

Chapman University

Spring 2022

PHIL305: Metaphysics

Tuesday/Thursday 2.30-3:45 in Doti Hall 002

Instructor: Dr. Kelvin J. McQueen

Email: mcqueen@chapman.edu

Office hours: flexible, email me to schedule a meeting.

Course Description

Metaphysics studies the fundamental nature of our reality and of our selves. It focuses on what exists, and how everything that exists fits together. Questions considered are: Is there a fundamental level of reality? Is it purely physical? When and how do particles compose larger objects? How can one object constitute another? What constitutes a person or a self? What makes a person at a given time identical to a person at some later time? Do we have free will? Is free will consistent with laws of nature? What are laws of nature? Does God exist? Why does the universe exist? Are there multiple universes? Are we in a simulation? (3 credits. No restrictions.)

Required Readings

All readings are distributed through Canvas. Required readings are listed on page 3 below, most have been selected from the following textbooks:

[1] Alyssa Ney (2014). *Metaphysics: An Introduction*. Routledge.

[2] Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne, and Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.) (2008). *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Blackwell.

[3] Peter van Inwagen and Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.) (1998). *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*. Blackwell.

[4] Earl Conee and Theodore Sider (2005). *Riddles of Existence: a Guided Tour of Metaphysics*. Oxford University Press.

[5] Fischer, Kane, Pereboom & Vargas (eds.) (2007). *Four Views on Free Will*. Blackwell.

Additional readings can be found on Canvas modules and in the bibliographies of these readings. You will also find useful the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy: <https://plato.stanford.edu/> and the philpapers.org archive of philosophy papers. I am always happy to help students find additional readings on topics of interest.

In preparation for writing philosophical papers you must read:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

The following is a helpful guide to improving academic writing:

<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/jfb/bengor.pdf>

Course objectives

By the end of this class you should be able to:

1. Identify the main positions in prominent contemporary areas of metaphysics, articulate the motivations and reasons supporting these positions, and evaluate the relative merits of the arguments given in their defence.
2. Formulate your own views about topics in contemporary metaphysics and be able to explain and defend them orally (in class discussion) and in writing (in assessments).
3. Collaborate with others in the class, helping them clarify, sharpen, and strengthen the defence of their views.
4. Exhibit competence with abstract concepts and arguments orally and in writing.

Course Delivery

Lectures are given every Tuesday and Thursday 2.30-3.45pm. The lectures are recorded. We will cover 14 topics, one for each week of class. You will find 14 corresponding modules on canvas. The Tuesday lecture will typically be a lecture on that week's topic. You will need to have read the assigned reading for that lecture beforehand. The Thursday lecture will typically involve discussion activities that enable you to discuss that week's topic in depth. Each week you will also contribute to discussion boards for a portion of your grade. The remainder of your assessment will require you to write papers, details below.

Assessment and grading

Participation. 5%

You receive 5% simply for attending all lectures and participating constructively in group discussions. You are allowed three unexcused absences. Every subsequent unexcused absence will cost 1%. Failure to participate constructively in discussion group activities will also cost 1% per group activity.

Weekly discussion board contributions. 25%

Beginning week 2, you will be required to make *at least two* discussion board contributions per week. Links to discussion boards are found in the Canvas modules. Each week, you will **(1) respond to a posted prompt** (try to do this mid-week) and then **(2) provide constructive feedback** on someone else's response to the prompt. You have until Saturday night at midnight each week to complete your two contributions. **Late contributions will not be graded. Missed contributions cannot be made up.**

Short paper. Due: Sunday 11.59pm March 20. 30%

Write a philosophical paper on either the metaphysics of persons (weeks 2/3), composition (weeks 4/5), or the universe (weeks 6/7). 600-800 words. Upload to Canvas before deadline.

Long paper. Due: Tuesday 11.59pm May 17. 40%

Write a philosophical paper on either the metaphysics of time (weeks 8-10) or free will (weeks 12-14). A bibliography is necessary and must include at least 5 references including references to readings from multiple modules. Other than [SEP](#), websites are not counted as references. [Philpapers](#) is a great resource for finding more references. 1500-2500 words. Upload to Canvas before deadline.

General note: If a student is going to miss a paper deadline, the student must contact the instructor in advance to give a reason. Proof of the student's excuse is due asap.

Final grades will be assigned as follows:

A	93 - 100	B+	87 - 89	C+	77 - 79	D+	67 - 69
A-	90 - 92	B	83 - 86	C	73 - 76	D	60 - 66
		B-	80 - 82	C-	70 - 72	F	0 - 59

Schedule and required readings

The below required readings, as well as optional additional readings, are on Canvas modules.

Week	Tuesday lecture	Thursday lecture
1	<u>February 1</u> <i>Topic:</i> Existence questions.	<u>February 3</u> <i>Topic:</i> Paradoxes of material objects. <i>Required reading:</i> Ney (89-103)
2	<u>February 8</u> <i>Topic:</i> Personal identity. <i>Required reading:</i> Sider	<u>February 10</u> <i>Topic:</i> Personal identity. <i>Required reading:</i> Sider (cont.)
3	<u>February 15</u> <i>Topic:</i> The nature of persons <i>Required reading:</i> Parfit	<u>February 17</u> <i>Topic:</i> The nature of persons <i>Required reading:</i> Parfit (cont.)
4	<u>February 22</u> <i>Topic:</i> The composition question. <i>Required reading:</i> Ney (103-115)	<u>February 24</u> <i>Topic:</i> The composition question. <i>Required reading:</i> Ney (115-117)
5	<u>March 1</u> <i>Topic:</i> Restricted composition. <i>Required reading:</i> McQueen/Tsuchiya	<u>March 3</u> <i>Topic:</i> Restricted composition. <i>Required reading:</i> McQueen/Tsuchiya (cont.)
6	<u>March 8</u> <i>Topic:</i> Why does the universe exist? <i>Required reading:</i> Parfit (418-427)	<u>March 10</u> <i>Topic:</i> Does God exist? <i>Required reading:</i> Swinburne (427-429)
7	<u>March 15</u> <i>Topic:</i> Is the universe a simulation? <i>Required reading:</i> Bostrom	<u>March 17</u> <i>Topic:</i> Is the universe a simulation? <i>Required reading:</i> Bostrom (cont.)
Spring Break March 21-26		
8	<u>March 29</u> <i>Topic:</i> The nature of time <i>Required reading:</i> Ney (138-146)	<u>March 31</u> <i>Topic:</i> The argument for eternalism <i>Required reading:</i> recap Ney (143-4)
9	<u>April 5</u> <i>Topic:</i> A-theory vs B-theory of time <i>Required reading:</i> Ney (146-156)	<u>April 7</u> <i>Topic:</i> The truth-maker objection <i>Required reading:</i> Ney (156-162)
10	<u>April 12</u> <i>Topic:</i> Presentism <i>Required reading:</i> Zimmerman (211-221)	<u>April 14</u> <i>Topic:</i> Presentism <i>Required reading:</i> Zimmerman (221-223)
11	<u>April 19-21</u> <i>Topic:</i> Time travel; <i>Required reading:</i> Ney (162-167) This week I'm in Tucson presenting research. There will be one zoom lecture. I will announce closer to the time whether that will be Tuesday or Thursday (2.30-3.45).	
12	<u>April 26</u> <i>Topic:</i> The problem of free will <i>Required reading:</i> Ney (239-252)	<u>April 28</u> <i>Topic:</i> Theories of free will <i>Required reading:</i> Ney (252-257)
13	<u>May 3</u> <i>Topic:</i> The manipulation argument <i>Required reading:</i> Pereboom (85-7 & 93-101)	<u>May 5</u> <i>Topic:</i> Can we live without free will? <i>Required reading:</i> Pereboom (114-124)
14	<u>May 10</u> <i>Topic:</i> TBA <i>Required reading:</i> TBA	<u>May 12</u> <i>Topic:</i> TBA <i>Required reading:</i> TBA

No electronic device policy

Due to their [detrimental effect on learning](#), laptops, tablets, and similar devices are not permitted during class. Failure to comply will result in the loss of participation grades. If special circumstances require the use of such devices at some point during the semester, you must clear this with me in advance and provide the relevant documentation.

Mask Policy

N95 face coverings are required for faculty, staff and students in all indoor facilities (unless alone in a private office, or while actively eating or drinking). Until this policy changes, an approved accommodation is required to not wear a face covering during class.

Syllabus Change Policy and Course Schedule

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, the above syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

Lectures are Recorded

Software will be used to record live class discussions. As a student in this class, your participation in live class discussions will be recorded to assist those who cannot attend the live session, or to serve as a resource for those who would like to review content that was presented. These recordings will be made available only to students who are enrolled in the class, and only during the period in which the course is offered.

Academic Integrity Principle Statement

Chapman University is a community of scholars that emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will be subject to sanction by the instructor/administrator and referral to the University's Academic Integrity Committee, which may impose additional sanctions up to and including expulsion. For further information see: chapman.edu/academics/academic-integrity/.

Students with Disabilities

In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class should inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. The University no longer makes the initial contact with professors--the student does. The University will determine what accommodations are suitable based on documentation and individual student needs, and students will email this information, in pdf form, to their teachers. For contact details see chapman.edu/students/health-and-safety/disability-services/. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize the academic standards or integrity of the course.

Philosophy Program Learning Outcomes (PLO's)

PLO1: Writing

Ability to state and support a thesis, apply knowledge of critical reasoning, accurately interpret philosophic sources, and clearly communicate a balanced account in writing.

PLO2: Critical Reasoning

Ability to construct and analyze complex arguments, and distinguish good reasoning from bad.

PLO 3M&E: Metaphysics & Epistemology.

Ability to demonstrate knowledge of some of the most important figures and theories in metaphysics and epistemology.

PLO 3L: Logic:

Ability to demonstrate knowledge about and skill in deductive or inductive reasoning.

General Education Learning Outcomes

7VI: Values and Ethical Inquiry: Students will be able to articulate how values and ethics inform human understanding, structures, and behavior.

7SI: Social Inquiry: Students will be able to identify, frame and analyze social and historical structures and institutions in the world today.