

# Course Summary for Philosophy 3601G: Metaphysics

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## 1 Course Description

So what is this thing called ‘causality’? What are counterfactuals? And what, by gum, do they have to do with each other?

Causal reasoning and causal judgment play a ubiquitous role in most areas of life. “Striking the match caused it to light.” “The sun’s gravity causes the Earth to orbit it.” “We cannot say which of the firing squad’s bullets caused her death.” “Drinking all that tequila will cause you to do something spectacularly stupid and almost certainly entertaining to the rest of us. I say, do it.” What do such statements mean? Do they get at something deep and real in the fabric of the physical world, do they merely reflect certain facts about our modes of reasoning and use of language, or are they just the factitious excreta of brute facts about our psychology? Or what?

Counterfactuals, roughly speaking, are conditional statements (“If  $p$ , then  $q$ .”) where the antecedent ( $p$ ) is false. “If wishes were horses, beggars would ride.” “If you hadn’t struck that match, it wouldn’t have lit.” “If you hadn’t struck that match, you would have a rutabaga for a nose.” “If you hadn’t drunk that tequila, the dancing horses would still have their virtue intact.” What meaning, if any, can we attribute to them? How are we to judge their truth, if we can ascribe truth to them at all?

We will examine several different accounts and analyses of both ideas, from the pragmatic to the scientific to the deeply metaphysical. And as for how the two may or may not bear on each other, we shall see that the question is unavoidable—it forces itself upon us no matter how we turn in trying to understand each.

## 2 Evaluation

1. Two short essays (20%, 10% each). Twice during the term, each student will write an essay of two pages (double-spaced, one inch margins in a reasonable font such as 12 pt. Times New

Roman) on the reading assignments of the week. The two pages should take one of the main questions raised during the week in lecture and present a summary of the answer proposed to it by one of the readings, along with questions of the student's own about the proposed answer. One of the essays must treat an issue of causality, the other of counterfactuals. The essay on causality is due by Tuesday, Mar 15 in lecture. The essay on counterfactuals will be due on the Monday following the week whose readings it treats, either given to me during my office hours that Monday or put in the Philosophy Department drop-box (1st floor Stevenson Hall, next to elevator) by 17:00.

2. First paper (40%), 8–10 pages, double-spaced, one inch margins in a reasonable font such as 12 pt. Times New Roman. Topics and additional guidelines will be distributed well in advance of the due date. The paper should clearly state and argue for a thesis; a mere summary of existing literature or lecture notes will not be rewarded. Students are encouraged to consult with me while preparing the paper.
3. Second paper (40%), 8–10 pages, double-spaced, one inch margins in a reasonable font such as 12 pt. Times New Roman. Topics and additional guidelines will be distributed well in advance of the due date. The paper should clearly state and argue for a thesis; a mere summary of existing literature or lecture notes will not be rewarded. Students are encouraged to consult with me while preparing the paper.

**Audit** Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

**Incompletes** Incompletes are granted at the exclusive discretion of the Undergraduate Program Chair, and only on the basis of documented medical or compassionate grounds. If, during the course, you envisage any difficulty completing all the required work by the completion deadline, consult immediately with the instructor and the Undergraduate Program Chair.

### 3 Tentative Schedule

For the full schedule with required and suggested readings, see the document “Lectures for Philosophy 3601G: Metaphysics”, available here:

<http://strangebeautiful.com/uwo/lectures-ph3601-metaphys.pdf>

#### CAUSALITY

**Week 1** Introduction and *Précis*; Hume's Analysis of Causality

**Week 2** Meta-Linguistic Accounts of Causation (Mackie, Lewis)

**Week 3** Physicalist Accounts of Causation—Manipulability (Woodward)

**Week 4** Causation According to Science—Positive Accounts (Peirce, Salmon)

**Week 5** Causation According to Science—Skepticism (Russell, Earman, Norton)

**Week 6** Causation, Determinism and Necessity (Peirce, Anscombe)

## **COUNTERFACTUALS**

**Week 7** Counterfactuals, the Support Account I (Goodman)

**Week 8** Counterfactuals, the Support Account II (Goodman, Parry, Bennett); **FIRST PAPER DUE (in Tuesday's lecture)**

**Week 9** Counterfactuals, the Possible-Worlds Account (Stalnaker)

**Week 10** Counterfactuals, the Possible-Worlds Account (Lewis I)

**Week 11** Counterfactuals, the Possible-Worlds Account (Lewis II)

**Week 12** Counterfactuals, the Possible-Worlds Account—Problems (Stalnaker, Lewis, *et al.*)

## **Week 13 VALEDICTION**

**Exam Week SECOND PAPER DUE (Monday, 17:00, Philosophy Department drop-box, Stevenson Hall, first floor)**

## **4 Disclaimer**

The Department of Philosophy Policies which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus cannot be used as grounds of appeal.