GHENT UNIVERSITY

Course Specifications

Valid as from the academic year 2026-2027

Metaphysics (A001227)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0 **Study time 150 h**

Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2026-2027

A (semester 2)	Dutch, English	Gent	lecture
			seminar

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

Weber, Erik	LW01	lecturer-in-charge
Gonzalez Barman, Kristian	LW01	co-lecturer
Riesmeier, Marabel	LW01	co-lecturer

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027	**crdts**	**offering**
Master of Science in Teaching in Arts and Humanities (main subject Philosophy)	5	A
Master of Arts in Philosophy	5	A
Research Master of Arts in Philosophy	5	A

Teaching languages

English, Dutch

Keywords

metaphysics of causation, negative causation, mechanisms, natural kinds, essentialism, realism, eliminativism.

Position of the course

In this specialised course students gain insight into central debates and methods in contemporary metaphysics of science, with particular attention to two interrelated clusters of problems: (i) the metaphysics of causation (including puzzles about negative causation, absences, and mechanisms) and (ii) natural kinds (including realism, essentialism, eliminativism) and the role kinds play across the special sciences.

Contents

(1) Metaphysics of causation and mechanisms. Study of causation by absence and disconnection, voids, and holes as case studies for whether negative entities and negative causation can be accommodated within a coherent ontology, together with the role of mechanisms in scientific explanation and the problem of fictional or idealised mechanism components.
(2) Natural kinds: realism, essentialism, eliminativism, and other influential accounts. Study of foundational positions on whether natural kinds exist and what, if anything, grounds them, alongside close examination of several prominent frameworks, in particular Boyd's homeostatic property cluster view and Chang's epistemic iteration account.
(3) Criteria for natural kindhood and natural kinds in the special sciences. What makes a category a natural kind? Examination of different criteria, and application of the above frameworks to classificatory practice in chemistry and psychology.

Initial competences

Basic knowledge of philosophy of science.

Final competences

1 Understanding complex debates in the metaphysics of science (their aims and methods, the positions taken).

2 Defending your own position regarding the philosophical debates discussed during this course.

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is unrestricted: the student takes into consideration the conditions mentioned in 'Starting Competences'

Conditions for exam contract

Access to this course unit via an exam contract is unrestricted

Teaching methods

Seminar, Lecture

Extra information on the teaching methods

Classes are not recorded.

Study material

Type: Reader

Name: Metaphysics of Causation
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Available on Ufora : Yes
Online Available : No
Available in the Library : No
Available through Student Association : No

Type: Reader

Name: Natural Kinds
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Available on Ufora : Yes
Online Available : No
Available in the Library : No
Available through Student Association : No

References

Barman, K. G. (2022). Fictional mechanism explanations: clarifying explanatory holes in engineering science. *European Journal for Philosophy of Science*, 12(2), 38.
Lewis, D., & Lewis, S. (1970). Holes. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 48(2), 206–212.
Lewis, D. (2004). Void and object. In J. Collins, N. Hall, & L. A. Paul (Eds.), *Causation and Counterfactuals*. MIT Press.
Schaffer, J. (2000). Causation by disconnection. *Philosophy of Science*, 67(2), 285–300.
Chang, Hasok. 2015. 'The Rising of Chemical Natural Kinds through Epistemic Iteration'. In *Natural Kinds and Classification in Scientific Practice*, 1st edn, edited by Catherine Kendig. Routledge.
Ellis, Brian. 2001. *Scientific Essentialism*. Cambridge University Press.
Hacking, Ian. 1991. 'A Tradition of Natural Kinds'. *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 61 (1/2): 109–26.

Course content-related study coaching

Individual help is offered by the lecturers.

Assessment moments

end-of-term and continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Oral assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Oral assessment

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Participation

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible in modified form

Extra information on the examination methods

See below.

Calculation of the examination mark

70% periodic evaluation (oral exam).
30% non-periodic evaluation (participation).

Facilities for Working Students

None.