctive syllogism: (i) P or Q, (ii) not P, therefore (iii) Q.
  - Etc.
- Examples of inductively valid argument forms include:
  - Statistical generalisation: (i) x% of observed Fs have been G, therefore (ii) x% of Fs are G.
  - Statistical syllogism: (i) most F's have been G, (ii) X is F, therefore (iii) X is G.
  - Etc.
- A valid argument whose premises are true is said to be 'sound'.

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### 2. Methodology > 2.1. Arguments

- If you are unhappy with the conclusion of an argument, you *must* find a fault in it (you can't just disagree and leave it there). The possibilities:
  - Hold that the argument is invalid, i.e. that the premises don't support the conclusion. Rare in published work. More often than not, the author will have left out a crucial premise, either because she thinks that it is obvious or because she is dishonest and thinks that it is dubious.
  - Hold that you aren't justified in believing that one or other of the premises is true, either:
    - because you are in fact justified in believing that it is false (the person offering the argument has put forward a premise that you can think of good reasons to reject), or
    - because you just don't know either way (the person offering the argument has put forward a premise that you can't think of good reasons to endorse).

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### 2. Methodology > 2.2. Study Skills

- Reading and writing philosophy paper can be challenging, but isn't in fact all that difficult *if you proceed in the right way*. All you need: commonsense, a dose of enthusiasm and some good, rigorous methodology.
- Make sure to read, over the next few weeks (and as soon as possible), the following pieces, available in the course reader:
  - J. Prior 'Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper',
  - J. Prior 'Guidelines on Reading Philosophy'.

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### 2. Methodology > 2.2. Study Skills > 2.2.1. Reading and Note-Taking

- Try to avoid reading when you don't have time to read a substantial of the text. Reading a piece in scattered stages is a waste of time.
- Read the abstract carefully, as well as the introductory paragraphs. These will give you an idea of the point of the paper and the way in which the author will be going about arguing his or her case.
- Skim through the essay.
- Highlight the conclusion(s).
- Go through the essay again, highlighting the premises of the various arguments/sub-arguments.
- If you have any doubts about what the author means, write your question down as clearly as possible. You can then put the question to your peers or to myself.

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### 2. Methodology > 2.2. Study Skills > 2.2.1. Reading and Note-Taking

- If there are any terms whose meaning you are unsure of, don't rely on a standard, lay-person's dictionary. Rather, take a look at a philosophical glossary or encyclopaedia (there are many out there; ask me if you are unsure).
- Outline, on a separate sheet and in your own words, the various arguments in premise/conclusion format. Make sure to check for possible unarticulated premises and make sure that you interpret the author charitably.
- Once you have successfully outlined the arguments, check for weak points:
  - Check that the premises do indeed support the conclusions.
  - Work your way through each and every premise, of each argument, assessing (a) whether or not the premise is true, or again (b) whether or not the exponent of the argument is entitled to claim that the premise is true (does the author offer a sub-argument or perhaps refer back to a sub-argument offered elsewhere in the literature?).

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### 2. Methodology > 2.2. Study Skills > 2.2.2. Essay-Writing

- *Start early!* Don't get cracking on the assignment 2 days before it's due in. You'd be guaranteed a poor grade. Things take time to sink in. I would recommend starting on the research at least 2 weeks before the deadline.
- Read your chosen essay question *carefully*. An essay on the relation of causation is an essay on the relation of causation, not an excuse to regurgitate the whole lecture on causation. Irrelevancies cost you (a lot of) points.
- *Selecting reading:*
  - If you are unsure what to read for your topic just ask me.
  - Note that reading more material is often counterproductive: stick to a very limited set of readings and deal with them in detail.
  - If you do nevertheless want to search for further reading yourself:

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### 2. Methodology > 2.2. Study Skills > 2.2.2. Essay-Writing

- Follow up references in the bibliographies of the papers that I suggest.
- Beware of googling as a search method. It churns up all sorts of incompetent, half-baked work. If you do find something that looks relevant on google, run it past me before using it.
- *Preparation.* Write a detailed essay plan before launching into the essay proper. This is *absolutely essential*:
  - If your essay doesn't look good in plan format, it won't look good in developed form.
  - It helps overcome writer's blocks. With a detailed plan, all you have left is to expand the bullet points into prose.
  - It helps ensure that your essay is well structured and thus easy to follow for the reader.

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### 2. Methodology > 2.2. Study Skills > 2.2.2. Essay-Writing

- It helps avoid irrelevant or waffly paragraphs.
- It helps for future reference (e.g. exams if you have any).
- It provides you with at least *something* to hand in if somehow things go wrong and you don't manage to finish the piece (it won't get you great marks but it will probably avoid you a fail).
- *Contents:*
  - Don't start with a conclusion and then go fishing for supporting arguments. Start with all the arguments available, assess them and *then* generate a conclusion.
  - Don't feel that you need to write a militant essay strongly in favour of one position over another. It's ok to be undecided: just make sure that you explain why.

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### 2. Methodology > 2.2. Study Skills > 2.2.2. Essay-Writing

- Make sure to carefully outline *any* position that you are about to criticize. The reader may not know what you are talking about. Furthermore, if you aren't in a position to outline the view, you aren't in a position to offer good criticism.
- Be wary of misrepresenting your opponent's view. Interpreting your opponent uncharitably and subsequently basing your criticism on that interpretation is a waste of time. Furthermore, make sure that you get your account of a theory from its proponents rather than its critics (critics have a tendency to interpret uncharitably).
- Try to write all arguments in clear, numbered premise/conclusion format:
  - It makes what you say easy to follow
  - It forces you to make sure that you understand the argument
  - It makes it easier for you to identify possible lines of response

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### 2. Methodology > 2.2. Study Skills > 2.2.2. Essay-Writing

- Don't leave gaps in your argumentation. Make sure that each and every step of your reasoning, however trivial it may seem, is made explicit.
- Avoid relying on any of the following when backing up a claim:
  - Clichés and folk-wisdom (e.g. 'That might be good theory, but theory won't get you anywhere in the real world'),
  - Appeal to authority,
  - Rhetorical questions (e.g. 'But who's to say that's right?')
- Always support and illustrate your argumentation/exposition with examples.
- Back up any assertion that might be controversial with an argument.
- Anticipate objections. Each time you make a point, try to think of how your opponent would respond to it. Try to stay a couple of steps ahead by anticipating criticism and defusing it.

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### 2. Methodology > 2.2. Study Skills > 2.2.2. Essay-Writing

- Don't waffle or include irrelevancies in order to make up the word count. It is likely to bring your mark down more than would the relatively minor penalty for handing in a piece that is under the minimum word count.
- Be very careful to choose the right term to express what you mean. You might wind up saying something very different to what you thought you did. Philosophers are very fussy about distinctions in meaning.

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#### ▪ *Form:*

- Keep the sentences short: if you can break a sentence into shorter ones, then do so.
- Avoid unnecessary jargon at all costs – plain English is preferable whenever appropriate.
- Don't repeat yourself. Check through the text to make sure you aren't saying the same thing twice.
- Start a new paragraph for each topic/subtopic. Avoid pages of uninterrupted blocks of text.
- Use section headings to mark out the main sections of the essay.
- Avoid quoting unless *absolutely* necessary. Furthermore, if you are going to quote someone, *always* follow this up with a brief account of what was said, in your own words.

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- *Introduction.* Don't stress. Keep it simple and matter-of-fact; it doesn't need to be fancy or witty or eye-catching:
  - Provide a succinct outline of the essay: target conclusions, rough idea of arguments, etc.
  - Avoid GCSE-standard opening lines such as 'Time is very important nowadays' or 'For centuries, philosophers have puzzled over the nature of truth'.
- *Conclusion.* Again, don't stress:
  - A simple, nice and clear summary of the outcome of the argument will do fine.
  - Don't feel that you have to end with an opinionated or witty 'bang'.
  - Again avoid GSCE-style closing comments such as 'only time will tell' or 'perhaps we will never find out the truth of the matter', etc.

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### 2. Methodology > 2.2. Study Skills > 2.2.2. Essay-Writing

- *After having written the essay:*
  - *Take some time off: leave the essay for 24-48 hours after having written it.*
  - Print the essay out and reread on paper. Again, rereading out loud helps pick up on mistakes that you may miss out on otherwise.

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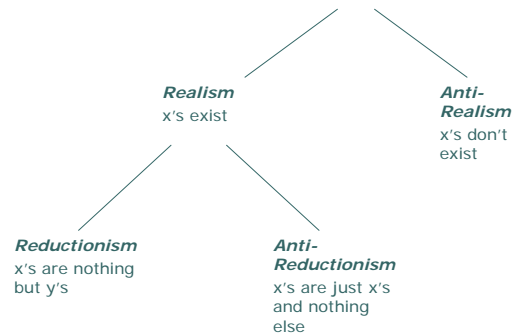
### 3. Overview of the Course

- Throughout the course, as is the case with pretty much every philosophy course on offer, we are going to be concerned with two general types of question:
  - The question of existence: do x's exist? (e.g.: Do properties exist? Do causal relations exist? Do possible worlds exist?)
  - The question of reduction: if x's do indeed exist, are they reducible to more primitive kinds of things? (e.g.: Are properties nothing but sets of individuals? Are causal relations nothing but probabilistic correlations?) Some examples of widely endorsed reductions from the scientific domain:
    - High temperature (in gases) is nothing but high mean molecular kinetic energy
    - Sound is nothing but a train of compression waves traveling through the air

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### 3. Overview of the Course

- This leaves us with the following classifications of views, for any given kind of thing x:



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### 3. Overview of the Course

- What is distinctive about this course is that the x's that we will be considering are candidates for being among *the most basic or fundamental categories* in our conceptual scheme. Indeed we are trying to identify the most primitive categories of our ontology.

- The schedule:
  - *Week 2*: Properties
  - *Week 3*: Objects
  - *Week 4*: Propositions, states of affairs and events
  - *Week 5*: Modality: possibility and necessity
  - *Week 6*: Time and diachronic identity
  - *Week 7*: Reduction and supervenience

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- *Week 8*: Counterfactual conditionals
- *Week 9*: Laws of nature
- *Weeks 10 & 11*: Causation
- *Week 12*: Dispositional Properties