PHIL 2480: Laws, Chance and Counterfactuals
Cian Dorr
Syllabus

Schedule of topics and readings

Week 1   **Introduction**

Week 2   **Naïve regularity theories of lawhood**
D.M. Armstrong, *What is a Law of Nature?*, chapters 1,2,4
Roger White, 'Explanation as a Guide to Induction', sections 1-6.
Alan Hajek, ' "*Mises Redux*"—*redux*: fifteen arguments against finite frequentism'

Week 3   **Humean supervenience and the best-system analysis of lawhood**
David Lewis, Introduction to *Philosophical Papers: volume 2*
Carroll, 'The Humean Tradition', sections 1–4
Bas van Fraassen, *Laws and Symmetry*, chapter 3
Helen Beebee, 'The Non-Governing Conception of Laws of Nature'
John Hawthorne, 'Humeans are Out of their Minds'

Week 4   **The Principal Principle and the best-system analysis of chance**
David Lewis, 'A Subjectivist's Guide to Objective Chance'
David Lewis, 'Humean Supervenience Debugged', sections 1–7
Barry Loewer, 'David Lewis's Humean Theory of Objective Chance'
Adam Elga,

Week 5   **Solutions to the undermining problem**
David Lewis, 'Humean Supervenience Debugged', sections 8–10
Ned Hall, 'Two Mistakes about Chance and Credence'
Ned Hall, 'Correcting the Guide to Objective Chance'
Frank Arntzenius and Ned Hall, 'On What We Know About Chance'
Jonathan Schaffer, 'Principled Chances'

Week 6   **Chance in classical statistical mechanics**
Barry Loewer, 'Chance and determinism'
David Albert, *Time and chance* (recommended background reading)
Jonathan Schaffer, 'Deterministic chances?'
Chris Meacham, 'Three Proposals Regarding a Theory of Chance'

Week 7   **Non-reductionist realism**
Armstrong, *What is a Law of Nature?*, chapters 6–10
Bas van Fraassen, *Laws and Symmetry*, chapter 5
Tim Maudlin, 'A Modest Proposal Concerning Laws, Counterfactuals and Explanations'
John Carroll, 'Nailed to Hume's Cross?'

Week 8   **Dispositional Essentialism**
John Hawthorne, 'Causal Structuralism'
Cian Dorr, 'There are No Abstract Objects', sections 4–4(ii)
Chris Swoyer, 'The Nature of Natural Laws'

	Sydney Shoemaker, 'Causality and Properties'
Week 9	**Projectivist theories of laws and chances**
	A.J. Ayer, 'What is a Law of Nature?'
	Brian Skyrms, *Causal Necessity*, chapter 1
	Barry Ward, 'Humeanism Without Humean Supervenience'
	Barry Ward, 'Projecting Chances: A Humean Vindication and Justification of the Principal Principle'
Week 10	**More on projectivism**
Week 11	**Lewis on counterfactuals**
	David Lewis, 'Counterfactual Dependence and Time's Arrow'
	Adam Elga, 'Statistical Mechanics and the Asymmetry of Counterfactual Dependence'
Week 12	**More worries about Lewis's theory**
	John Hawthorne, 'Chance and counterfactuals'
	Boris Kment, 'Counterfactuals and Explanation'

Assessment

Unless you want to make other arrangements, you will be expected (if you want a grade for the course) to write three short (6–8 page) papers. These will be due on weeks 6, 10 and 14 (i.e. one week after the final seminar). I will try to provide some sort of guidance on possible topics as we proceed, but your the default strategy should be to focus in the most laser-like way you can on developing an objection to some particular argument in the readings and considering possible responses. In any case, I strongly encourage you to discuss your choice of topic with me before you start writing. If you do want to make other arrangements—say, to write a single term paper—you **must** request this by week 4 at the latest.