

Topics in the Metaphysics of Time and Modality

Tel Aviv University, Semester B – Spring 2017

Course Meetings: Thursdays 12:00-14:00, Gilman 304

Instructor: Olla Solomyak
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Polonsky Academy, Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, room 228.

Office Hours: By appointment

Course Description:

This course will be an exploration of the metaphysics of time and modality from a contemporary analytic perspective. Our primary focus will be on questions surrounding the metaphysical status of the past, the future, and the merely possible; as well as on what it takes for a state of affairs to be genuinely contingent and temporary. We'll start by gaining familiarity with the contemporary debates surrounding these issues: We'll examine A-theories and B-theories, presentism and eternalism, and varieties of modal realism and actualism. We'll then move to consider some meta-metaphysical questions surrounding these debates: What's at stake in the ontological disputes in these areas? What does it take to be a *realist* about temporal passage and metaphysical contingency? And finally, what should we make of the deep structural parallels between the temporal and modal domains?

Readings will be drawn primarily from contemporary work in analytic philosophy. Students registered for the course will be required to submit a final paper. The course will be taught in English.

Course Requirements:

Attendance, presentation, and participation: 25%

Students registered for the course will be expected to prepare a short (~10-minute) presentation on the weekly reading for one session of the semester. Each session will begin with a student presentation and will be centered on in-depth class discussion. All students are expected to read the material assigned ahead of time, and come prepared for discussion and analysis of the readings.

Final paper: 75%

A final paper (of roughly 3000 words) will be due on **August 20, 2017**. Students will be required to submit a plan or brief outline of the paper by July 20. The paper is to be written in English.

Reading Schedule: (*details subject to change; readings will be made available through the course website and/or by email*)

March 16: Introduction

March 23: McTaggart on the reality of time

- J. Ellis McTaggart, 'The Unreality of Time.' (*)
- Heather Dyke, 'McTaggart and the Truth about Time.'

March 30: Eternalism

- Ted Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism*, Sections 2.1 – 2.3. ('Against Presentism').

Passover Break

April 20: Special relativity and the present

- Simon Saunders, 'How Relativity Contradicts Presentism.'

April 27: Persistence

- Katherine Hawley, *How Things Persist*, Chapter 1 ('Sameness and Difference').

May 4: Contemporary A-theories

- Dean Zimmerman, 'The Privileged Present: Defending an 'A-Theory' of Time.'

May 11: Contemporary A-theories continued

- Meghan Sullivan, 'The Minimal A-theory.'

May 18: Modality: Lewisian modal realism

- David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Sections 1.1-1.2, 1.6-1.9.

May 25: *Students' day, no class*

June 1: Counterpart theory

- David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Sections 4.1-4.3.

June 8: Actuality

- David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Section 2.1.
- Robert Adams, 'Theories of Actuality.'

June 15: *no class, make-up session TBD*

June 22: Modal actualism

- Alvin Plantinga, 'Actualism and Possible Worlds.'
- David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Section 3.1.

June 29: Meta-metaphysics and deflationist views

- Ted Sider, 'Reductive Theories of Modality.'
- Ted Sider, *Writing the Book of the World*, Sections 12.0-12.2. (*)

Extra Session - time TBD: Wrap-up; time and modality parallels

- Olla Solomyak, 'Actuality and the Amodal Perspective.'