



David Lewis's Letters

Tuesdays 12:30-3:15
Sara Bernstein

The work of David K. Lewis (1941-2001) sets the agenda for many contemporary subfields of philosophy. This seminar will focus on two newly published volumes of David Lewis's letters, and how they shed light on his metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of language. Each class will focus on several of David Lewis's letters, paired together with a topically relevant and more well-known published paper of Lewis's. We will focus on how Lewis's letters can shape our understanding of his published work. There will be several guest speakers who were among Lewis's correspondents, including Jessica Collins, Frank Jackson, Daniel Nolan, Marga Reimer, and Ted Sider.

Required Text: *Philosophical Letters of David K. Lewis, Volume 1: Causation, Modality, Ontology* (a.k.a. "The Red Book")

All other readings, including those from *Philosophical Letters of David K. Lewis, Volume 2: Mind, Language, Epistemology* (a.k.a. "The Green Book") will be posted to Canvas.

Assessment:

- 30% class participation
- 20% in-class presentation on a topic related to the class (sign up for topics and dates by January 18)
- 10% in-class presentation on your final paper
- 20% first draft of final paper, due April 10 at 11:59pm by email
- 20% tightly written *Analysis*-sized final draft of final paper, due May 4 at 11:59pm by email

Schedule:

January 11: First day of class; **Possible Worlds**

Lewis, *Plurality of Worlds* Chapter 1, pp. 1-27

Letters: #159-162, The Red Book, pp. 308-317

January 18: **Modal Recombination** (Guest: Daniel Nolan)

Lewis, *Plurality of Worlds*, Chapter 2, section 2, “All Worlds in One” (pp. 101-104)

Daniel Nolan, “Recombination Unbound”

Letters: *The Red Book*, #161 (pp. 312-315), #212 (pp. 412-415), and #215 (pp. 419-420)

Suggested reading: Forrest and Armstrong, “An Argument Against David Lewis’s Theory of Possible Worlds”

January 25: **Causation** (I)

Lewis, “Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow” + Postscripts

Letters: *The Red Book*, #60 (pp. 111-112) #95-98 (pp. 189-197)

Feb 1: **Causation** (II)

Lewis, “Causation as Influence”

Letters: *The Red Book*, #89-92 (pp. 171-185)

Feb 8: **Omissions**

Lewis, “Void and Object”

Letters: *The Red Book*, #104 (pp. 208-210), #108 (pp. 214-217), #111 (pp. 220-221)

Feb 15: **Naturalness** (Zoom Guest: Ted Sider)

Lewis, “New Work for a Theory of Universals”

Letters: *The Red Book*, #350-353 (pp. 690-695), #403 (pp. 771-772)

Feb 22: **Time Travel**

Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel”

Letters: *The Red Book*, #233 and #234 (pp. 456-461), #240 (pp. 470-472)

Suggested: “Paradoxes of Time Travel to the Future,” Sara Bernstein

March 1: **Context in the Philosophy of Language** (Zoom guest: Marga Reimer)

Lewis, “Scorekeeping in a Language Game”

Letters: *The Green Book*, #624 and #625 (pp. 350-352)

March 15: **Metaphysics of Mind** (Zoom guest: Frank Jackson)

Lewis, "What Experience Teaches"

Frank Jackson, "Epiphenomenal Qualia"

Recommended: Lewis, "Mad Pain and Martian Pain"

Letters: The Green Book, #479 (pp. 125-126), #487 (pp. 136-137, #516 (pp. 183-184)

March 22: **Mereology**

Lewis, *Parts of Classes* (excerpt)

Karen Bennett, "'Perfectly Understood, Unproblematic, and Certain: Lewis on Mereology'"

Letters: The Red Book, #298-306 (pp. 597-609)

March 29: **Laws**

Lewis, "Are We Free to Break the Laws?"

Letters: The Red Book, #50-54 (pp. 94-103)

April 5: **Student Presentations on Paper Topics**; catch-up

April 12: **No class** (Pacific APA week)

April 19: **Probability** (Zoom guest: Jessica Collins)

Lewis, "Humean Supervenience Debugged"

Bigelow, Collins, and Pargetter, "The Big Bad Bug: What are the Humean's Chances?"

Letters: The Red Book, #84 (pp. 165-167), #167 (pp. 167-168) The Green Book #684-685 (pp. 449-453), #694 (pp. 471-472)

April 26: **Methodology**

Lewis, "How to Define Theoretical Terms"

Letters: The Green Book, #447-451 (pp. 55-66)

Final paper due May 4.

A few notes concerning...

COVID Policy

For in-person class sessions, **masks are required to be worn in class, every class, for the entire class** until further notice. Masks must be worn over the nose and mouth.

Please do not come to class if you are sick or unwell, even if it just the sniffles, and please do not come to class if you have had a probable COVID exposure. Err on the side of caution. You will not be penalized for non-attendance due to any sort of illness—just send me an email and let me know you won't be attending.

Zoom Sessions

Some class sessions involving guest speakers will likely be on Zoom. For those sessions, please have your camera on if you are able to.

Class Participation

Philosophical skill is best acquired by *doing philosophy* rather than passively learning about it. Active participation in class, which includes asking questions, coming up with cool examples, asking for clarification on confusing concepts, and presenting an informed opinion about the reading, is central to learning to do philosophy. Talking several times per class will be enough to do well in class participation.

Syllabus Changes

It is possible that topics will be added, removed, or changed on the syllabus. If this happens, it will be announced in class and over email. Please check your email before every class.