

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT  
SPRING 2016  
PHILOSOPHY 254 SPECIAL TOPICS IN METAPHYSICS: SUBSTANCES, POWERS, MINDS  
Wed. 2 – 4:30 BLISS HALL 206

Instructor: Dr. Chris Johns E-Mail: cj08@aub.edu.lb Phone: Ext. 4259	Office: 147 Fisk Hall Office Hours: T & Th 2:00 – 3:00 PM, Wed., 4:30 – 5, and by appointment.
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**Course Description:**

This course will consist of a focused study of John Heil’s, “The Universe as We Find it,” in which he offers—inspired by Descartes, Locke, and Spinoza—a contemporary, naturalist ontology of substances and properties, including his accounts of qualities as powers (dispositions), truthmaking, consciousness, and his critique of the “linguistified” turn in contemporary metaphysics. The general aim of the book is provide an “ontologically serious,” non-dualist theory of physical and mental nature. Along the way, we will examine Heil’s critique of contemporary metaphysical notions of *substance, essence, mode, property, cause, relation, truth, emergence, and reductionism*. The central feature of the work is a two-category ontology of substances and “powerful qualities” (or dispositions), constituting a world of “mutual disposition partners.” In addition to Heil, readings from several contemporary and historical authors will be included. Required assignments are weekly “question papers,” two short papers, one final paper, attendance and active participation.

\*\*\*By strictly contrived coincidence, the Philosophy Department at AUB is holding an international conference on the central themes of this course, featuring our author, John Heil, as keynote speaker. *Powers, Dispositions, and the New Essentialism*, will be held April 29, 30, and May 1, in OSB. Students are of course invited and encouraged, if not forced, to attend. In fact, during finals week the class will have its own mini-conference, during which each student will make a 20 minute presentation of their final paper.\*\*\*

My main goal is to help you become a more effective thinker and writer. Toward that end, each week we will have a set of readings to discuss in class. You are expected to have read them ahead of time, so that we can discuss them fruitfully. Most of the readings are difficult and you will have trouble understanding them. You will need to keep track of complicated arguments and unfamiliar terms. You will likely need to do some outside reading to fill in any gaps. I’m here to help.

In general, this course mainly emphasizes philosophical thinking, which I take to be the slow, careful, reflective reading and analysis of texts and concepts. Classes will be discussion-driven and centered on the assigned readings. My goal is not only to introduce the student to various issues and problems in metaphysics, but also to develop the habit of reading and thinking philosophically.

This course fulfills a GE Humanities II requirement. *Prerequisite: Two previous courses in philosophy or consent of instructor.*

**Course Outcomes**

- The ability to precisely identify the conclusion for which a writer is arguing.
- The ability to accurately represent the argument(s) which someone is using to support his or her conclusion.
- The ability to identify and assess objections to arguments in our readings.
- The ability to develop, explain, and defend your own views.
- To explain and critically evaluate the various theories of language.

**Essential:** By taking this class, you agree to understand and to comply with this syllabus. By ‘syllabus’ I mean all of the documents found in the **Syllabus Section** on Moodle. Read all syllabus documents carefully. If I make any changes, I will inform you. If you have a question about any policy, I am happy to talk about it. But if it is in the syllabus, you can never say that you did not know it.

**Required Texts:** See course schedule below for assigned readings.

- Heil, John. *The Universe As We Find It*.
- Occasional readings and handouts available on Moodle

### **Graded Requirements:**

- Short Question papers (approx. eight, dispersed throughout the semester): 25% of course grade
- Short paper 1 (15%)
- Short paper 2 (25%)
- Final paper: 25%
- Mini-conference presentation: (10%)

### **Weekly “question papers”**

The questions papers (300 - 500 words max each) are designed to generate class discussion, to practice writing and thinking, to practice formulating meaningful questions, and to let me know what you need to know. For each Q paper, formulate at least three questions based on the readings assigned for that day. For each question, provide a brief explanation for why it is a question for you. Choose one question to attempt to answer yourself. We will discuss that question in class. Papers will be graded around 92, 85, 75, 65, points, according to the following criteria: your questions should reflect thoughtful engagement with the text. Your writing must be clear, organized, and grammatical. The questions must be uploaded onto Moodle before class time. I will return your paper to you with comments via email. Be sure to bring a copy of your paper to class, so that you can ask your question. If you do not upload your question paper by class time and do not bring a copy to class, you will not receive points for it. Your lowest grade will be dropped from your total score. However, if you do not submit the last two question papers, the lowest grade will not be dropped. Keep these papers as a running log of ideas for your longer papers.

**Short papers and Final paper:** Short papers run between 800 – 1000 words and will be based on the assigned readings. You will not use any external sources for these papers, beyond background help from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. The word limits must be strictly adhered to. The Final paper will run between 1,500 – 2000 words, based on the course readings. You will engage two external sources for your final paper, beyond the SEP. All papers are of the “critical” type, meaning that you will take a position (a thesis) and defend it. This includes whether you are providing a critic of another author’s position, or elucidating a concept or idea, through comparison and analysis.

The grading criteria for these papers could be as follows: You must be able to clearly state your thesis and its supporting reasons. You must support your thesis with reasons and evidence. You must be able to critically evaluate the readings that you engage in your paper. You must be able to write in clear, grammatically correct, English. Your main ideas must be logically organized, and your thoughts clear and concise. Essays that fulfill all of the above in an excellent manner will receive at least 90 points. Essays that do so in a “good” manner, or fulfill the criteria partially, will receive at least 80 points. Essays that need work in at least two of the above criteria will receive at least 70 points. Essays that do not fulfill several of the criteria, or do so in a weak manner, will receive at least 60 points. Essays that fail to display much knowledge of the readings, *or* are incomprehensible or thoughtless in expression, will receive a 59 or less. The best way to prepare for these essays is to read the assigned readings *carefully* and pay attention to how we discuss them in class. Also, for most of the readings, I will provide reading questions and/or lecture notes on Moodle that will help you focus on what is important. More information on how to write philosophy papers can be found on Moodle. Plagiarism is severely punished. See below.

**Presentation of Final paper at mini-conference:** As mentioned, during finals week the class will conduct a mini-conference, in which each student will present a 20-minute version of their paper and conduct a 10-minute question/answer period. Details will be forthcoming.

**Attendance:** Your performance on the papers and exams will depend heavily on your ability to understand the assigned readings and to think critically about these issues. Also, quizzes cannot be made up. So, it is in your best interest to attend every class, be attentive, and participate. It is also important to practice forming your thoughts verbally. I will take attendance, but I do not accept

excuses for absences. However, if you miss **four** classes for whatever reason, you will either be dropped from the course and receive a “W”, or you will receive a failing grade of 50. Three absences yields a 10-point reduction. Two late attendances will count as one absence.

**Participation and class conduct:** Participation is strongly encouraged. To participate well, you must do the readings *before* class so we can go over them in class. Ask questions, make comments, and respond (respectfully) to other students. No question or comment is too silly or off base. Everyone has questions, and surely others have the same questions as you. However, please do not monopolize the discussion. Give others a chance to speak. *Be respectful of me and others by listening to what is going on, rather than talking among yourselves.*

**NOTE:** Repeat offenders of the following behaviors will be ejected from class and will have **points removed from their final grade.** (1) Talking while someone else is talking. (2) Using cell phones or other electronic devices (computers) in class. (3) Leaving the room to make or answer phone calls; playing games or reading non-class material during class. (4) Repeated lateness and early leaving. All devices must be turned off and put away completely out of sight. If you *must* take notes with a computer, your internet connection must be turned off. Also, as a courtesy to me, *please do not make preparations to leave class until I say class is over.* If I seem unaware that class time has expired, kindly alert me, thank you.

**Grade Calculation:** I want you to understand how your grades are assigned and calculated, so that you can know better what I expect and so that you can exercise more control over your own progress. See “Calculating and Estimating Your Grades” on Moodle.” This will show you completely explicitly how all calculations are made, so that you can do them yourself. Here is a brief explanation: All grades are recorded on Moodle’s “Grades” (as well as on the assignments themselves), so you can view them as soon as I have put them up (Moodle→Administration→Grades).

To estimate your grade at any point in the semester, simply figure your average and multiply it by the “weighted” amount; then sum the weighted amounts (see “Calculating and Estimating . . .”).

**NOTE:** Never tell me that you “need” a certain course or paper grade, nor ask me to “go easy” on grades or anything else. The request is completely inappropriate and unethical. If made, I will *reduce* your course grade by at least 2 points. I am always happy to talk about the work you need to do to get good grades. I am a hard grader but I try to be fair. But there are no guarantees that you will get the grade you need. Keep in mind I am interested in working with you, not against you. So, feel free to come to office hours or make an appointment.

**Plagiarism:** is the intentional or careless use of someone else’s writing or ideas as if they were your own. It includes, for example, paraphrasing without attribution, replacing a few words here and there using a thesaurus, copying the words from a spoken video, downloading papers from the net, using encyclopedia passages without attribution, copy/pasting from various blogs and anonymous sites, purchasing papers online, getting papers from past students and friends, and having someone write your paper for you. I consider plagiarism equivalent to stealing, lying, and cheating, and no amount of it will be tolerated in my class. Plagiarism is wrong for other reasons: The general objective of college is to become a better writer, thinker, learner, and person. Plagiarizing severely undermines that objective and harms, not only you, but all students, professors, the university, and society in general. If you plagiarize, you fail to learn how to write and think. You represent yourself as having skills and knowledge that you in fact do not have. Also, I take your work and my work seriously. If you plagiarize, then my work becomes a pointless waste of time. I hate wasting time, because I wish to fill my life with meaning and accomplishments. I also hate false relationships. When I read and respond to your work, I consider myself engaged in a mutual relationship of trust, respect, truth, care, and progress. If I am reading your plagiarized work, then I am having a false relationship with you. I despise false relationships because they destroy the substance of life. **If you plagiarize anything in this class, you will receive a grade of zero for the assignment and be reported to the Dean. It will go on your record and you could be dismissed from the university. No exceptions. If I so much as suspect that your work has been plagiarized, I will give it a zero and submit it to the**

**Academic Affairs Committee for judgment.** This applies to any submitted work whatsoever (including essay drafts, single sentences and ideas, dictionary definitions, encyclopedia entries, or any part thereof, paraphrasing, whether from books, internet, magazines, friends, wherever). You must also discourage plagiarism by not giving your paper to someone else to copy. Unfortunately, I catch plagiarizers *every semester*. I am an experienced reader and can usually tell, simply by reading, when a student has plagiarized. (This also applies to papers written by ghostwriters.) I can tell because the writing does not match the assignment, because the text has an “internet feel,” or because it uses awkward wording in an attempt to disguise the source. I also use Google, Turnitin, and other resources. You can, of course, easily avoid plagiarism simply by *citing your sources properly*. If you are unsure of how to cite sources properly, see “**Documenting Sources: Rules & Mechanics**” posted on Moodle. But *you are responsible for any plagiarism*. If you are struggling with an assignment, or with your English, please come and talk to me. I am here to help.

**Turnitin.** Students must submit all assignments to Turnitin.com. Failure to do so results in an automatic 0 for the assignment. Here is how it works: As their website says, “Every paper submitted is returned in the form of a Originality Report. Results are based on searches of billions of pages from current and archived instances of the Internet, millions of student papers submitted to Turnitin, and commercial databases of journal articles and periodicals” ([http://www.plagiarism.org/plag\\_solutions.html](http://www.plagiarism.org/plag_solutions.html)). NOTE that Turnitin only submits a “similarity” report, not a plagiarism report. The similarity report shows the percentage of your text that is similar or identical to another text, and therefore helps me determine whether you have plagiarized. Some similarity is fine and to be expected. But identical similarity or paraphrased similarity is plagiarism. NOTE: Writing a paper does *not* consist in using a source and changing a few words here and there. Nor does paraphrasing a source consist of changing a few words here and there. It means making a compact summary of the main point of a paragraph, for purposes of clarification for the reader, in your own words as much as possible. Yet all paraphrasing must be documented. To submit your paper to Turnitin, go to Moodle and click on “Turnitin submission” for the current assignment. **More information on Plagiarism is posted on Moodle.**

**The Writing Center:** If you have writing issues that need extra attention, please take advantage of the Writing Center. Their instructors help all students, from first-year to doctoral. Keep in mind that they will *not* proofread or copy-edit your work. Walk in or make an appointment: 9 am - 5 pm, Monday – Friday. West Hall 336; Ext. 3157; E-mail: [writing@aub.edu.lb](mailto:writing@aub.edu.lb)

**Moodle:** Here you will find course material such as the syllabus, some course readings, citation mechanics, tips on writing papers, and such. Class notices and announcements will be sent to you by e-mail (via the “News Forum”) so, **check your AUB e-mail** regularly. You may also post your own thoughts on the News Forum for everyone to see.

**E-mail:** **So that we may better communicate, you must use your AUB e-mail and “authenticate” it so that I can see your name and know who you are.**

See Course Schedule, next page--

**Course Schedule:** This schedule is subject to change, although any changes will be announced well in advance. To be prepared for class discussions, read the assigned material *prior* to class time. *Always* bring the assigned material to class. Bring whatever is assigned for Tuesday to Thursday's class as well. *If you do not bring the readings to class, I may ask you to leave until you return with them!* The readings refer to chapters in Heil's book, unless otherwise noted.

<b>Week</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>
<b>1</b> Jan 27	Syllabus What is 'metaphysics' (fundamental ontology) and why should we care?
<b>2</b> Feb 3	I Introduction Q1 paper
<b>3</b> 10	2 Substance Aristotle & Locke (Moodle) Q2 paper
<b>4</b> 17	3 Substance Stressed (Simple substances, or atomless gunk?) Q3 paper
<b>5</b> 24	4 Properties (properties as powerful qualities) Locke on primary and secondary qualities (Moodle) <b>1<sup>st</sup> short paper due Saturday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, Noon</b>
<b>6</b> Mar 2	5 Universals Loux, The Problem of Universals (Moodle) Q4 paper
<b>7</b> 9	6 Causing Q5 paper
<b>8</b> 16	<b>No class; attending conference.</b> 7 Relations; Russell on relations (optional, Moodle) Q6 paper: on Relations
<b>9</b> 23	8 Truthmaking Q7 paper
<b>10</b> 30	9 Reduction, Kinds, and Essences Q8 paper
<b>11</b> Apr 6	10 Mind and Mentality <b>2<sup>nd</sup> short paper (due Saturday Noon), April 9<sup>th</sup></b>
<b>12</b> 13	11 Consciousness Q9 paper
<b>13</b> 20	12 Conscious thought Q10 paper
<b>14</b> 27 29-1	13 The Ontological Turn Jaworski, "Powers, Structures, Minds," (hylomorphism) (Moodle) <b>Last class</b> Q11 paper <i>Conference on Powers, Dispositions and the New Essentialism, at the American University of Beirut, April 29, 30 May 1.</i>
<b>15</b> May 4	<b>No classes: Reading Period</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>Mini-conference: May 11. Final Paper due: May 12</b>
<b>17</b>	End of Semester, Sat. May 14