

Introduction to Metaphysics

MW 8:40am–9:55am · Rockefeller Hall 104

PHIL 2640

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TA: Name
Email: [email](#)
Section: Time · Place
Office Hours: Time · Place

Description

Metaphysics is the philosophical investigation into the fundamental nature of reality. It tries to address two very broad questions: what is there, and what is it like? This course is an introduction to metaphysical questions through three main topics: time, modality, and causation. We will cover topics such as: the passage of time, the theory of relativity, time travel, possible worlds, the ontological argument for the existence of God, reductive analyses of causation, causation by omission, free will, and explanation.

Readings

All readings will be made available on Canvas. There are no required materials that you need to purchase for this course.

Grades

Papers	60%	first worth 15%, second worth 20%, third worth 25%
Final Exam	25%	
Writing Exercises	15%	7 in total
Attendance	6%	bonus, 3% for lecture, 3% for optional section

Assignments

Reading Guide

On Canvas, you will find a list of questions you should try to answer as you do the reading. This reading guide will be your study guide for the final exam. A selection of these questions will be used as the questions on the final exam at the end of the semester. You will be given a selection of questions from the reading guide that might appear on the final exam beforehand.

Final Exam

At the end of the semester, there will be a final exam on **December 16th at 7pm** (location TBD). The questions on the final exam will be based on the reading guide.

Papers

There are three paper assignments in this course. The first paper is worth 15%, the second worth 20%, and the third worth 25% of your total grade. Each paper must be between 1200–1500 words (\approx 4–5 pages, double-spaced) and will be submitted on Canvas as a PDF. See the schedule for deadlines. More details about the papers can be found on Canvas later.

Writing Exercises

Throughout the semester, there will be 7 writing exercise assignments that are aimed at improving your philosophical prose. Each exercise is worth 2% of your total grade (except for the first, which is worth 3%) and will be submitted on Canvas. These exercises will due on **Fridays by the end of the day** of select weeks. See the schedule for deadlines. No late exercises will be accepted.

Extension Policy

For paper assignments, I will use an “allowance” system for granting extensions. Each student gets four 12-hour blocks worth of extensions on paper deadlines at the beginning of the semester. You may spend your allowance however you like, no questions asked. Just leave a comment in the comment box when you upload your paper to Canvas saying how many blocks you would like to use for that assignment.

Once your allowance runs out, your grade will be reduced by 1/3 of a letter grade for each day your paper is late. Papers submitted more than a week late will not be accepted. Exceptions to this policy will only be made in extreme circumstances (e.g., family or medical emergency) and may require documentation.

No extensions will be granted for writing exercises.

Attendance

You may receive up to 6% in bonus points throughout the semester for attending the lectures and the optional section. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each. To earn the full 3% for lectures, you will need to attend at least 20 lectures. You will earn no credit if you attend fewer than 12 lectures. To earn the full 3% for sections, you will need to attend at least 8 sections. You will earn no credit if you attend fewer than 2 sections.

Academic Integrity

In this course, we will strictly adhere to the University Policy on Academic Integrity, as outlined in the Code of Academic Integrity (<http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm>). Any violation of this policy will be reported immediately. Violations will, at the very least, result in an F on the assignment in question, but may also lead to an F in the class, suspension, or other penalties.

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction

- 09/04 | No reading
Homework: read "A Brief Guide to Logic and Argumentation"

Time

Week 2: The Passage of Time

- 09/09 | John M. E. McTaggart, "Time" (excerpt)
09/11 | Dean W. Zimmerman, "The Privileged Present: Defending an 'A-Theory' of Time" (section 6 optional)
09/13 | **WRITING EXERCISE 1 DUE**

Week 3: Change and Persistence

- 09/16 | Theodore Sider, "Time" (pp. 58–61 are optional. . . but fun)
09/18 | Sally Haslanger, "Persistence Through Time", sections 1–6
09/20 | **WRITING EXERCISE 2 DUE**

Week 4: Space

- 09/23 | ——— Arc is away (no lecture) ———
09/25 | Shamik Dasgupta, "Substantivalism vs Relationalism About Space in Classical Physics", sections 1–5
09/27 | **WRITING EXERCISE 3 DUE**

Week 5: Relativity

- 09/30 | Albert Einstein, "Relativity: The Special and General Theory" (excerpt)
10/02 | Katherine Hawley, "Metaphysics and Relativity"
10/04 | **WRITING EXERCISE 4 DUE**

Week 6: Time Travel

- 10/07 | David K. Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel"
10/09 | Simon Keller & Michael Nelson, "Presentists Should Believe in Time-Travel"
10/11 | **WRITING EXERCISE 5 DUE**

Modality

Week 7: Why Anything?

- 10/14 | ——— Fall break (no lecture) ———
10/16 | Derek Parfit, "Why anything? Why this?" Part 1
Derek Parfit, "Why anything? Why this?" Part 2 (optional)
David Albert, "'A Universe from Nothing', by Lawrence M. Krauss" (optional)
10/18 | **PAPER 1 DUE**

Week 8: Possible Worlds

- 10/21 | David K. Lewis, "Possible Worlds"
 10/23 | Robert Stalnaker, "Possible Worlds"

Week 9: Necessity and the A Priori

- 10/28 | A. J. Ayer, "The A Priori" (pp. 81–83 are optional)
 10/30 | Saul Kripke, "Identity and Necessity", pp. 135–158 (up to end of first paragraph)
 11/01 | **WRITING EXERCISE 6 DUE**

Week 10: The Ontological Argument

- 11/04 | St. Anselm & Gaunilo, "The Ontological Argument"
 Laura Garcia, "Ontological Arguments for God's Existence"
 11/06 | David Lewis, "Anselm and Actuality"
 11/08 | **WRITING EXERCISE 7 DUE**

Causation**Week 11: Counterfactual Accounts of Causation**

- 11/11 | Stephen Mumford & Rani Lill Anjum, *Causation: A Very Short Introduction* (chps 1–2)
 11/13 | David K. Lewis, "Causation" (section titled "Counterfactual Versus Nomic Dependence" is optional)
 11/15 | **PAPER 2 DUE**

Week 12: Preemption and Omission

- 11/18 | Jonathan Schaffer, "Trumping Preemption" (objection/reply on pp. 170–173 as well as last paragraph of 179 to the end are optional)
 11/20 | Helen Beebe, "Causing and Nothingness" (sections 1–2 and 4–5)

Week 13: Transitivity and Contrasts

- 11/25 | Cei Maslen, "Causes, Contrasts, and the Nontransitivity of Causation" (sections 1–6)
 11/27 | ——— Thanksgiving (no lecture) ———

Week 14: Free Will

- 12/02 | Alyssa Ney, "Free Will" (pp. 239–248)
 12/04 | Alyssa Ney, "Free Will" (pp. 249–257)

Week 15: From Cause to Because

- 12/09 | Paul Audi, "Grounding: Toward a Theory of the "In-Virtue-Of" Relation" (optional)

Week 16

- 12/16 | **FINAL EXAM**
 12/17 | **PAPER 3 DUE**