

PHIL 310 – Metaphysics

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Office: Main Hall 410
Office Hours: 11am – 12pm T/Th
or by appointment on T/Th afternoon

I. Required Texts

Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons*.

Additional readings will be linked to in Moodle and sent out via email.

II. Course Description

This is an introductory survey course in Metaphysics. Roughly, Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that inquires into the nature of reality. To put it in terms of a simplified slogan, Metaphysicians try to figure out what there is and what it's like.

We don't have anywhere near enough time to study all the important topics that metaphysicians discuss, so we'll have to make do with a small sample. Among other things, we'll discuss the nature of objects and their properties, including the nature of particular objects like you and me, as well as the nature of objects in general. Among other things, we'll discuss composition, change, and time.

However remote, abstract, and inconsequential some of these topics may seem, many of them have their own intrinsic interest (at least to metaphysicians). Many of them also bear directly on other topics in philosophy and on scientific inquiry. Hopefully, you'll come to see how some of these topics bear on some of these issues, including issues about ourselves: what we are, what we're like, and what relations we bear to one another and to the world around us.

III. Course Objectives

You won't do well in this course just by memorizing facts. This course is meant to help you develop various **skills**, among them reading, writing and critical thinking skills. You will do this by 1) examining philosophical texts and arguments and 2) advancing and defending your own arguments in speech and writing. You'll learn to identify and evaluate arguments and to formulate and defend your own arguments. This is very difficult. Academic philosophy demands formalism, rigor and a lot of careful thought.

You're going to have to put a lot of effort into trying to understand the readings. You'll also have to **think** about the positions and arguments we'll discuss. This means thinking both about the particular readings we cover – e.g., the claims made by particular authors – and more generally about the particular issues discussed in those readings. In an important sense, you have to be prepared to **go beyond the readings** – say by identifying relevant issues that may not have been discussed by an author and determining how they might bear on the author's arguments and more generally on different arguments and positions regarding the topic at issue. You'll be expected to challenge your beliefs by

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evaluating arguments for and against those beliefs and also to evaluate positions on issues you may not have thought much about before. In the process, I hope you'll learn to become careful, sober, objective, but still enthusiastic and imaginative thinkers.

IV. Course Requirements

<u>Grade Distribution</u>	<u>Grading Scale</u>		
Attendance: 10%	A: 94-100	A-: 90-93	
Participation: 20%	B+: 87-89	B: 83-86	B-: 80-82
3 Short Papers: 30%	C+: 77-79	C: 73-76	C-: 70-72
Term Paper: 35%	D: 60-69	F: 0-59	
Term Paper Draft: 5%			

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. I take attendance. Everyone gets **one** unexcused absence. Further absences will reduce your grade, directly detracting from your attendance and participation scores and indirectly detracting from the other parts of your grade. You are solely responsible for acquiring notes, handouts, etc. for days you are absent and should check with me to see if you missed any announcements.

Papers

You'll write one term paper at least 1500 words long (5-6 double spaced pages) on a topic of your choice. You must get my approval on the topic first, however (it will have to be one of the topics discussed in the readings). I'll also provide a handout outlining how papers should be written. A rough draft is required. I'll read it and suggest revisions.

You'll also write 3 short (1.5-3 page) papers on topics of your choice. The purpose of these short papers is to get you to think as you read. As you read, if you spot a particular argument or claim that you disagree with (or agree with but think more can be said in support of), you can write a short paper on the issue. These papers can be on any issue dealt with in the readings. What you write on is up to you. These papers should meet the same general standards as the term paper (see the paper guidelines handout), though the grading will be slightly more lenient, given that the objective is primarily to get you thinking about the issues we're reading about. You may turn in 1 draft of each short paper if you would like suggestions for revision. Just be sure you give me a reasonable amount of time to get it back to you before the due date.

Reading

You won't do well unless you do the readings. This should constitute the bulk of the coursework. Reading philosophy is difficult and time consuming. Budget your time accordingly, paying particular attention to the length of each reading well before the day it needs to be read – unavoidably, some days will involve more reading than others (because we meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays, you may want to read part of some Thursday readings before our Tuesday meetings). Take brief notes on each piece, identify the most important parts (for more reading), jot down questions and comments to bring up in class, etc.

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Participation

Discussion is crucial to philosophy and will factor significantly in your grade. Participation is 20% of your grade. Failing to speak regularly will significantly impact your grade. If you do not speak at all, you'll get a 0 for your participation score. Hence, the best you can do in this class without talking – even if all your other scores are perfect (and I promise you that they won't be) – will be a B-. The *rough* standard for a perfect participation score is this: say something substantive at least twice a week. My advice is this: if you have something to say, say it – even if you're worried that it might be a lousy idea. Quality doesn't factor into the participation score much, if at all, and you can't come up with good ideas if you're afraid of trying out bad ones.

I intend this to be primarily a discussion driven class. You are expected to come to class prepared to engage in serious discussion. To do this you will have to carefully read and think about the assigned readings. **You also have to be prepared to think on your feet.** You can ask questions and offer comments any time. I realize that speaking in class can be difficult, but learning to articulate your thoughts is an important skill that this course is intended to help you develop. There's no way around it. If you find it difficult to talk, try to force yourself to do so (thinking up questions or comments in advance, say while reading, can help). If you can't bring yourself to talk in class, I strongly recommend that you consider taking another course.

V. Additional Policies

Academic Dishonesty

If you cheat or plagiarize, I'll catch you and you'll regret it. I enforce the University's policy on academic dishonesty without exception. If you plagiarize or cheat on any assignment, no matter how seemingly insignificant, the incident will be reported to the Dean of Student Academic Services and to the Honor Council. Even if you plagiarize a paper draft, the incident will be reported. You must write the following statement on all assignments, followed by your signature: "I reaffirm the LU Honor Pledge."

Excuse policy

If an emergency (serious illness, injury, passing of a friend or family member) forces you to miss class or renders you unable to hand in an assignment on time, try to contact me beforehand (a short email is fine). If you miss a deadline, we'll agree on an extension deadline. Vacations, oversleeping, forgetfulness, hangovers, existential crises, etc. are not acceptable reasons (either individually or in combination). Plan your term accordingly.

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VI. Tentative Schedule

Readings marked ‘*’ will be sent out via email

Readings marked ‘+’ will be linked to in Moodle

OP = *Objects and Persons*

Week 1 The Existence of God Possible Worlds	3/30 – Introduction 4/1 – *Plantinga – selection: <i>God, Freedom, and Evil</i>
Week 2 Possible Worlds Composition	4/6 – +deRosset – Possible Worlds I: Modal Realism *optional: Lewis – selection: <i>On The Plurality of Worlds</i> 4/8 – *McDaniel – Parts and Wholes
Week 3 Composition Change	4/13 – +Rea – In Defense of Mereological Universalism 4/15 – *Olson – The Paradox of Increase
Week 4 Change Properties	4/20 – **Short Paper 1 due** +Wasserman – The Problem of Change +Hinchliff – The Puzzle of Change 4/22 – *Russell – The Problems of Philosophy, Chs. 9-10 +Jackson – Statements About Universals
Week 5 Properties Time, etc.	4/27 – *Daly – Tropes 4/29 – +Sider – Four-Dimensionalism
Week 6 Time, etc.	5/4 – *Prior – The Notion of the Present, Changes in Events and Changes in Things, and Some Free Thinking About Time 5/6 – Reading Day (no class)
Week 7 Composition (again), and lots more	5/11 – **Short Paper 2 due** <i>OP</i> , Chs 1-2 5/13 – <i>OP</i> , Ch 3
Week 8 Composition (again), and lots more	5/18 – <i>OP</i> , Chs 4-5 5/20 – <i>OP</i> , Ch 6
Week 9 Personal Identity Consciousness	5/25 – +Olson – Was Jekyll Hyde? 5/27 – *Chalmers – The Puzzle of Conscious Experience +Dennett – Real Patterns
Week 10 Free Will Metaethics	6/1 – **Short Paper 3 due** *Van Inwagen – The Consequence Argument, The Mystery of Metaphysical Freedom *O’Connor – The Agent as Cause 6/3 – *Bedke – Intuitive Non-Naturalism Meets Cosmic Coincidence 6/7 **Term Papers due** (at noon – by email)