0 The syllabus

1 What is metaphysics?

Metaphysics is concerned with formulating theories about the world that are about the reality behind appearances... though this isn't a necessary or sufficient characterization.

Topics we'll discuss: properties and universals, identity, persistence through time, the mind, causation, free will and determinism, space and time, God

What distinguishes metaphysics from other areas of philosophy? There is overlap in scope, but roughly:
- About how things are rather than what we can know or be justified in believing (epistemology) or how we represent the world and communicate (philosophy of language)
- Not concerned with how we should act (ethics) but maybe a little about how we do act, and believe, and so on (philosophy of mind)
- Concerned with laws to some extent (philosophy of science) but not human laws (social and political philosophy)

What distinguishes metaphysics from the sciences?
- Some of the same subject matter, but different scope
- Sometimes asks questions that we can't answer empirically, even in principle
  - Is this nonsense? See quantum mechanics, God

Some words you'll hear a lot:
- *Ontology* concerns what exists
- *Properties* are (roughly) features that objects have, like redness or positive charge
- *Ockham's Razor* is the methodological principle that all other things equal, between two competing theories the simpler one should be preferred.
- *A priori* knowledge is that known independently of experience. *A posteriori* knowledge is not.

2 Assessing arguments

An argument consist of some *premises* and a *conclusion*, where the premises are intended to provide support for the conclusion.

What makes for a good argument?

A valid argument is one in which the conclusion follows from the premises, without exception. But these aren't the only type of good arguments. We can also give persuasive (even if non-decisive) evidence for a claim.

Some steps involved in assessing an argument:
- Figure out what the argument is
- Decide whether it's valid or not
- Decide whether the reasons given are persuasive

Excerpt from *Nicomachean Ethics*, by Aristotle

Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim.

Excerpt from *Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, by Doyle

The Simpson incident had shown me that a dog was kept in the stables, and yet, though someone had been in and had fetched out a horse, he had not barked enough to arouse the two lads in the loft. Obviously the midnight visitor was someone whom the dog knew well.

Excerpt from *Relativity*, by Einstein

I stand at the window of a railway carriage which is travelling uniformly, and drop a stone on the embankment, without throwing it. Then, disregarding the influence of the air resistance, I see the stone descend in a straight line. A pedestrian who observes the misdeed from the footpath notices that the stone falls to earth in a parabolic curve. I now ask: Do the "positions" traversed by the stone lie "in reality" on a straight line or on a parabola? Moreover, what is meant here by motion "in space"? From the considerations of the previous section the answer is self-evident. In the first place, we entirely shun the vague word "space," of which, we must honestly acknowledge, we cannot form the slightest conception, and we replace it by "motion relative to a practically rigid body of reference." The positions relative to the body of reference (railway carriage or embankment) have already been defined in detail in the preceding section. If instead of "body of reference" we insert "system of co-ordinates," which is a useful idea for mathematical description, we are in a position to say: The stone traverses a straight line relative to a system of co-ordinates rigidly attached to the carriage, but relative to a system of co-ordinates rigidly attached to the ground (embankment) it describes a parabola. With the aid of this example it is clearly seen that there is no such thing as an independently existing trajectory (lit. "path-curve"), but only a trajectory relative to a particular body of reference.