

Philosophy 341: *Introduction to Metaphysics*

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Overview

Metaphysics is sometimes defined as the branch of philosophy that addresses fundamental questions about the nature of reality. In this course, we will consider five main topics: (1) causation, (2) freedom and determinism, (3) personal identity, (4) time, and (5) material objects. The aim of the course will be to educate students about some of the main issues, theses, and arguments concerning these topics.

Learning Outcomes

After successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- Characterize some of the main issues in contemporary metaphysics.
- Discuss the most important theses and arguments concerning those issues in an informed but neutral way.
- Articulate and defend their own views on these issues.

Course Requirements

- ❖ **Regular pop quizzes** (collectively worth 20% of final grade)
- ❖ **Five Short Papers** (collectively worth 10% of final grade)
- ❖ **Midterm Exam** (a take-home exam, worth 30% of final grade)
- ❖ **Final Exam** (a take-home exam, worth 40% of final grade)

Required Text

- *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, by John W. Carroll and Ned Markosian (Cambridge University Press, 2010). Available on Amazon. Digital version available on course website.

Recommended Readings

- [Berkeley: Ideas, Immaterialism, and Objective Presence](#), by Keota Fields (excellent discussion of Berkeley's famous argument for immaterialism; link is to publisher's page for the book)
- "Review of Rickless, *Berkeley's Argument for Idealism*," by Keota Fields (*Philosophical Quarterly* **64** (2014), pp. 170-172; available on course website)
- "[Feminist Metaphysics](#)," by Sally Haslanger and Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article; this and the other SEP articles listed below are available free online)
- "[The Metaphysics of Causation](#)," by Jonathan Schaffer (SEP article)
- "[Arguments for Incompatibilism](#)," by Kadri Vihvelin (SEP article)
- [Free Will: The Basics](#), by Meghan Griffith (short, clear introductory book; link is to Amazon page for the book)
- [Making Sense of Freedom and Responsibility](#), by Dana Kay Nelkin (original, book-length study by leading contemporary scholar; link is to Amazon page for the book)
- "[Reid on Memory and Personal Identity](#)," by Rebecca Copenhaver (SEP article)
- "[Functionalism](#)," by Janet Levin (SEP article)
- "[Anomalous Monism](#)," by Steven Yablo (SEP article)
- "Identity Through Time," by Marjorie S. Price (*Journal of Philosophy* **74** (1977), pp. 201-217; available on course website)
- "[Temporal Parts](#)," by Katherine Hawley (SEP article)
- "The Crooked Path from Vagueness to Four-Dimensionalism," by Kathrin Koslicki (*Philosophical Studies* **114** (2003), pp. 107-134; available on course website)
- "A Lockean Argument for Black Reparations," by Bernard Boxill (*The Journal of Ethics* **7** (2003), pp. 63-91; available on course website)
- "[Types and Tokens](#)", by Linda Wetzels (SEP article)

About Pop Quizzes

There will be approximately seven pop quizzes during the quarter. Pop quizzes will be designed to determine whether you have done the reading carefully. Doing the reading carefully involves (a) reading the relevant assignment several times, taking notes, while figuring out exactly what the main questions, theses, principles, objections, replies, counterexamples, and arguments are; as well as (b) thinking about what you take to be the best objections to those theses, principles, etc. (Here are three random examples of typical pop quiz questions: (1) Summarize Traphagen's main argument against Monism, and then briefly discuss what you take to be the best objection to that argument. (2) What is the point

of Schnell's field mouse example? (3) What was Holly's counterexample to Champion's Principle?)

If you miss a pop quiz you will get a zero on that quiz (unless you turn in a Quiz Paper – see below). But your two lowest quiz grades will be dropped. (Please note that no excuses – medical, athletic, or otherwise – will be accepted for missed pop quizzes. But that is one main reason for the generous policy of dropping your two lowest pop quiz grades.) Quizzes will be graded on a 100-point scale, but you will get 50 points merely for writing your name. Thus it behooves you to come to class (on time!) even if you did not manage to do the reading.

If you know in advance that you will miss class on a given day, you may choose to write a Quiz Paper for that day. A Quiz Paper is a two-page (typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins) paper in which you summarize the main thesis or argument from the reading and discuss an objection to that thesis or argument. Your Quiz Paper must be turned in *before* class on the relevant day (hard copies only; no emailed papers will be accepted), and it will be counted only if it turns out that there is a pop quiz on that day. If there is a quiz, then your Quiz Paper grade will count as your grade for that quiz.

About Short Papers

Details about the individual short paper assignments can be found below.

Each short paper is due at the beginning of class on the relevant day. (See the schedule below for specific due dates.) Hard copies only. Any paper turned in after the beginning of class will be considered late. Late papers will be penalized 1 point (out of 2 points). Late papers can be turned in until the beginning of the next class, but will not be accepted after that.

About Exams

There will be two take-home exams for this course – a midterm and a final. The midterm will consist of three 4-page essays on specific topics that will be posted on the course website, and the final will consist of three 5-page essays, also on specific topics that will be posted. In each case there will be several topics from which to choose.

The take-home exams will be designed to test your knowledge of both the readings and the lectures, as well as your ability to criticize the views and evaluate the arguments that we have studied.

Short Paper Assignments

- ❖ **First short paper assignment:** Write a 2-page paper in which you (i) formulate your favorite account of causation, and (ii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that account. (Two pages is the maximum. Your paper should be printed double-sided, with normal fonts and margins. *Be sure to bring two copies of your paper to class.*) Due at the beginning of class on February 7.

- ❖ **Second short paper assignment:** Write a 2-page paper in which you (i) formulate your favorite solution to the problem of freedom and determinism, and (ii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that solution. (Two pages is the maximum. Your paper should be printed double-sided, with normal fonts and margins. *Be sure to bring two copies of your paper to class.*) Due at the beginning of class on February 21.
- ❖ **Third short paper assignment:** Write a 2-page paper in which you (i) formulate your favorite theory of personal identity, and (ii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that theory. (Two pages is the maximum. Your paper should be printed double-sided, with normal fonts and margins. *Be sure to bring two copies of your paper to class.*) Due at the beginning of class on March 7.
- ❖ **Fourth short paper assignment:** Write a 2-page paper in which you (i) formulate your favorite theory of time, and (ii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that theory. (Two pages is the maximum. Your paper should be printed double-sided, with normal fonts and margins. *Be sure to bring two copies of your paper to class.*) Due at the beginning of class on March 30.
- ❖ **Fifth short paper assignment:** Write a 2-page paper in which you (i) formulate your favorite answer to The Special Composition Question, and (ii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that answer. (Two pages is the maximum. Your paper should be printed double-sided, with normal fonts and margins. *Be sure to bring two copies of your paper to class.*) Due at the beginning of class on April 27.

The Philosophy 341 Card System

The Philosophy 341 Card System is a system for handling in-class discussion. The main purposes of the card system are (a) to ensure that every student has an equal chance to be called on during classroom discussions, and (b) to prevent discussions from being dominated by a small handful of students.

Each student will receive two cards at the beginning of each class: one pink and one green. If you want to make a contribution during that day's class, you will hold up your pink card. If you get called on, you'll relinquish the pink card (but hang onto your green card). Then if you later want to make a second contribution you'll hold up your green card (and, if you get called on, you'll relinquish that one, too). If you want to get called on when you are out of cards, you can simply hold up an empty hand.

Pink cards will have priority over green cards which will have priority over empty hands.

Meanwhile, if you have a quick, non-substantive question (such as "Can you please scroll back up to the argument on the screen?" or "What did you say is the rationale for the third premise?"), then you can hold up just one finger rather than using one of your

cards. (But be warned: If you attempt to abuse the finger rule by using a finger to ask a substantive question, you will lose a card, and your question will be skipped.)

The Rules

Philosophical discussions (whether in class, after a talk, or in informal settings) can vary along a number of different dimensions. One of these is a spectrum that ranges from (a) a competitive, zero-sum game that involves scoring points and trying to appear smart, on one end, to (b) a cooperative and fun activity aimed at discovering and solving interesting philosophical problems, on the other end. In general, the closer a discussion is to the cooperative end of this spectrum, the better it will be – better because it produces better philosophy, and better also because it is more enjoyable for everyone involved.

Here are some rules designed to keep us on the right end of this spectrum.

1. Don't be mean.
2. Never interrupt. If you have a great point, it will still be a great point when it is your turn to speak.
3. Don't bogart the discussion. Some people are more shy than you. Many of them have excellent things to say. It pays to listen.
4. Think in terms of abstract ideas that, once expressed, are on their own, rather than ideas that belong to a particular person.
5. Don't try to impress anyone.
6. Do try to build on the points that have been made by others.
7. Try to make connections between the point currently under consideration and previous points.
8. Every once in a while during the discussion, someone should offer a big-picture comment. "So it seems to me that we were discussing X and Y. Did we ever come to any conclusion about whether X is consistent with Y?"
9. If you notice someone else breaking one of the first two rules, speak up right away, even if – *especially if* – you are not the victim.

Other Classroom Rules and Policies

Laptops and similar devices are permitted in class, but only for (a) taking notes or (b) viewing the textbook. If you plan to use a laptop or similar device in class, please talk to me beforehand so that you can take The Pledge (which involves solemnly swearing to use your device only for good and never for evil).

The use of cell phones, music players, headphones, ear buds, etc. is not permitted during class.

Schedule

Jan	24	Course Intro
	26	Causation: 2.1-2.3
	31	Causation: 2.4-2.5
Feb	2	Causation: 2.6-2.7
	7	First papers due
	9	Freedom and Determinism: 3.1-3.4
	14	Freedom and Determinism: 3.5-3.6
	16	Freedom and Determinism: 3.7-3.11
	21	Second papers due
	23	Personal Identity: 5.1-5.4
	28	Personal Identity: 5.5-5.7
Mar	2	<i>No class</i>
	7	Third papers due
	9	Midterm exam due at 5pm
	14	<i>Spring break</i>
	16	<i>Spring break</i>
	21	Time: 7.1-7.3
	23	Time: 7.4-7.7
	28	Time: 7.8-7.12
	30	Fourth papers due
Apr	4	Material Objects: 8.1-8.4
	6	Material Objects: 8.5-8.9
	11	<i>No class</i>
	13	<i>No class</i>
	18	<i>No class</i> (Monday schedule)
	20	Material Objects: 8.10-8.12
	25	Material Objects: 8.13-8.15
	27	Fifth papers due
May	2	<i>No class</i>
	4	Final exam due at 5pm