

Value in Metaphysics

Tuesdays at 14:05–16:30

Room B214 Zhenhua Building

Peter Finocchiaro

My office: Zhenhua Building, B502

My office hours: Wednesdays, 14:00–18:00, and by appointment

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Course Description:

According to many philosophers, metaphysics is the study of ultimate reality. This characterization of metaphysics might suggest that metaphysics is a “value-free” descriptive project. But appearances can be deceiving. In this course, we will explore the ways that metaphysics may be influenced by considerations of value. We will organize this exploration around specific sources of value: the practical, the ethical, the linguistic, and the epistemological. But we will also look to see how the overall force of these considerations impacts our understanding of metaphysics. Along these lines, we will be concerned with two central questions: (1) In which ways do considerations of value interact? (2) To what extent does the interaction of these considerations challenge the status of metaphysics as “objective”? This course will be conducted as a seminar. Consequently, the vast majority of class time will be spent in discussion. Students will be assessed on the extent to which their presence contributes to that discussion. Students will also be assessed on two papers on a topic of their own choosing.

Required Texts: There are no required texts; all required readings will be research articles or book excerpts in pdf format.

Optional Texts: That being said, a seminar is a good opportunity to fill out your philosophical library. I recommend acquiring the following books:

- *Metametaphysics*, edited by David J. Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman
- *Writing the Book of the World*, by Theodore Sider
- *Ontology Made Easy*, by Amie Thomasson
- *From a Logical Point of View*, by Willard van Orman Quine
- *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, by Nelson Goodman

A note about the reading: For each class session, I have assigned multiple reading assignments. I do not expect to cover every aspect of every reading that I assign. That being said, in each class session we are free to explore whatever issues come to mind. Every student should, therefore, strive to read *all* of the assigned material.

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

96.00 - 100.00	A+	70.00 - 74.99	B-
90.00 - 95.99	A	67.00 - 69.99	C+
85.00 - 89.99	A-	63.00 - 66.99	C
80.00 - 84.99	B+	60.00 - 62.99	C-
75.00 - 79.99	B	00.00 - 59.99	D

Grade Distribution: The overall grade is determined by the following:

Participation	25%
Questions	10%
Response Paper	25%
Positive Paper	40%

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 game of ping pong and more like a soccer ("football") match. Each student will be graded on the extent to which they follow this model of active participation.

Questions: For each class day, students will submit two questions that they have regarding the reading for that day. **Students should submit these questions to the class QQ group by 23:59 the day before class.** These questions should be thoughtful, rather than slap-dash. If they express confusion, they should demonstrate an attempt to understand. If they raise an objection, it shouldn't be an objection that the author could easily answer.

These questions serve three purposes. Their first purpose is to help me ensure that students are completing the assigned reading and that they are not overwhelmed by it. The second purpose of these questions is to help guide our class discussions. Consequently, I will likely ask some of you to read/pose your question in class. The third purpose of these questions is to give students an opportunity to practice asking good questions. Asking good questions is a skill – a skill that students in philosophy should learn. I

will therefore also occasionally discuss what makes a question a good question to ask.

Paper: Each student will write two papers for this course. The first paper should be a response paper (approximately 2–5 pages), wherein the student directly critiques one of the arguments from the course readings. The second paper should be a positive paper (approximately 5–8 pages) wherein the student argues for a substantive philosophical position. Students should choose their own topics and theses. **No matter what topic students choose to write on, they must first consult with me in a face-to-face meeting.**

Reading List and Schedule:

Below is a tentative schedule of the material that we will cover throughout the semester.

Week 1: Introductions (no reading)

Week 2: Neo-Quineanism

1. W.V.O. Quine’s “On What There Is”, reprinted in his book, *From a Logical Point of View*: 1–19
2. Peter van Inwagen’s “Quine’s 1946 Lecture on Nominalism” in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* 4: 125–142

Week 3: Anti-Realism

1. Rudolf Carnap’s “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology” in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4: 20–40
2. Hilary Putnam’s “Realism and Reason”, reprinted in his book, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*: 123–140

Week 4: Reference Magnetism

1. David Lewis’s “New Work for a Theory of Universals” in *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 61: 343–377
2. Callie Phillips’s “Value-Based Interpretationism: Reference Magnetism Without Natural Properties”

Week 5: Charity and Deflationism

1. Eli Hirsch’s “Ontology and Alternative Languages” in *Metametaphysics*: 231–259
2. Peter Pagin’s “Radical Interpretation and the Principle of Charity” in *A Companion to Donald Davidson*: 225–246

Week 6: Virtue-Driven Theory Choice

1. Karen Bennett's "Composition, Colocation, and Metaontology" in *Metametaphysics*: 38–76.
2. Thomas Kuhn's "Objectivity, Value Judgment, and Theory Choice" in *The Essential Tension*: 320–339

Week 7: Metaphysical Structure

1. Theodore Sider's *Writing the Book of the World*, Chapter 1 and Chapter 6
2. Allan Hazlett's "Understanding and Structure" in *Making Sense of the World: New Essays on the Philosophy of Understanding*: 135–158.

Week 8: Epistemic Value in Metaphysics

1. Kris McDaniel's "Normative Accounts of Fundamentality" in *Philosophical Issues* 27: 167–183
2. Shamik Dasgupta's "Realism and the Absence of Value" in *Philosophical Review* 127: 279–322

Week 9: Metalinguistic Negotiation

1. David Plunkett's "Which Concepts Should We Use? Metalinguistic Negotiations and the Methodology of Philosophy" in *Inquiry* 58: 828–874
2. Amie Thomasson's "Metaphysical Disputes and Metalinguistic Negotiation" in *Analytic Philosophy* 57: 1–28

Week 10: Amelioration

1. Sally Haslanger's "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" in *Noûs* 34: 31–55
2. Robin Dembroff's "What Is Sexual Orientation?" in *Philosophers' Imprint*: 1–27

Week 11: Ethics-First Metaphysics

1. Rebecca Chan's "Ethics-First Metaphysics"
2. Miriam Schoenfield's "Moral Vagueness is Ontic Vagueness" in *Ethics* 126: 257–272