

Philosophy 341: *Introduction to Metaphysics*

Ned Markosian
Department of Philosophy
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Office Hours: TuTh 2:30-3:30
Office: South College E421
markosian@umass.edu
Spring 2020

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 six main topics:

- material objects
- the nature of time
- modality
- causation
- freedom and determinism
- science and metaphysics

The aim of the course will be to educate students about some of the main issues, theses, and arguments concerning these topics, so that the students may make up their own minds about these matters.

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.
- Write a clear, concise, and well-reasoned philosophy paper.

Course Requirements

- ❖ **Regular pop quizzes** (collectively worth 20% of final grade)
- ❖ **Four Short Papers** (each worth 20% of final grade)

Required Text

- Alyssa Ney, *Metaphysics: An Introduction* (Routledge, 2014). [Companion website here: [https://www.routledgetextbooks.com/textbooks/9780415640756/.](https://www.routledgetextbooks.com/textbooks/9780415640756/)]

Additional Required Readings

- Nina Emery, "Laws and Their Instances," *Philosophical Studies* 176 (2019), pp. 1535-1561.
- Nina Emery, "Mooreanism in Metaphysics from Mooreanism in Physics," (manuscript).

Recommended Readings

- Bernard Boxill, "A Lockean Argument for Black Reparations," *The Journal of Ethics* 7 (2003), pp. 63-91. Available on the course website.
- Helena de Bres, [The Pink Guide to Philosophy](https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy/), <https://sites.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/pinkguidetophilosophy/>. An extremely useful (free, online) resource for philosophy students, with excellent information about how to read philosophy and how to write a philosophy paper.
- Rebecca Copenhaver, "[Reid on Memory and Personal Identity](#)," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. This and the other SEP articles listed here are available free online.
- Nina Emery, "Against Radical Quantum Ontologies," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 95 (2017), pp. 564-591. Available on the course website.
- Keota Fields, [Berkeley: Ideas, Immaterialism, and Objective Presence](#) (Rowman & Littlefield, 2011). An excellent discussion of Berkeley's famous argument for immaterialism. Link is to publisher's page for the book.
- Keota Fields, "Review of Rickless, *Berkeley's Argument for Idealism*," *Philosophical Quarterly* 64 (2014), pp. 170-172. Available on the course website.
- Meghan Griffith, [Free Will: The Basics](#) (Routledge, 2013). A short, clear introductory book. The link is to the Amazon page for the book.
- Sally Haslanger and Ásta, "[Feminist Metaphysics](#)," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Katherine Hawley, "[Temporal Parts](#)," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Kathrin Koslicki, "The Crooked Path from Vagueness to Four-Dimensionalism," *Philosophical Studies* 114 (2003), pp. 107-134. Available on the course website.
- Janet Levin, "[Functionalism](#)," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

- Dana Kay Nelkin, [*Making Sense of Freedom and Responsibility*](#) (Oxford University Press, 2013). An original, book-length study by a leading contemporary scholar. The link is to the Amazon page for the book.
- Marjorie S. Price, "Identity Through Time," *The Journal of Philosophy* 74 (1977), pp. 201-217. Available on the course website.
- Jonathan Schaffer, "[The Metaphysics of Causation](#)," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Kadri Vihvelin, "[Arguments for Incompatibilism](#)," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Linda Wetzel, "[Types and Tokens](#)," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Steven Yablo, "[Anomalous Monism](#)," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

About Pop Quizzes

There will be approximately 7-8 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 fictional 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 Campion'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 paper (double-spaced, with one-inch margins) in which you (i) summarize the most interesting thesis or argument from the reading and (ii) discuss an objection to that thesis or argument. ***Your Quiz Paper must be emailed to me in the form of a PDF before noon on the relevant class day***, 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 noon on the relevant day. (See the schedule below for specific due dates.) You must turn in your paper via Turnitin on Moodle. Any paper turned in after the deadline will be considered late. Late papers will be penalized 10 points (out of 100) per day.

We will still have class at the regular time on days when a paper is due (except for the day the sixth paper is due), and there may be a pop quiz on any such day.

Each short paper assignment calls for you to write a 4- or 5-page paper (double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins). If your paper is shorter than 4 pages, it is probably not as detailed and substantive as it should be. If your paper is longer than 5 pages, it is probably too long, and in need of editing.

There are six short paper assignments, but your two lowest short paper grades will be dropped. (Which means that in principle you could get away with writing only four papers.)

Short Paper Assignments

- ❖ **First short paper assignment:** Write a 4- or 5-page paper (double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins) in which you (i) formulate and explain your favorite response to The Special Composition Question, and (ii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that response.
- ❖ **Second short paper assignment:** Write a 4- or 5-page paper (double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins) in which you (i) formulate and explain your favorite combination of views about time and persistence, and (ii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that combination of views.
- ❖ **Third short paper assignment:** Write a 4- or 5-page paper (double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins) in which you (i) formulate and explain your favorite theory about the metaphysics of modality, and (ii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that theory.
- ❖ **Fourth short paper assignment:** Write a 4- or 5-page paper (double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins) in which you (i) formulate and explain your favorite theory of causation, and (ii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that theory.
- ❖ **Fifth short paper assignment:** Write a 4- or 5-page paper (double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins) in which you (i) formulate and explain your favorite response to the free will problem, and (ii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that response.
- ❖ **Sixth short paper assignment:** Select a topic from our final two readings (on science and metaphysics), and write a 4- or 5-page paper (double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins) on that topic. Be sure to (i) formulate and explain very clearly what exactly is at stake, and (ii) present, explain, and evaluate the most interesting argument regarding that topic that you find in the reading.

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 on to 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 "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.

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. Think of your job as trying to develop those ideas, making them clearer, stronger, better.
6. Try to build on points that have been made by others, whenever possible.

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 (even if it is just a question). "So it seems to me that we were discussing X and Y. Did we ever come to any conclusion about whether Y is consistent with X?"
9. If you notice someone 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 readings. 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

Note: *MAI* = Alyssa Ney, *Metaphysics: An Introduction*

- | | | |
|-----|----|--|
| Jan | 21 | <i>MAI</i> , Logic for Metaphysics, pp. 1-28 |
| | 23 | <i>MAI</i> , Material Objects, pp. 89-100 |
| | 28 | <i>MAI</i> , Material Objects, pp. 100-114 |
| | 30 | <i>MAI</i> , Material Objects, pp. 114-117 |
| Feb | 4 | First short paper due |
| | 6 | <i>MAI</i> , Time, pp. 138-152 |
| | 11 | <i>MAI</i> , Time, pp. 152-168 |
| | 13 | <i>MAI</i> , Persistence, pp. 170-181 |
| | 18 | <i>No class (Monday schedule)</i> |
| | 20 | <i>MAI</i> , Persistence, pp. 182-189 |
| | 25 | Second short paper due |
| | 27 | <i>MAI</i> , Modality, pp. 190-201 |
| Mar | 3 | <i>MAI</i> , Modality, pp. 202-211 |
| | 5 | <i>MAI</i> , Modality, pp. 211-216 |
| | 10 | Third short paper due |
| | 12 | <i>MAI</i> , Causation, pp. 217-222 |

- 17 *Spring break*
19 *Spring break*
- 24 *MAI*, Causation, pp. 223-232
26 *MAI*, Causation, pp. 232-237
- 31 **Fourth short paper due**
Apr 2 *MAI*, Free Will, pp. 239-246
- 7 *MAI*, Free Will, pp. 246-251
9 *No class*
- 14 *MAI*, Free Will, pp. 252-258
16 **Fifth short paper due**
- 21 Emery, "Laws and Their Instances"
23 Emery, "Laws and Their Instances"
- 28 Emery, "Mooreanism in Metaphysics from Mooreanism in Physics"
- May 6 **Sixth short paper due**