

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 eight main topics:

- material objects
- the nature of time
- modality
- causation
- free will
- natural and social kinds
- the metaphysics of race and gender
- laws of nature

The aim of the course will be to educate students about some of the main issues, views, 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 25% of final grade)
- ❖ **Three Short Papers** (each worth 25% of final grade)

Required Text

- Alyssa Ney, *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, Second Edition (Routledge, 2023). [Companion website [here](#).]

Additional Required Reading

- Nina Emery, "Laws and Their Instances," *Philosophical Studies* 176 (2019), pp. 1535-1561.

Recommended Readings

- Sara Bernstein, "The Metaphysics of Intersectionality," *Philosophical Studies* 177 (2020), pp. 321-335.
- Bernard Boxill, "A Lockean Argument for Black Reparations," *The Journal of Ethics* 7 (2003), pp. 63-91. Available on the course website.
- John W. Carroll and Ned Markosian, *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- 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.
- Nina Emery, "Mooreanism in Metaphysics from Mooreanism in Physics," *Inquiry* (forthcoming). 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 10 pop quizzes during the semester. 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 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 Quiz Paper option, as well as 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 class on the relevant day*, and it will be counted only if it turns out that there is a pop quiz on that day. If there is a pop 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 course schedule 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. Extensions are possible, but you must email me before the deadline for a paper to get an extension on that paper.

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 seven short paper assignments, and you can turn in as many short papers as you want, 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:** 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 view on the metaphysics of race and/or gender, (ii) give your reasons for preferring that view, and (iii) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to your view.
- ❖ **Seventh 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) on Emery's argument in "Laws and Their Instances." Be sure to (i) explain very clearly what exactly is at stake, (ii) formulate and explain Emery's view on this topic, (iii) present and explain Emery's argument, and (iv) discuss what you take to be the best possible objection to that argument.

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.

Academic Honesty

Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, the use of AI to generate text that is included in any assignment, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty. Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible. Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent. For more information on campus policies, please visit:

https://www.umass.edu/dean_students/campus-policies.

Accommodations

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements. For further information, please visit the UMass Disability Services website:

<https://www.umass.edu/disability/>.

Title IX

In accordance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 that prohibits gender-based discrimination in educational settings that receive federal funds, the University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students, free from all forms of discrimination, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and retaliation. This includes interactions in person or online through digital platforms and social media. Title IX also protects against discrimination on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, miscarriage, abortion, or related conditions, including recovery. There are resources here on campus to support you. A summary of the available Title IX resources (including both confidential and non-confidential resources) can be found at the following link:

<https://www.umass.edu/equalopportunity/titleix>.

You do not need to make a formal report to access these resources. If you need immediate support, you are not alone. Free and confidential support is available 24 hours a day / 7 days a week / 365 days a year at the SASA Hotline 413-545-0800.

Schedule

Note: *MAI* = Alyssa Ney, *Metaphysics: An Introduction* (2nd Edition)

- Feb 1 *MAI*, Logic for Metaphysics, Sections 1.1-1.7
- 6 *MAI*, Material Objects, Sections 3.1-3.3
- 8 *MAI*, Material Objects, Sections 3.4-3.7
- 13 *MAI*, Material Objects, Sections 3.8-3.9
- 15 *MAI*, Time, Sections 8.1-8.3
- 18 **First short paper due at 5pm**
- 20 *MAI*, Time, Sections 8.4-8.5
- 22 *No class* (Monday schedule)
- 27 *MAI*, Time, Section 8.6
- 29 *MAI*, Persistence, Sections 9.1-9.3
- Mar 5 *MAI*, Persistence, Sections 9.4-9.6
- 7 *MAI*, Modality, Sections 10.1-10.3
- 10 **Second short paper due at 5pm**
- 12 *MAI*, Modality, Sections 10.4-10.5
- 14 *MAI*, Modality, Sections 10.6-10.7
- 19 *Spring break*
- 21 *Spring break*
- 24 **Third short paper due at 5pm**
- 26 *MAI*, Causation, Sections 11.1-11.2
- 28 *MAI*, Causation, Sections 11.3-11.4
- Apr 2 *MAI*, Causation, Sections 11.5-11.6
- 4 *MAI*, Free Will, Sections 12.1-12.3

7 Fourth short paper due at 5pm

9 *MAI*, Free Will, Sections 12.4-12.5

11 *MAI*, Free Will, Sections 12.6-12.7

16 *MAI*, Free Will, Section 12.8

18 *MAI*, Natural and Social Kinds, Sections 5.1-5.3

21 Fifth short paper due at 5pm

23 *MAI*, Natural and Social Kinds, Sections 5.4-5.7

25 *MAI*, The Metaphysics of Race and Gender, Sections 6.1-6.4

30 *MAI*, The Metaphysics of Race and Gender, Sections 6.5-6.10

May 2 Emery, "Laws and Their Instances," Sections 1-5

5 Sixth short paper due at 5pm

7 Emery, "Laws and Their Instances," Sections 6-8

9 Course wrap-up

15 Seventh short paper due at 5pm