

Topics in Recent Philosophy: Metaphysics
Philosophy 850, Spring 2018

Updated 18 January 2018

Instructor: Ben Caplan
Time: T 3:00–4:50 PM
Location: 3097 Wescoe
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Office hours: T 12:15–1:15 PM
 T 1:45–2:45 PM
 Th 12:15–1:15 PM
 Or by appointment
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Description

We will talk about the metaphysics of holes, statues, motorcycles, cakes, and candles. We will also talk about the metaphysics of race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Along the way we might talk about topics like existence, location, and parthood; objects, properties, and relations; and persistence, identity, and time.

Requirements

Short writing assignment	10%
Problem set	25%
Final paper	65%

The short writing assignment should be less than a page. The final paper should be 10–12 pages.

Due dates for the short writing assignment and the problem set will be announced in class at least one week in advance.

The final paper will be due at the end of finals week, on Friday, 11 May 2018. You must meet with me to get your topic approved and to discuss your final paper beforehand.

Readings

Readings are available on Blackboard. I will sometimes presuppose that, in one way or another, you will have the relevant texts in front of you in class.

Academic misconduct

The university policy on academic misconduct is set out in Article II, Section 6 of the University Senate Rules and Regulations. Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) “giving or receiving of unauthorized aid on ... assignments,” “knowingly misrepresenting the source of any academic work,” and “plagiarizing another’s work.” Penalties for academic misconduct include receiving a failing grade for the course, being suspended from the university, and being expelled. For further details, see policy.ku.edu/governance/USRR#art2sect6.

Accessibility

I’m committed to making this class as accessible as possible. If you have any particular accommodation requests, please speak to me as soon as possible.

Title IX

According to Title IX, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.”¹

If you or someone you know has been sexually harassed or assaulted, you can find resources at the Office of Institutional Opportunity and Access (ioa.ku.edu) or by contacting the Title IX Coordinator (ioa@ku.edu). Please note that, under FERPA (the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act), a university has a legal right to access its students’ medical records from campus health clinics.²

Under Title IX, faculty members have an obligation to report to IOA incidents of sexual harassment or assault that they know, or have reason to believe, have occurred.

Electronic devices

You are permitted to use laptops and other electronic devices in class, since some students prefer taking notes, or reading texts, on such devices.

¹ Title IX is a portion of the United States Education Amendments of 1972, Public Law No. 92-318, 86 Stat. 235 (23 June 1972), codified at 20 U.S.C. Section 1681–1688.

² In effect, FERPA limits the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). See “Joint Guidance on the Application of the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)* and the *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA)* to Student Health Records,” p. 6. Available at <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocr/privacy/hipaa/understanding/coveridentities/hipaaferpajointguide.pdf>.

However, students report that they find laptop use in class distracting. This includes laptop use by their peers.³ (If you're browsing Facebook during class, you might find it interesting. So, apparently, might those around you.) More importantly, "the level of laptop use was negatively related to several measures of student learning, including ... overall course performance," which is to say that (generally speaking), the more students used laptops in class, the worse their final grades were.⁴

If you use a laptop or other electronic device in class, please try to sit somewhere where your screen is less likely to be visible to others.

Concealed carry

If you carry a concealed handgun, familiarize yourself both with the relevant state and federal laws and with KU's weapons policy. See <https://concealedcarry.ku.edu/information>.

Schedule

A detailed and updated schedule will be posted on Blackboard.

There is no class on Tuesday, 20 March 2018 (Spring Break).

Tentative outline

The outline is tentative. Among other things, additional readings might be assigned over the course of the semester, depending on what our interests are and on how discussion in class proceeds.

Holes

David Lewis and Stephanie Lewis, "Holes," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 48.2 (Aug. 1970): 206–212.

Statues (multi-thingism and plenitudinarianism)

Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Statue and the Clay," *Noûs* 32.2 (June 1998): 149–173, esp. 149–154.

Karen Bennett, "Spatiotemporal Coincidence and the Grounding Problem," *Philosophical Studies* 118.3 (April 2004): 339–371.

³ Carrie B. Fried, "In-Class Laptop Use and Its Effects on Student Learning," *Computers and Education* 50.3 (April 2008): 906–914.

⁴ Fried, "In-Class Laptop Use and Its Effects on Student Learning," p. 906.

Motorcycles and cakes (hylomorphism)

Kathrin Koslicki, *The Structure of Objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3–8, 176–186, 261–264.

Karen Bennett, “Koslicki on Formal Proper Parts,” *Analysis* 71.2 (April 2011): 286–290.

Candles (persistence)

Sally Haslanger, “Persistence through Time,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, ed. Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 315–354.

Gender and race

Charlotte Witt, “What Is Gender Essentialism?,” in *Feminist Metaphysics: Explorations in the Ontology of Sex, Gender and the Self*, ed. Charlotte Witt (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 11–25.

Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?,” *Noûs* 34.1 (March 2000): 31–55.

Katharine Jenkins, “Amelioration and Inclusion: Gender Identity and the Concept of *Woman*,” *Ethics* 126.2 (Jan. 2016): 394–421.

Sexual orientation

Esa Díaz-León, “Sexual Orientations: The Desire View,” in *Feminist Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Keya Maitra and Jennifer McWeeny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

Disability

Elizabeth Barnes, *The Minority Body: A Theory of Disability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), ix–xii, 1–8, and 9–53.