

Philosophy 341: *Introduction to Metaphysics*

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 1:00pm-2:00pm. South College E421.

Course 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)
- ❖ **Three Short Papers** (collectively worth 80% 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," *Inquiry* (forthcoming).

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, 2nd edition, 2021). 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.
- Kadri Vihvelin, "[Arguments for Incompatibilism](#)," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
- Linda Wetzel, "[Types and Tokens](#)," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

About Pop Quizzes

There will be approximately 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 5:00pm 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.

Each short paper assignment calls for you to write a paper of about 1500-2000 words (that's about 4 or 5 pages, double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins). If your paper is shorter than 1500 words, it is probably not as detailed and substantive as it should be. If your paper is longer than 2000 words, it is probably too long, and in need of editing.

There are six short paper assignments, but only your three best short paper grades will count toward your final grade.

Short Paper Assignments

- ❖ **First short paper assignment:** Write a paper of about 1500-2000 words (that's about 4 or 5 pages, double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins) in which you (i) formulate and explain your favorite response to The Special Composition Question, (ii) give your reasons for preferring that response, and (iii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that response.
- ❖ **Second short paper assignment:** Write a paper of about 1500-2000 words (that's about 4 or 5 pages, double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins) in which you

(i) formulate and explain your favorite combination of views about time and persistence, (ii) give your reasons for preferring that combination, and (iii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that combination of views.

- ❖ **Third short paper assignment:** Write a paper of about 1500-2000 words (that's about 4 or 5 pages, double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins) in which you (i) formulate and explain your favorite theory about the metaphysics of modality, (ii) give your reasons for preferring that theory, and (iii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that theory.
- ❖ **Fourth short paper assignment:** Write a paper of about 1500-2000 words (that's about 4 or 5 pages, double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins) in which you (i) formulate and explain your favorite theory of causation, (ii) give your reasons for preferring that theory, and (iii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that theory.
- ❖ **Fifth short paper assignment:** Write a paper of about 1500-2000 words (that's about 4 or 5 pages, double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins) in which you (i) formulate and explain your favorite response to the free will problem, (ii) give your reasons for preferring that response, and (iii) 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 paper of about 1500-2000 words (that's about 4 or 5 pages, double-spaced, with normal fonts and margins) on that topic. Be sure to (i) explain very clearly what exactly is at stake, (ii) formulate and explain the view on this topic that you endorse, (iii) give your reasons for preferring that view, and (iv) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that view.

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 a closed fist rather than using one of your cards.

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*

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| Feb | 7 | <i>MAI</i> , Logic for Metaphysics, pp. 1-28 |
| | 9 | <i>MAI</i> , Material Objects, pp. 89-100 |
| | 14 | <i>MAI</i> , Material Objects, pp. 100-114 |
| | 16 | <i>MAI</i> , Material Objects, pp. 114-117 |
| | 19 | First short paper due at 5pm |
| | 21 | <i>MAI</i> , Time, pp. 138-152 |
| | 23 | <i>MAI</i> , Time, pp. 152-168 |
| | 28 | <i>Snow day</i> |
| Mar | 2 | <i>MAI</i> , Persistence, pp. 170-181 |
| | 7 | <i>MAI</i> , Persistence, pp. 182-189 |
| | 9 | |
| | 12 | Second short paper due at 5pm |

- 14 *Spring break*
 16 *Spring break*
- 21 *MAI, Modality*, pp. 190-201
 23 *MAI, Modality*, pp. 202-211
- 28 *MAI, Modality*, pp. 211-216
 30 *MAI, Causation*, pp. 217-222
- Apr 2 **Third short paper due at 5pm**
- 4 *No class*
 6 *No class*
- 11 *MAI, Causation*, pp. 223-232
 13 *MAI, Causation*, pp. 232-237
 16 **Fourth short paper due at 5pm**
- 18 *No class* (Patriot's Day Holiday)
 20 *MAI, Free Will*, pp. 239-246
- 25 *MAI, Free Will*, pp. 246-251
 27 *MAI, Free Will*, pp. 252-258
- May 2
- 4 Emery, "Laws and Their Instances," Sections 1-5
 7 **Fifth short paper due at 5pm**
- 9 Emery, "Laws and Their Instances," Sections 6-8
 11 Emery, "Mooreanism in Metaphysics from Mooreanism in Physics," Sections 1-4
- 16 Emery, "Mooreanism in Metaphysics from Mooreanism in Physics," Sections 5-7
 21 **Sixth short paper due at 5pm**