

PH-328: Metaphysics Spring 2010

There is a science that studies being insofar as it *is* being, and also the properties of being in its own right. It is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences. For none of them considers being quite generally, in so far as it *is* being; rather, each of them cuts off some part of being and studies the relevant coincident of that part, as, for instance, the mathematical sciences do.

Since we are seeking the principles, i.e., the highest causes, clearly they must be the causes of the nature of some subject as it is in its own right. If, then, those who were seeking the elements of beings were also seeking these highest principles, the elements must also be the elements of being not coincidentally, but in so far as it *is* being. That is why we also ought to find the first causes of being in so far as it *is* being.

— Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV.1

Aristotle described a science that would study the most basic nature of existence as such. This course is in that tradition, considering such questions as the fundamental nature of reality, the nature of time, personal identity, and freedom.

Course Objectives

There are four main objectives for this class. By the end of this class you should be able to:

1. *Identify* the main positions in some areas of contemporary metaphysics, *articulate* the motivations and reasons supporting these positions, and *evaluate* the relative merits of the arguments given in their defense;
2. *Formulate* your own views about topics in contemporary metaphysics (at least provisionally) and *defend* your views orally and in writing;
3. *Collaborate* with others in the class, helping them clarify, sharpen, and strengthen the defense of their views.
4. *Think hard* about the fundamental nature of reality.

Your grade in this class will be a function of how well you accomplish these objectives. The fourth objective is notoriously difficult to measure, but I will try to evaluate your success in accomplishing the other three in the following ways:

A. Attendance and Participation (25%)

Your participation in class will give me one way to see how well you are accomplishing each of the objectives above. Obviously, failure to participate gives me very little to go on. I will frequently ask you to write an in-class response to the readings as preparation for our discussions. The in-class writings and discussion will give me a way to see how well you are doing on each of the above objectives.

B. Three Exams (10% each)

*The exams will ask you to identify, compare, and synthesize material we are studying, allowing me to see how well you are doing in achieving the first objective. This is the primary way I will be able to see the breadth of your learning. (Note: the third exam will take place during the final exam period, but it will *not* be cumulative.)*

C. Peer Reviews (calculated as part of the paper grades)

The peer review process is intended to be a way for you and your classmates to collaborate on your writing. As such, it gives me a way of measuring how well you are accomplishing the third objective.

D. Two Papers

Paper 1: 5-7 pages (15%)

Paper 2: 10-12 pages (30%)

Your papers give you the best opportunities for achieving the second goal. This is the primary way I will be able to see the depth of your learning.

Course Texts

The following texts are required for this course. The first two are available at the Skidmore Shop. The Course Packet will be distributed in class.

1. *Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings*, 2nd Edition, ed. Michael J. Loux (Routledge, 2008; ISBN: 978-0415962384) [M]
2. *Free Will*, 2nd Edition, ed. Derk Pereboom (Hackett, 2009; ISBN: 978-1603841290) [FW]
3. *Course Packet* [CP]

Attendance and Participation

Attendance and participation is mandatory. I *will* be grading your participation in class. Any absence will automatically reduce your attendance/participation grade by 5 percentage points. **Six or more absences, whatever the reason, will result in automatic failure of the course.**

Participation should not be understood in terms of simply promoting your own views—if that's *all* you did, you would not be a good participant. Good participation means that you are actively engaged *during the class time* in trying to understand clearly the arguments being presented. So, even if you don't yet have a view of your own on the issue under discussion, good participation will include asking clarifying questions (of me and of your classmates), raising possible counterexamples, proposing alternative ways of understanding an argument, uncovering underlying assumptions, and any other way of honestly and respectfully engaging with the issues being discussed.

Peer Reviews

For each paper, you will be asked to provide constructive comments on two of your peers' first drafts, and you will also receive feedback on your draft from two of your classmates. The aim of this is to engage in a collaborative effort to improve each person's argument. I will provide more details on the review procedure closer to the due date for the first draft.

Grading Policy

I will follow the evaluation rubric outlined in the course catalog (p. 49) when assigning grades:

A+, A	Distinguished work
A-, B+, B	Superior Work
B-, C+, C	Satisfactory Work
C-, D+, D	Passing, poor-quality work
F	Failure, no credit earned

Late Work: Any late work will be graded down by 1/3 of a grade for each day that it is late. **You will receive no credit for work that is more than a week late.**

Example: a B paper will receive a B- if handed in one day late; it will receive a C+ if it is handed in two days late; etc.

I do not allow make-up exams.

Honor Code

In keeping with the Honor Code, I must give you some sense of what constitutes “honesty and integrity” in your work for this class. The main things I would be concerned about in this class are:

- a. Papers: any sources that you use in your paper must be properly quoted and cited. If you consult other sources (whether formal research materials in the library or less formal research materials such as online write-ups), you *must* identify the source. If there is any uncertainty about what constitutes plagiarism or unauthorized aid on the papers, you should discuss it with me.

Of course, you are free to make use of peer reviews, visits to the Writing Center, meetings with me, etc., to sharpen your paper. In fact, **I encourage wide use of such aids.**

- b. Exams: you may study together (again, I encourage it!), but you may not make use of any notes or help from others (in any form) during the exams.

If you are in doubt about whether anything else constitutes a violation of the honor code, it is your responsibility to consult with me first. Any violation of the honor code will result in failure of the class.

Outline of Readings

Listed below is a tentative outline of readings. If the schedule changes, I will provide you with an updated plan.

I. Time

A. Ontology

i. Realism/Nominalism

“The Problem of Universals” (M, pp. 3-13) Jan. 27

Russell, “The World of Universals” (M) Jan. 27

Quine, “On What There Is” (M) Jan. 27

ii. Materialism/Non-materialism

Lewis and Lewis, “Holes” (CP) Feb. 1 & 3

Crane and Mellor, “There is No Question of Physicalism” (CP) Feb. 1 & 3

B. Time

“Time: The A-Theory and the B-Theory” (M, pp. 341-349) Feb. 8

McTaggart, “Time” (M) Feb. 8

Taylor, “Time and Eternity” (M) Feb. 10

Prior, “The Notion of the Present” (M) Feb. 15

Smart, “The Space-Time World”(M) Feb. 17

Mellor, “The Need for Tense” (M) Feb. 17

Application: is time travel possible?

Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel” (CP) Feb. 22

Heinlein, “—All You Zombies—” (CP) Feb. 22

II. Identity

A. Persistence (generally)

"Endurantism and Perdurantism" (M, pp. 411-417)	Mar. 1
Merricks, "Endurance and Indiscernibility" (M)	Mar. 1
Heller, "Temporal Parts of Four-Dimensional Objects" (M)	Mar. 3

B. Persistence of Persons

Locke, <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> , Book II, chapter 27, "Of Identity and Diversity" (CP)	Mar. 8
Swinburne, "Personal Identity: The Dualist Theory" (M)	Mar. 10
Parfit, "Personal Identity" (M)	Mar. 22
Lewis, "Survival and Identity" (M)	Mar. 24

III. Freedom

A. Reasons and Causes: Are the Laws of Nature a threat to Freedom?

Rée, "Determinism and the Illusion of Moral Responsibility" (CP)	Mar. 29
Van Inwagen, "The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism" (FW)	Mar. 29

B. If so, is there such a thing as Free Will?

<i>Libertarianism</i> : Van Inwagen, chapter 12 of <i>Metaphysics</i> (CP)	Mar. 31
<i>Digression</i> : Is the Principle of Alternative Possibilities True?	
Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" (FW)	Apr. 7
<i>Hard Determinism</i> : Pereboom, "Determinism <i>al Dente</i> " (FW)	Apr. 12
<i>Soft Determinism</i> (a.k.a. <i>Compatibilism</i>):	
Fischer, "My Compatibilism" (FW)	Apr. 14
<i>An Asymmetric Account</i> : Susan Wolf, "Asymmetric Freedom" (FW)	Apr. 19

IV. Recent Work in Metaphysics

TBD

Final Exam: Thursday, May 13, 9 a.m. - Noon

**Planning Calendar
for
PH-328 – Metaphysics**

Spring Semester 2010

Week	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Jan. 24		1 – Jan. 25 Classes Begin		2 – Jan. 27		Jan. 29 Drop/Add Deadline	
2 Jan. 31		3 – Feb. 1		4 – Feb. 3			
3 Feb. 7		5 – Feb. 8		6 – Feb. 10			
4 Feb. 14		7 – Feb. 15		8 – Feb. 17			
5 Feb. 21		9 – Feb. 22		10 – Feb. 24 Exam One			
6 Feb. 28		11 – Mar. 1 <i>Draft 1 of Paper 1 Due</i>		12 – Mar. 3 <i>Peer Reviews Due</i>			
7 Mar. 7		13 – Mar. 8 <i>Final Draft of Paper 1 Due</i>		14 – Mar. 10			
Mar. 14	Spring Break (March 13 – March 21)						
8 Mar. 21		15 – Mar. 22		16 – Mar. 24			
9 Mar. 28		17 – Mar. 29		18 – Mar. 31			
10 Apr. 4		19 – Apr. 5 Exam Two		20 – Apr. 7			
11 Apr. 11		21 – Apr. 12		22 – Apr. 14		Apr. 16 Withdrawal Deadline	
12 Apr. 18		23 – Apr. 19 <i>Draft 1 of Paper 2 Due</i>		24 – Apr. 21 <i>Peer Reviews Due</i>			
13 Apr. 25		25 – Apr. 26		26 – Apr. 28			
14 May 2		27 – May 3 <i>Final Draft of Paper Two Due</i>	May 4 Last Day of Classes	Final Exam: May 13 9 a.m. - Noon			