Recent years have seen a rapid reawakening of interest in a distinctively metaphysical kind of explanation called “ground”. Interest in ground stems from its dual role as the common factor in diverse in virtue of questions and as the structuring relation in the building project of explaining how some phenomena are “built” from more fundamental phenomena. This seminar engages with current research on ground, in the hopes of making progress on some outstanding questions about it.

**PREREQUISITES**  
3.0 units in ≥300-level philosophy courses, or by permission.

**PLACE/TIME**  
CLE B315, Mondays & Thursdays 1:00pm-2:20pm (Fall 2014)

**INSTRUCTOR**  
Dr Mike Raven (mike@mikeraven.net | http://mikeraven.net/)

**OFFICE HOURS**  
CLE B323 Monday/Thursday 2:30-3:30, or by appointment

**WEBSITE**  
CourseSpaces.

**TEXTS**  
No texts. Readings available online (see CourseSpaces).

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**APPROACH**

“Philosophy is the strangest of subjects: it aims at rigour and yet is unable to establish any results; it attempts to deal with the most profound questions and yet constantly finds itself preoccupied with the trivialities of language; and it claims to be of great relevance to rational enquiry and the conduct of our life and yet is almost completely ignored. But perhaps what is strangest of all is the passion and intensity with which it is pursued by those who have fallen in its grip.” (Kit Fine)

Philosophy is a skilled activity which strives for clarity, precision, and rigor in our understanding of the world.

This philosophical skill is best learned by practice. One can no more learn philosophy without practice than one can learn to play a musical instrument without practice. And one can no more learn philosophy merely by reading it than one can learn to dance merely by reading about dancing. Thus, while the course focuses on some central philosophical questions, the main emphasis is on how to do philosophy: to think with clarity, precision, and rigor.

But clear, precise, and rigorous thought is inseparable from the clear, precise, and rigorous communication of thought. Your practice in philosophy will consist in reading the material, discussing the material in class, and communicating it in your written work. Writing assignments tend to be short, the standards are high.

Philosophers might initially seem to use obscure technical terms disconnected from ordinary language, to fuss pedantically over insignificant details, and to get caught up in abstract disputes disconnected from everyday life. As a result, some students might initially find philosophy to be unfamiliar, difficult, and irrelevant. But this first impression is misleading. Technical terms are used to avoid unclarity and imprecision, details are fussed over to achieve the strictest rigor, and the abstract is focused on to guard against everyday biases.

Philosophy requires patience and discipline. But it can be rewarding, especially as one hones the skill of sharpening one's ideas and isolating the justifications for them—a skill which can be used in any academic discipline, and in ordinary life.
EVALUATION

The grade you earn depends solely on your performance in this class. Submitting all the work is required to pass. There is no extra credit. Grades are calculated on the University’s standard scale: A+ >90  A 89-88  A- 87-86  B+ 85-84  B 83-80  B- 79-77  C+ 76-75  C 74-70  C- 69-65  D 64-60  F <50

ASSIGNMENTS  Paper (80%)
  • Tentative Due Dates: NOV 19 (draft); DEC 3 (revised)

PARTICIPATION  Participation in and out of class; presentations (20%)
  This includes (but is not limited to) discussion in class and with the instructor during office hours or over email.

LATENESS  If you do not expect to complete an assignment on time, submit what you have done on time. Except in extreme circumstances (instructor’s discretion), extensions require documentation of a legitimate reason before the due date and will not extend past when timely assignments are returned. Late work is penalized one letter grade per day late and does not receive comments.

CONDUCT

You agree to a social contract of conduct by enrolling in this course:

CLASS  Attending and contributing to class helps train your philosophical skills. But it is not just for your benefit, but also for your classmates. Please be respectful: be prepared to contribute, but do not interrupt, bully, ramble, distract, or insult your classmates.

CONTACT  You are welcome to seek guidance in office hours or by email. Please be respectful: communicate professionally, avoid wasting time by asking questions already answered by official sources (e.g. syllabus, course site, class), and allow ample time for replies.

INTEGRITY  Plagiarism is not tolerated. Ignorance is no excuse. It is your responsibility to learn the university’s policies on academic integrity (http://web.uvic.ca/calendar2014/FACS/UnIn/UARes/PoAcI.html).

RESOURCES

ADVICE  The material is best learned by reflecting on the readings and class discussions, participating, and preparing for assignments in advance of the deadlines. Consult the instructor and these resources:

  VOCAB  http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/
  READING  http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html
            http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html
            http://publish.uwo.ca/~amendel5/slides-sample-paper.html

DISABILITIES  Consult with the Resource Center and instructor at the beginning of the term to ensure reasonable accommodations.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Readings for the course will be drawn from the bibliography below: precise reading assignments will be made in class and on CourseSpaces.

• AUDI, “Grounding: Toward a Theory of the In virtue of Relation”
  • BENNETT, “By Our Bootstraps”
  • BENNETT, “Construction Area (No Hard Hat Required)”
  • DASGUPTA, “On the Plurality of Grounds”
  • DASGUPTA, “The Possibility of Physicalism”
  • DEROSSET, “Getting Priority Straight”
  • DEROSSET, “Grounding Explanations”
  • KOSLICKI, “The Coarse-Grainedness of Grounding”
  • JENKINS, “Explanation and Fundamentality”
  • JENKINS, “Is Metaphysical Grounding Irreflexive?”
  • LITLAND, “Grounding Grounding”
  • FINE, “Essence and Modality”
  • FINE, “Guide to Ground”
  • FINE, “The Logic of Essence”
  • FINE, “Necessity and Non-existence”
  • FINE, “The Question of Realism”
  • FINE, “Senses of Essence”
  • RAVEN, “Fundamentality without Foundations”
  • RAVEN, “Ground”
  • RAVEN, “In Defence of Ground”
  • RAVEN, “Is Ground a Strict Partial Order?”
  • RAVEN, “New Work for a Theory of Ground”
  • ROSEN, “Metaphysical Dependence”
  • SCHAFER, “Grounding in the Image of Causation”
  • SCHAFER, “Grounding, Transitivity, and Contrastivity”
  • SCHAFER, “On What Grounds What”
  • SIDER, Writing the Book of the World
  • WILLIAMS, “Requirements on Reality”
  • WILSON, “No Work for a Theory of Grounding”