COURSE TOPICS LIST

1. The difference between traditional “speculative” metaphysics and “naturalistic” metaphysics.
2. Rejections of metaphysics: weak (epistemologically based, e.g., Hume’s position) vs. strong (semantically based, e.g., logical empiricist position).
3. Ontology—terrain of types/categories of entities
4. Three basic methodological principles of ontological inquiry (each mentioned by Quine).
5. Ontological commitment.
6. The problem of non-being and “Plato’s beard”.
7. McX and Wyman responses to the problem of non-being.
8. Using Russell’s analysis of definite descriptions—eliminating nominal expressions (including names and noun phrases generally) in terms of just predicates, variables, and quantifiers—to deal with the problem of non-being.
9. Quine’s criterion of ontological commitment—where it “sits” primarily and what generates it there, plus how one “takes on” ontological commitment.
10. Quinean naturalism—the place of ontological inquiry within inquiry in general.
11. Carnap’s internal/external distinction with respect to existence questions, including agreement with Quine’s take on how to determine what a theory or statement says exists—when it’s applied internally.
12. Carnap’s appeal to a theoretical/practical distinction in assessing the illegitimacy/legitimacy of would-be ontological questions.
13. Quine’s rejection of Carnap’s internal/external distinction by linking it to the analytic/synthetic distinction, which he rejects. (Plus, Quine’s rejection of the theoretical/practical distinction on the basis of his pragmatism.)
14. Quine’s rejection of “attributes” (i.e., universals) but acceptance of sets and (thus a set-theoretic understanding of) numbers.
15. Alston’s critique of Quine’s use of “paraphrase” or “translation” with his criterion of ontological commitment to avoid ontological commitment to attributes (possibilities, meanings).
16. Universals vs. particulars.
17. Universals as an explanation of recurrence of qualities.
18. Universalia ante rem vs. universalia in rebus.
19. Russell’s argument for ante rem universals.
20. Instantiation: what it is supposed to do and why it has to be a “cross-realm” relation for an ante rem view. Worries about that factor.
22. In rebus universals as solving the “cross-realm” worry but not the regress worry.
23. Inexact resemblance (i.e., degrees of resemblance) worry for in rebus universals.
24. Determinate/determinable distinction as solution to inexact resemblance worry.
25. Resemblance Nominalism (aka The Philosophy of Resemblances): ontology, no need for instantiation, status/nature of resemblance, structuring of resemblance classes around exemplars, derivative nature of qualities/characteristics with respect to resemblance classes.
26. Infinite hierarchy worry about resemblance.
27. Internal relations vs. external relations as an explanation of why the resemblance regress is harmless, in contrast with instantiation regress being vicious.
29. Tropes giving concrete particulars their particularity without appeal to “bare particulars” or “haecceities” or a “primitive this”.
30. Resemblance classes of tropes as the basis of recurrence of qualities.
31. Primitive resemblance between tropes more plausible/understandable than between whole concrete particulars.
32. Resemblances between tropes as themselves tropes, generating infinite hierarchy of higher and higher orders of resemblance tropes. Harmless or vicious?
33. Worry about how tropes get bundled as parallel to worry about how instantiation works.
34. Armstrong’s notion of states of affairs—their structure and status.
35. Where universals and particular sit in Armstrong’s three-category ontology.
36. Armstrong’s rejection of bare particulars and uninstantiated universals.
37. States of affairs as a solution to the instantiation regress.
38. Modal talk and thought—its importance and unavoidability. Its categories.
39. Varieties of modality (logical, metaphysical, nomological, historical).
40. The “quantifying over possible worlds” analysis of modal talk (and thought) explaining logical relations between different categories of modal claims and (via restriction of the domain of quantification) between the different varieties of modality.
41. Generation of ontological commitment to possible worlds, creating a need for a metaphysics of possible worlds.
42. Lewis’s modal realist understanding of worlds (including everything being “world-bound”).
43. De dicto vs. de re modality.
44. Counterpart theory and restricting the domain of quantification to sets of (non-maximal) possibilia to explain de re modality. Kripke’s “concern” worry about counterpart theory. Lewisian response.
45. Similarities and differences between “ersatz worlds” views and modal realism.
46. Plantinga’s Actualism—basic thesis regarding existence and actuality and distinction between Plantinga’s understanding of ‘actual’ and Lewis’s understanding of ‘actual’.
47. Plantinga’s ontology—what he postulates in place of worlds and counterparts and why.
48. Rosen’s modal fictionalism—how it is supposed to allow talk of (Lewisian) possible worlds without ontological commitment to them. (Deflationism. “Theft over honest toil”?)
49. What Rosen’s appeal to a “story-prefix” makes modal claims end up being about according to his version of modal fictionalism. Worries regarding that, especially “concern”.
51. B-theorist “eternalist” picture of time and the different A-theorist pictures of time (moving spotlight, growing block, shrinking block, rising plane).
52. McTaggart’s argument that B-series relations by themselves cannot constitute time (because they are insufficient for the existence of change).
53. McTaggart’s argument that A-series notions are incoherent (because they involve either contradiction or generate a vicious infinite regress) and thus time is unreal.
54. Russell’s reply (as relayed by McTaggart) to McTaggart’s argument against the adequacy of B-series relations for change.
55. Broad’s reply to McTaggart’s argument against A-series notions.
56. Taylor’s argument for the thesis that A-series notions (“pure becoming”) cannot be eliminated in favor of “tenseless” language and thus we must either accept tense as real or flatly deny “the datum” (involving our impressions of and attitudes towards time).
57. Prior’s argument for the reality of tense and thesis that only the present is real (Presentism)—so reality must contain tensed facts (in the present) to make any tensed claims or thoughts true.
58. Worry about Prior’s view conflicting with our best physics (Special Theory of Relativity).
59. Smart’s view of time and the “token-reflexive” analysis of tensed talk and thought.
60. Worries about the token-reflexive analysis claiming to give tenseless translations of tensed claims.
61. Mellor’s move from the view that tensed claims have token-reflexive tenseless translations to the view that tensed claims have token-reflexive (tenseless) truth-conditions, in support of his view that reality does not contain tense.
62. Persistence through time: endurantism vs. perdurantism.
63. Lewis on the coherence of time travel: personal time vs. external time.
64. Lewis’s resolution of the “Grandfather Paradox” in terms of two sense of ‘can’ (as used in, e.g., ‘Tim can kill his grandfather’).