

Metaphysics 200-300

Instructor: Liz Jackson

Course Description: Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that explores questions regarding the fundamental nature of reality. Metaphysics is an attempt to answer these questions in general (yet interesting) ways.

This class will have six parts. Here are some examples of the questions we will cover in each part.

- 1) **Ontology:** What is there?
- 2) **Modality:** What is the nature of possibility? What is necessary, and what is contingent?
- 3) **Time:** What is the nature of time?
- 4) **Free will:** What does it take to be free? Are we free?
- 5) **Social Metaphysics:** What is a group? Can groups be responsible for things? What is gender? What is race? Are these socially constructed? What is the nature of disability?
- 6) **Metaphysics:** What is metaphysics?

Learning Goals:

At the end of the course, students should be able to...

- 1) Clearly state an argument in premise-conclusion form.
- 2) Properly object to an argument in premise-conclusion form.
- 3) Comprehend the main views in ontology, modality, the nature of time, free will, social metaphysics, and the nature of metaphysics.
- 4) Analyze arguments for and against each of the above views.

Policies:

Technology policy: No screens during class, including phones, laptops, tablets, etc. There is quite a bit of research on this, and almost all findings support the idea that screens in class inhibit, rather than enhance, student learning. Further, the main purpose of this class is to *discuss* the philosophical issues at hand. I do not, primarily, want students to memorize facts, but for them to think, converse, and form opinions about the various topics. If you need to use a device during class to aid your learning, feel free to come talk to me.

Late work: Late work will be deducted one-third letter grade for each day late (A to A-, etc.).

Texts: There is no textbook for this class. We will instead be working from a variety of material, including professional philosophy articles, opinion pieces, podcasts, and video. Each topic will have required material. Most topics will have further material that students are encouraged to consume.

Grading scale: I will use the following grading scale.

A	94+	B+	87-89	B-	80-82	C	73-76	D	60-69
A-	90-93	B	83-86	C+	77-79	C-	70-72	F	59-

Honor Code: Students are responsible for compliance with the University's honor code at all times. I take academic integrity very seriously. 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: I am 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.

Assignments:

Attendance:

It is impossible for a student to participate if he or she does not attend class. It is also difficult to learn the material without attending and participating. *Students who have more than two unexcused absences will have points deducted from their overall grade.*

Participation: 20%

This class is discussion-based, so participation from the students is especially important. I know not everyone loves talking in front of the class, so participation grades will also include reading responses. For each reading response, students should submit a question about the assigned material the Google Doc 24 hours before the class meeting. The question should demonstrate that you read (or watched/consumed/etc.) the material (partially because I am doing these instead of pop quizzes).

Three Podcasts, 15% (5% each)

Students will be put in groups and must pick an argument to discuss. Groups will collaborate to record and produce a 5-10 minute philosophical conversation.

Paper 1, Objection and Response Paper: 25% (~3-4 pages)

In this paper, students pick an argument we talked about in class (or write a new argument with my help), defend the argument, then offer an original objection and response. A rough draft is required (and graded as pass/fail).

Paper 3, Paper & Creative Project: 40% (~6 pages)

Part 1- Paper (20%): In this paper, students take their own view on an issue we discuss. They should offer an argument for their view, then give two objections to their argument, then respond to each objection. A rough draft is required (and graded as pass/fail). I will give ideas for paper topics, but students can write on any topic that is related to course material.

Part 2- Presentation (20%): Students are required to do a creative project that explains or illustrates their argument from paper 3. During the final weeks of the semester, students will present their projects to the class.

Do not include your first or last name on your papers. Instead, merely include your student ID number.

Schedule:

UNIT 1: ONTOLOGY

Week 1:

- Quine, “On What There Is”
- van Inwagen, “Meta-ontology”

Week 2:

- Lewis and Lewis, “Holes”
- Schaffer, “On What Grounds What”

UNIT 2: MODALITY

Week 3:

- Lewis, “A Philosopher’s Paradise”

Week 4:

- Van Inwagen, “Two Concepts of Possible Worlds”
- Rosen “Modal Fictionalism”

UNIT 3: TIME

Week 5:

- Sider, “Against Presentism”
 - Recommended: Baron, “Time, Physics, and Philosophy: It’s all Relative”
- Markosian “A Defense of Presentism”

Week 6:

- McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time”
- Lewis: “Paradoxes of Time Travel”

UNIT 4: FREE WILL

Week 7:

- van Inwagen, “The Powers of Rational Beings: the Freedom of the Will” in *Metaphysics*

Week 8:

- van Inwagen, “The Consequence Argument”
- Richard Taylor, “Fatalism”

UNIT 5: SOCIAL METAPHYSICS

Week 9:

- Kate Ritchie, "The Metaphysics of Social Groups"
- H.D. Lewis, "Collective Responsibility"

Week 10:

- Haslanger, "Ontology and Social Construction"
- Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) are they? (What) do we want them to be?"

Week 11:

- Elizabeth Barnes, "Valuing Disability, Causing Disability"
- Campbell and Stramondo, "The Complicated Relationship between Disability and Well-Being"

UNIT 6: WHAT IS METAPHYSICS?

Week 12:

- Van Inwagen, "Introduction" in *Metaphysics*

Week 13: Thanksgiving Break

Week 14: Student Presentations

Week 15: Student Presentations