

Metaphysics

PHIL 43501 01

M/W 3:30–4:45

215 Malloy

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Office: 300 Malloy

Office Hours: T 3:30–4:45 & W 2:00–3:15

Course Description:

Metaphysics is the area of philosophy that explores the underlying reality of the world, which can create the impression that metaphysics is dry, uninteresting, and irrelevant to our lives. This, however, is not the case, and in this course we will explore metaphysical topics that matter. Some questions along these lines are: How do I freely choose my actions, or is the future fixed? What sort of thing are we, and what happens to us when we die? What is the nature of race and gender? Along the way we will learn key metaphysical concepts, including essence, possible world, existence, naturalness, personhood, and causation. The course is primarily discussion-based and will emphasize philosophy as a collaborative activity.

Texts: *Metaphysics: An Introduction* by Alyssa Ney; *Metaphysics (fourth edition)* by Peter van Inwagen; *A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality* by John Perry. More material will be provided on the course website. **NB:** It might not be necessary to purchase physical copies of the texts used in this course.

A Note about the 3-Rs: Each class topic will have three levels of material: Required, Recommended, and Rapturous. I expect everyone to have worked through the Required material enough so as to constructively discuss it in class. The Recommended material is for those would like additional insight into the material or further historical background. I encourage students to work through the Rapturous material when they might write a paper on that topic.

Grade Distribution:

Participation	15%
Podcasts	30%
Critical Paper	20%
Positive Paper	30%
Salon	5%

Letter Grade Distribution: In this course I will use the following scale to convert between numerical and letter grades:

>= 93.00	A	73.00 - 76.99	C
90.00 - 92.99	A-	70.00 - 72.99	C-
87.00 - 89.99	B+	67.00 - 69.99	D+
83.00 - 86.99	B	63.00 - 66.99	D
80.00 - 82.99	B-	60.00 - 62.99	D-
77.00 - 79.99	C+	<= 59.99	F

Honor Code:

Students are responsible for compliance with the University's honor code at all times. Notre Dame has extensive guidelines on the honor code. Additionally, the philosophy department has a document explaining how Notre Dame's honor code applies to writing philosophy papers. Links to both of these can be found on the course website.

I take academic integrity very seriously, especially that of our philosophy majors. Cheating of any kind will be reported, will result in a failing grade on the assignment, and might lead to even stronger penalties. Any particular questions about the honor code should be directed to me.

Accessibility:

Notre Dame and I are committed to making this course accessible to all students. Students who have (or think they may have) a disability, or who have questions about disability, are invited to talk to me or to contact Sara Bea Disability Services for a confidential discussion in the Sara Bea Center for Students with Disabilities (north of the Main Building), or by phone at 574-631-7157. All information given is confidential and is shared only with your consent. I encourage students to contact Sara Bea Disability Services at their earliest opportunity to ensure that there is time to complete the process before any accommodations are actually needed. Additional information about accommodations and the process for requesting accommodations can be found at sarabeadisabilityservices.nd.edu.

Assignments

Participation: Philosophy is an activity that we do, and active participation in philosophy is the best way to learn to do philosophy. Each student is expected to interact with me and with other students inside and outside of class. It's important to note, though, that active participation is more than just being vocal; it requires carefully thinking through issues and engaging with peers, often by listening to, supporting, clarifying, or justifying their comments. Doing philosophy is not just about expressing your own ideas, but is just as much about engaging with the ideas of others. Metaphorically speaking, the ideal philosophical discussion is less like a tennis match and more like a

volleyball game. Each student will be graded on the extent to which they follow this model of active participation.

Podcasts: For each unit, students will collaborate in pairs to produce 5–8 minutes of philosophical conversation that connects the class to a real-world issue. These conversations will be recorded, sent to me, and graded on the extent to which they demonstrate (i) mastery of the material discussed, (ii) ability to prioritize material, and (iii) skill in active participation. Students will be guided through the first of these podcasts.

Papers: Each student will write two papers for this course. These papers may be done in any order and submitted at any time – but both must be submitted by **11:59PM EST the day after the final exam date**. One paper will be a short critical response to a reading. The other paper will be a longer, “positive”, paper that defends a metaphysical claim. Students are free to choose their own topic or have one assigned, but in either case each student must meet with me in advance to discuss their papers.

Salon: In lieu of a final exam, we will have a “salon” session. Each student will be required to make a poster (broadly construed) presenting the project behind their positive paper. During the final exam period, students will be divided into two halves. These halves will alternate between presenting and mingling. Students will be graded on the extent to which they demonstrate (in both phases of the salon) mastery of the material covered and creativity in how that material is conveyed.

Reading List and Schedule:

[[See attached]]

Schedule			
Topic	Required Reading	Recommended Reading	Rapturous Reading
<p>Key: AN is Alyssa Ney's <i>Metaphysics: an Introduction</i> PvI is Peter van Inwagen's <i>Metaphysics</i> (4th edition) JP is John Perry's <i>A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality</i></p>			
What is Metaphysics?			
	PvI - Introduction	SEP entry on Metaphysics, by Peter van Inwagen and Meghan Sullivan	McDaniel, "Metaphysics, History, Phenomenology"
	AN - Background	Xu and Yu, "Morality and Nature: the Essential Difference Between the Dao of Chinese Philosophy and the Metaphysics in Western Philosophy"	Paul, "Metaphysics as Modeling: the Handmaiden's Tale"
	AN - Chapter 1 (selections)		
Personal Identity			
	JP - Day One	PvI - Chapter 10	Schechtman, "The Narrative Self"
	JP - Day Two	PvI - Chapter 11	Panjvani, "The First Noble Truth"
	JP - Day Three	Baker, "Persons and the Metaphysics of Resurrection"	
		Merricks, "The Resurrection of the Body"	
Causation			
	AN - Chapter 8	SEP entry on the Metaphysics of Causation, by Jonathan Schaffer	Schaffer, "Contrastive Causation in the Law"
	Bernstein, "The Metaphysics of Omissions"	History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps podcast episode, "Form and Function: Aristotle's Four Causes"	Baker, "Metaphysics and Mental Causation"
Free Will			
	AN - Chapter 9	PvI - Chapter 12	Finch and Warfield, "Fatalism: Logical and Theological"
	Wolf, "The Importance of Free Will"	Lewis, "Are We Free to Break the Laws?"	Nahmias, "Your Brain as the Source of Free Will Worth Wanting"
God			
	PvI - Chapter 6	Rea, "Gender as a Divine Attribute"	Rea, "Polytheism and Christian Belief"

	Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and some Varieties of Atheism"	Miller, "The Euthyphro Dilemma"	Rea, "Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence"
Social Identities			
	AN - Chapter 10	Interview with Michel Foucault	Papineau, "The Logic of Fandom"
	Haslanger, Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?	Spencer, "A Radical Solution to the Race Problem"	Excerpt from Beauvoir's The Second Sex
	Dembroff, "What is Sexual Orientation?"		
Groups			
	Ritchie, "The Metaphysics of Social Groups"	Ritchie, "What Are Groups?"	Uzquiano, "The Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Justices"
	Cray, "Fightin' Words: Sabbath Doesn't Need the Ozzman"	Smithsonian Magazine, "Is a Band Without Its Original Members Still the Same Band?"	Excerpt from List and Pettit's Group Agency
Methodology			
	AN - Chapter 1	von Solodkoff, "Paraphrase Strategies in Metaphysics"	Wilson, "Three Barriers to Philosophical Progress"
	AN - Chapter 4	Brenner, "Simplicity as a Criterion of Theory Choice in Metaphysics"	
Bonus Topics			
	TBD (Composition? Ontology of Art?? Time travel???)		
Salon	Thursday, Dec 14, 4:15pm--6:15pm EST		
Papers Due	Friday, Dec 15, 11:59pm EST		