

Metaphysics

Sample Syllabus for Prospective Course

Section #: Meeting time/place

Instructor: Robert K. Whitaker

Office Hours:

Email:

Course Description

This course will introduce the student to metaphysics, which is the investigation of fundamental questions about the nature of reality, especially those not amenable to purely empirical resolution. This will include topics of historical importance such as monism and individuation, realism and idealism, the nature of physical objects, time and space, persistence through time, truth (realism and anti-realism), the existence of abstract objects, the reality of possible worlds, the nature of causation, the existence of God, the existence of the soul, the nature of the human person, the existence and persistence of the self, and the possibility of free will; as well as topics of more recent interest such as social ontology and metametaphysics. The course will have a contemporary focus, with most of the readings written by recent authors. There will also be an emphasis on diversity of perspectives, including non-Western and feminist perspectives.

Required Texts

§ Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 4th Ed. New York, NY: Routledge, 2018. ISBN-13: 978-0813349343

§ Alyssa Ney, *Metaphysics*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2014. ISBN-13: 978-0415640756

All other readings will be made available as PDF documents online.

Course Objectives and Assessment

By the end of the course, the student will be able to state and provide reasons for basic philosophical positions concerning monism and individuation, realism and idealism, the nature of physical objects, the nature of time and space, persistence through time, realist and anti-realist notions of truth, the existence of abstract objects, the nature of possible worlds, the nature of causation, arguments for and against the existence of God, the existence of the soul, the nature of the human person, the existence and persistence of the self, the possibility of free will, the nature of socially constructed entities, and the overall aims and challenges of metaphysics as a discipline. The student will be able to state, explain, compare, and contrast the views of various representative thinkers in the history of metaphysics on these issues. In addition, the student will have received practice and instruction on crafting well-written arguments, as well as recognizing and assessing the arguments of others. Attainment of all these objectives will be assessed primarily through written reading responses, a critical paper, a presentation, and two exams. All objectives will also be assessed via class participation.

Course Requirements

Course Composition:

Reading Responses	20%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	20%
Critical Paper	20%
Presentation	10%
Video Responses	5%
Participation	5%

The grading scale is as follows:

A	94 – 100	C	73 – 76.9
A-	90 – 93.9	C-	70 – 72.9
B+	87 – 89.9	D+	67 – 69.9
B	83 – 86.9	D	60 – 66.9
B-	80 – 82.9	F	... – 59.9
C+	77 – 79.9		

Reading Responses: There will be 8 short reading responses assigned throughout the course of the semester (see readings in the schedule marked with an 'R'), of which you are responsible for **5**. You may write up to **6** of these. If you write 6, I will drop your lowest grade. If you wish, you may write only 5, but you will be stuck with the grades you get. I highly recommend writing all 6. These are to be **no more than a half page** double spaced (roughly 2-3 paragraphs), and are to be purely exegetical. You will **summarize the main arguments of the author; do not provide your own opinion**. The goal here is to develop the skills needed to read philosophy well. Please cite the page number of the relevant reading for any quotations and major points; no outside sources will be necessary. Hand in a hard copy at the beginning of class on the day the reading is assigned. Reading responses will not be accepted after the class for which they are assigned, and you must be present for the whole class on the day you turn in a response (unless you have a valid excuse). Each response is worth **4%** of your final grade.

Midterm Exam: There will be a take-home, open-notes midterm exam due on _____. The exam will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

Final Exam: There will be a (non-comprehensive) take-home, open-notes final exam due on _____. The exam will include multiple choice, short answer, short essay, and a longer essay.

Critical Paper: The critical paper consists of an articulation and assessment of at least one of the philosophical views considered during the course of the semester. This does not have to be a direct response to one of the readings, though it should be conversant with at least one of the authors we've covered. As with the reading responses, you will need to identify and explain the argument or position you are responding to, but the bulk of the paper should be your own argumentation. This may take the form of critiquing the argument of an author, critiquing a philosophical position taken by one or more authors, critiquing an entire style of approach to a type of philosophical problem, and/or making a positive case for your own view over and against the view of one or more of our authors. I will provide a list of potential

topics for this paper, and I encourage you to choose something that interests you. You may also suggest something that is not on the list (pending my approval). You will submit the paper (PDF or Word files only please) **online by _____, at 11:59 pm**. There is no need to turn in a hard copy.

Specifications: 3-4 pages in length, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins, correct grammar, and proper citation.* See “Critical Paper Rubric” online for further detail.

* I do not care what citation style you use, so long as whatever style you choose is consistent throughout, and so long as all sources, quotations, and borrowed ideas are properly cited (see below regarding academic honesty). No cover page or separate bibliography page is necessary, nor will such count towards page total. Footnotes are preferred over endnotes.

Presentation: Once during the semester, you will be responsible for presenting on a reading of your choice from the schedule, and leading the class discussion on it for that day. Depending on how discussion goes, this should take 30-45 minutes. Your presentation itself needn’t be that long; whatever is required to deal with the reading is sufficient. You may use a slideshow or print handouts if you like, but this is not required; the style of your presentation is up to you. You will be graded on your mastery of the material, not on your public speaking ability. The presentation is worth **10%** of the final grade.

Video Responses: Five times throughout the course of the semester, I will assign short videos for you to watch before class (see places in the schedule marked with a “V”). The videos will typically feature some thought-provoking content relevant to the unit we are in at that time. You will prepare a question about the video(s), and bring it to class, typed and printed. **Handwritten questions will not be accepted.** We will watch the video(s) again together in class, and then split into groups to discuss your questions. You will turn in your questions at the end of class. To receive credit, you must be present for the whole class on the day you turn in a response (unless you have a valid excuse). These will not be graded for content, but you will receive **one participation point** for each question you turn in, which together will constitute **5%** of the final grade.

Participation: Participation involves two things: 1. class involvement, and 2. at least one 1-on-1 meeting with me outside of class. **Class involvement:** your involvement is essential to the success of this class and to your success in this class. This means that a) active listening and note-taking, b) open questioning, and c) creative discussion are expected of you. Note that all of these things require attendance; thus, if your attendance drops below the required minimum, your participation grade will suffer. Class involvement constitutes **4%** of your final grade (though excessive absences will result in a greater than 4% grade reduction—see below under “Attendance”). **Individual meeting:** you are responsible for meeting with me at least once during office hours or by appointment **on or before _____**. This meeting may be in relation to your paper or another class assignment, but this is not necessary. A 10-15 minute chat about questions you might have had in class or anything philosophical fulfills this requirement. Please do not delay in scheduling this meeting, as I cannot guarantee extra appointments towards the end of the semester. The individual meeting constitutes **1%** of your final grade.

Reading Incentive: To encourage reading, you will have the following opportunity: for each day of class, you may bring in a **single 4x6 note card** with notes you have taken from the required reading for that day, **completed prior to the class for which the reading is assigned**. These may be turned in at the beginning of class. **Please print your name clearly at the top of each note card.** On exam day (midterm

and final), I will return to you any note cards you have turned in, and you may use them on the exam. If you don't turn them in, you don't get any help on the exams.

Attendance: Attendance is required. Your success in the course will largely depend on your grasp of the material discussed in class, and it is not possible to get the full benefit of that discussion if you are not present. In general, I will not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences (for example, in the case of illness), but if you need to be absent for some extraordinary circumstance, please notify me well in advance. **I will allow a grace period of four absences before I start deducting points.** 5 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 2 final percentage points; 6 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 4 final percentage points. More than 6 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 4 final percentage points, plus an additional 4 final percentage points per absence over 6. Additionally, punctuality is expected; if you come to class late, it is your responsibility to make sure I know you are there, preferably by seeing me at the end of class so I can mark you on the attendance sheet.

Late Work Policy: Five percentage points will be deducted from the student's assignment grade for each late day (including weekends). For example, a student who has earned an 85% (B) on a paper but who has turned it in a day late may receive a maximum grade of 80% (B-).

Extra Credit: I have included several **recommended readings** in the schedule. These are clearly marked as "Recommended" and appear in a slightly smaller font size. You are not required to read these for class, but if you choose, you may read one and write a short (2-3 paragraph) response summarizing the main argument of the article. These should be similar in style to a normal reading response, and each will be worth a maximum of **2 final percentage points**. You may write a maximum of **two** extra credit reading responses during the semester. These may be turned in (online dropbox) any time up to and including _____.

Grading: Rubrics for the critical paper, reading responses, and presentation will be posted online.

Writing: Good writing is a basic skill in any professional field, and I expect you to put in the necessary effort to make sure that your paper, reading responses, and exam essays are lucid and well organized. A **"Tips for Writing Philosophy Papers"** document will be posted online. Please use it. If you need additional help with this, please visit the writing center on campus.

Reading: The reading for this course is difficult. Despite this, it is crucial that you keep up with the reading schedule and engage the material (especially since the lectures and all assignments are based on the readings). This means setting aside adequate time to engage the material *before class*. I have tried to keep the assigned readings to a length that allows you to wrestle with the material without getting overwhelmed. If something from the reading is unclear, you may always bring it up in class, or in a meeting with me.

Academic Dishonesty: The university's guidelines on academic dishonesty will be enforced. *Ignorance is not an excuse*. Please refer to these policies for more details or contact me with particular questions in order to avoid any problems. The university's policies can be found online here: [URL].

More information on plagiarism can be found here: <http://www.plagiarism.org/plagiarism-101/what-is-plagiarism/>

*A useful, but not foolproof, rule of thumb: When in doubt, err on the side of over-citing.

In this course you will be required to submit written assignments in electronic form to a plagiarism detection website called Turnitin (this is done automatically via the online paper dropbox). Your assignments become a permanent part of the Turnitin database, but will not be used for any other purpose than checking for plagiarism.

Disabilities: Students with documented physical or learning disabilities wishing to have special accommodations should contact me as soon as possible. In addition, the Office of Disability Services is available to assist you. They can be reached here: _____.

Phones and Computers: Unless a legitimate reason is provided, mobile phones and computers are to be off and put away for the duration of the class. Texting, or any other form of electronic communication, is strictly prohibited. Use of phones, computers, tablets, etc., will lower your participation grade.

Food and Drink: Please try to avoid bringing food into the classroom. However, in the exceptional case, choose being engaged in class while eating a snack over not eating and being unable to focus. Beverages in closed containers are welcome.

Conduct: Disagreement is a basic feature of philosophy and all other academic discourse. In this class, we will be discussing important and controversial issues. We may be engaging in discussions which challenge some of our most deeply held beliefs, and disagreement is sure to arise. For this reason, it is vital for each student, and myself, to always conduct ourselves with the utmost generosity and sensitivity toward one another and our authors. I reserve the right to steer discussions in whatever way I deem most appropriate to the day's lesson, and I will not tolerate rude, disrespectful, or offensive comments. If you are unsure whether something you plan to say or do could possibly be offensive, always talk to me before sharing it with the class.

Tentative Schedule

All readings should be completed by the date assigned.

“**R**” indicates a Reading Response assignment

“**V**” indicates a Video Response assignment

Date	Text	Page #
The World		
Week 1 Monism & Individual Objects	Intro to Course	
	Van Inwagen: Ch. 1 – Introduction Karen Bennet: There Is No Special Problem with Metaphysics	1-22 21-37
	Van Inwagen: Ch. 2 – Individuality	23-52
Week 2 Idealism; Time & Space	Van Inwagen: Ch. 3 – Externality George Berkeley: A Treatise Concerning the Principle of Human Knowledge <i>Recommended:</i> David Hume: An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding <i>Recommended:</i> C.S. Peirce: The Fixation of Belief	53-70 544-564 564-582 583-592
	Van Inwagen: Ch. 4 – Temporality Judith Jarvis Thomson: McTaggart on Time <i>Recommended:</i> J.M.E. McTaggart: Time Is Not Real <i>Recommended:</i> Parmenides: Being Is Not Temporal <i>Recommended:</i> Aristotle: Time Is a Measure of Change	V 71-106 229-252 44-55 8-10 14-21
Week 3 Persistence Through Time; Truth, Realism, & Anti- Realism	Alyssa Ney: Persistence <i>Recommended:</i> Plato: Phaedo <i>Recommended:</i> Aristotle: On Substance <i>Recommended:</i> Thomas Hobbes: Of Identity and Diversity <i>Recommended:</i> Sally Haslanger: Persistence Through Time	170-189 90-109 109-121 121-124 315-354
	Van Inwagen: Ch. 5 – Objectivity <i>Recommended:</i> W.V.O. Quine: Ontological Relativity <i>Recommended:</i> Richard Rorty: The World Well Lost <i>Recommended:</i> William P. Alston: Yes, Virginia, There Is a Real World	107-122 627-644 645-654 654-668
Week 4 Abstract Objects	Alyssa Ney: Abstract Entities	60-88
	Linda Wetzel: Types Exist <i>Recommended:</i> Gideon Rosen: Abstract Objects (<i>SEP</i>)	23-51 1-10
Week 5 Modality	Alyssa Ney: Modality Alvin Plantinga: Modalities: Basic Concepts and Distinctions	190-216 173-186
	David Lewis: A Philosopher’s Paradise Gideon Rosen: Modal Fictionalism	R 208-229 236-254
Week 6 Causation	Alyssa Ney: Causation <i>Recommended:</i> David Hume: Constant Conjunction <i>Recommended:</i> Thomas Reid: Efficient Cause and Active Power	217-238 285-289 290
	J.L. Mackie: Causes and Conditions G.E.M. Anscombe: Causality and Determination <i>Recommended:</i> Wesley Salmon: Causal Connections	362-377 306-320 405-418

God			
Week 7 The Concept of God; The Ontological Argument	Van Inwagen: Part 2 Introduction Sallie McFague: God and the World William Rowe: The Idea of God <i>Recommended:</i> Derek Parfit: Why Anything? Why This? <i>Recommended:</i> Thomas Morris: The Concept of God <i>Recommended:</i> Tina Beattie: Redeeming Mary <i>Recommended:</i> Elizabeth Johnson: Selection from <i>She Who Is</i>	R V	123-128 37-47 4-17 1-9 12-22 107-122 TBD
	Van Inwagen: Ch. 6 – Necessary Being: The Ontological Argument William Lane Craig: Five Arguments for God – The Ontological Argument <i>Recommended:</i> Anselm: The Ontological Argument <i>Recommended:</i> William Rowe: The Ontological Argument		129-158 24-27 709-710 37-51
Week 8 The Cosmological & Teleological Arguments	Van Inwagen: Ch. 7 – Necessary Being: The Cosmological Argument William Lane Craig: Five Arguments for God – the <i>Kalam</i> Cosmological Argument Paul Draper: A Critique of the <i>Kalam</i> Cosmological Argument <i>Recommended:</i> William Lane Craig: Five Arguments for God – The Cosmological Argument from Contingency <i>Recommended:</i> William Rowe: The Cosmological Argument		159-182 5-10 189-194 1-5 19-35
	Midterm Exam Due Date		
	William Rowe: The Design Argument (Old and New) William Lane Craig: Five Arguments for God – the Teleological Argument <i>Recommended:</i> Robin Collins: A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God		54-67 13-24 210-227
Week 9 Arguments Against God's Existence: Divine Hiddenness & Evil	J.L. Schellenberg: Divine Hiddenness Justifies Atheism Paul Moser: Divine Hiddenness Does Not Justify Atheism Replies <i>Recommended:</i> Michael Murray: Deus Absconditus <i>Recommended:</i> Michael Rea: Divine Hiddenness, Divine Silence	R V	30-41 42-53 54-58 369-382 383-392
	William Rowe: The Problem of Evil Grace Jantzen: Whose Problem Is the "Problem of Evil"? <i>Recommended:</i> Alvin Plantinga: The Free Will Defense <i>Recommended:</i> John Hick: Evil and Soul-Making <i>Recommended:</i> Paul Draper: Evolution and the Problem of Evil <i>Recommended:</i> Paul Draper: The Skeptical Theist <i>Recommended:</i> Bruce Russell & Stephen Wykstra: "The 'Inductive' Argument from Evil" <i>Recommended:</i> Laura Ekstrom: Suffering as Religious Experience <i>Recommended:</i> Marilyn McCord Adams: Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God	R	112-131 283-287 300-318 319-323 271-282 163-173 495-511 360-368 351-359
Persons			
Week 10 The Soul; Hylomorphism; Dualism vs. Physicalism	Plato: <i>Phaedo</i> Aristotle: <i>On the Soul</i> <i>Recommended:</i> Plato: The Allegory of the Cave		127-133 134-138 63-70
	Van Inwagen: Ch. 10 – The Nature of Rational Beings: Dualism and Physicalism Alvin Plantinga: Against Materialism <i>Recommended:</i> René Descartes: from Passions of the Soul <i>Recommended:</i> Gottfried Leibniz: "The Nature and Communication of Substances" <i>Recommended:</i> Nicolas Malebranche: from "The Union of Soul and Body"	V	223-248 3-22 109-114 119-121 115-118

Week 11 Dualism vs. Physicalism (Cont.); Buddhist Self	Jaegwon Kim: Lonely Souls: Causality and Substance Dualism R Alvin Plantinga: Response to Kim (from “Materialism and Christian Belief”) <i>Recommended:</i> William Hasker: Emergent Dualism <i>Recommended:</i> David Armstrong: The Nature of Mind <i>Recommended:</i> Gilbert Ryle: The Myth of the Ghost in the Machine	1-13 130-133 525-539 270-277 176-181
	Peter Harvey: Theravāda Philosophy of Mind and the Person Fazang: The Rafter Dialogue & Essay on the Golden Lion *Critical Paper Due*	265-274 80-91
Week 12 Personal Identity; Free Will	John Perry: “A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality” V <i>Recommended:</i> Thomas Hobbes: Of Identity and Diversity <i>Recommended:</i> John Locke: Of Identity and Diversity Supplement: <i>SEP</i> , John Locke: The Immateriality of the Soul and Personal Identity <i>Recommended:</i> Thomas Reid: Of Identity and Of Mr. Locke’s Theory of Personal Identity <i>Recommended:</i> David Hume: On Identity and Personal Identity <i>Recommended:</i> Derek Parfit: Personal Identity <i>Recommended:</i> Daniel Dennett: Where Am I?	1-23 121-124 124-134 1-3 135-140 140-148 562-574 1-8
	Van Inwagen: Ch. 12 – The Powers of Rational Beings: Freedom of the Will Harry Frankfurt: Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility R <i>Recommended:</i> G.E. Moore: Free Will <i>Recommended:</i> Harry Frankfurt: Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person <i>Recommended:</i> “Life Is a Coin With One Side” from <i>This American Life</i> Podcast	267-285 408-414 396-401 480-492
Week 13	NO CLASS: BREAK	
Week 14 Social Ontology	John Searle: The Building Blocks of Social Reality Sally Haslanger: Ontology and Social Construction R <i>Recommended:</i> Katherine Ritchie: What Are Groups?	1-30 83-112 257-272
	Alyssa Ney & Allan Hazlett: The Metaphysics of Race <i>Recommended:</i> Mpho Tshivhase: Personhood	259-279 347-360
Metametaphysics		
Week 15 Philosophy of Metaphysics	Karen Bennett: Composition, Colocation, and Metaontology David Chalmers: Ontological Anti-Realism	38-76 77-129
	Amie Thomasson: Answerable and Unanswerable Questions R Elizabeth Barnes: Going Beyond the Fundamental: Feminism in Contemporary Metaphysics	444-471 335-351
Final Exam		
Week 16	Due Date	