

Metaphysics

TTh 9:30–10:50 · Ridge Walk 426

PHIL 130

Description

Metaphysics is the philosophical investigation into the fundamental nature of reality. It tries to address two very broad questions: what is there and what is it like? This course explores classic metaphysical questions of this sort. Topics include: material and abstract objects, personal identity, gender and race, possibility and necessity, free will, determinism and the existence of God.

Prerequisites: upper-division standing or consent of instructor

Instructor

Instructor: Arc Kocurek
Email: akocurek@ucsd.edu
Office Hours: Th 3–4 · Ridge Walk 445

Readings

All required readings are available on Canvas.

Below are some optional introductory texts that I think are good.

- Alyssa Ney, *Metaphysics: An Introduction*
- Earl Conee and Theodore Sider, *Riddles of Existence*
- Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne, and Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*

Grades

Attendance	8%	18 lectures, 0.5% per lecture (2 skips)
Reading Guides	12%	9 in total, 1.5% each, graded for completion
Papers	50%	2 in total, 25% each
Final Exam	30%	short essay, in-person, list of prompts provided in advance

Assignments

Attendance

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each lecture. Each lecture attended is worth 0.5%. The maximum you can earn in this category is 8% (so you can miss 2 lectures without penalty). Absences will only be excused for approved reasons (e.g., illness, family or medical emergencies) and may require documentation.

Reading Guides

Each week, there will be a reading guide posted on Canvas containing a list of questions about the readings for that week. You must submit your answers to these questions by **the end of the day on Friday**. These are graded for completion. There are 9 reading guides in total. Each reading guide is worth 1.5% (so you can skip 1 week without penalty).

Papers

There will be two paper assignments, each worth 25% of your grade. Each paper should be between 1200–1500 words (\approx 5–6 pages, double spaced). Prompts will be given on Canvas.

- Paper 1 due **October 23**
- Paper 2 due **November 22**

Final Exam

There will be a final exam on **Thursday, December 12 (8:00–10:59am)**; location TBD). It will consist of short essays based on the reading guides. A list of potential prompts will be provided in advance.

Policies

Paper Extensions

If you need an extension on a paper assignment, just ask. While I reserve the right to not grant an extension, I will typically grant one if a student asks (especially if they ask *in advance*, i.e., at least 48 hours *before* the deadline). However, paper assignments will not be accepted more than a week after the deadline. Exceptions will only be made in extreme circumstances (e.g., family or medical emergency) and may require documentation.

Academic Integrity

We strictly adhere to the University Academic Integrity Policy (<https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/process/policy.html>). It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with this policy and what constitutes a violation of it. All work submitted must be the student's own, and all sources must be properly cited. Any violation of this policy will be reported immediately. Violations will, at the very least, result in an F on the assignment, but may also lead to an F in the class, suspension, or even expulsion.

Schedule

Week 0: Introduction

- 9/26 | *Recommended (but not required):*
Alyssa Ney, "An Introduction to Ontology"

Existence

Week 1: Warm Up

- 10/1 | David & Stephanie Lewis, "Holes"
10/3 | Chris Swoyer, "Abstract Entities"

Week 2: Immaterial Objects

- 10/8 | Earl Conee, "Universals"
10/10 | Amie Thomasson, "Fictional Entities"

Week 3: Material Objects

- 10/15 | James Van Cleve, "The Moon and Sixpence"
10/17 | Theodore Sider, "Constitution"

Identity

Week 4: Personal Identity

- 10/22 | Judith Jarvis Thomson, "People and Their Bodies"
10/23 | **PAPER 1 DUE**
10/24 | Derek Parfit, "Persons, Bodies, and Human Beings"

Week 5: Gender and Race

- 10/29 | Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?" (pages 31–39, 42–45)
10/31 | Jennifer Saul, "Gender and Race" (pages 119–127 + section 4)

Modality

Week 6: Possible Worlds

- 11/5 | David K. Lewis, "Possible Worlds"
11/7 | —No class (Arc is away)—

Week 7: Necessity and the A Priori

- 11/12 | A. J. Ayer, "The A Priori" (pp. 81–83 are optional)
11/14 | Saul Kripke, "Identity and Necessity", pp. 135–158 (up to end of first paragraph)

Week 8: Free Will and Determinism

- 11/19 | Alyssa Ney, "Free Will"
- 11/21 | Manuel Vargas, "Revisionism"
- 11/22 | **PAPER 2 DUE**

Week 9: Thanksgiving break (no class)

Week 10: God

- 12/3 | St. Anselm & Gaunilo, "The Ontological Argument"
- 12/3 | Laura Garcia, "Ontological Arguments for God's Existence"
- 12/5 | John Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence"

Week 11: Final Exam

- 12/12 | **FINAL EXAM**