

Course	PHIL60502
Title	Issues in Metaphysics: Grounding
Tutor	Dr David Liggins

Course Content: What do all of these examples have in common?

The proposition that dogs bark or pigs fly is true because dogs bark.

Beautiful sculptures are beautiful in virtue of their non-aesthetic features.

The brittleness of the cup results from the way its constituent atoms are bonded.

Vodka is what makes this drink alcoholic.

The pleasure I am feeling is realized by such-and-such a neural state.

These all seem to be examples of something depending on something else: the truth of the proposition depends on the behaviour of dogs, the beauty of the sculptures depends on their non-aesthetic features, the brittleness of the cup depends on the way its atoms are bonded, and so on. Moreover, these do not seem to be cases of causal dependence. Let's call non-causal dependence *grounding*. That is the topic of this course. Although the term 'grounding' is relatively unfamiliar, the phrase 'in virtue of' and the notion of non-causal dependence are frequently used in philosophy. Causation has been studied in detail by philosophers, whereas grounding has traditionally been neglected. But in the last five years there has been an explosion of work on grounding, which makes it a very exciting time to be studying it.

In this course, we will consider a range of questions about grounding. What general principles can we establish about grounding? What can they teach us about particular cases? How shall we deal with the paradoxes of grounding? And what can studying grounding in general teach us about one particularly interesting example of grounding – namely, the dependence of truth on reality (see the first example in the list above)?

The readings will consist of recently published papers and yet-to-be-published drafts.

Teaching and Learning Methods: 1 x one-hour introductory meeting, 7 x 2-hour seminars
Students will also have the opportunity to discuss their private reading and writing assignments one-to-one with the tutor.

Assessment: Assessed Essay 5000 words 100%

Preliminary reading

Rosen, Gideon 2010. Metaphysical dependence: grounding and reduction. In Bob Hale and Aviv Hoffmann (eds) *Modality: Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology*. New York: Oxford University Press: 109–35. [A contemporary classic. Accessibly written.]

Schaffer, Jonathan 2009. On what grounds what. In David Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman (eds) *Metametaphysics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press: 347–383. [A lively and provocative paper.]

Aims: The course unit aims:

- To introduce students to the philosophical issues regarding grounding and non-causal dependence.

- To introduce students to the literature on this topic.
- To equip students with the advanced research skills needed for dissertation writing and doctoral research.

Intended Learning Outcomes: On completion of this unit successful students will be able:

- To complete a substantial piece of research in an area of analytical philosophy.
- To demonstrate a broad knowledge of the literature on an advanced topic in analytical philosophy.
- To conduct independent research, under supervision by an expert supervisor.
- To understand, critically assess, and respond to advanced philosophical writing.