**Metaphysics**

PHIL3601

Summer 2020

Instructor: Andrew Richmond

Location: Zoom, link on Courseworks

Date/Time: M/T/W/R, 1:00-2:35pm (July 6 – Aug 14)

Office Hours: Every day after class, or by appointment

**Course Description**

Metaphysics is the study of two questions: *what is there*, and *what it’s like*? The questions, of course, are deceptively simple. Metaphysicians ask whether there are such things as selves, souls, or minds, and they ask about the most fundamental building blocks of reality. E.g., what is nature made up of, at the most basic level? The standard answer is that there are two kinds of things: objects and properties. Is that right? And if it is, what *are* objects and properties? And how exactly do they build the world we live in?

We’ll start by discussing some difficult cases, close to home — the metaphysics of the self and free will. Then we’ll move to more fundamental questions about the building blocks of reality. Finally, we’ll discuss higher-order questions about metaphysics itself. Does metaphysics reveal the way the world is independently of us? Or does it only describe the concepts we use to think about the world? And since science is one of our best tools for understanding the world, what is the role of science role in metaphysics?

By the end of the course, you will be comfortable with central debates in contemporary metaphysics and prepared for more advanced courses in the subject. You will have gained experience evaluating arguments, writing argumentative papers, and participating in group inquiry into difficult problems. And you will be able to take a philosophically- and metaphysically-informed perspective on concrete problems.

**Texts**

All the readings will be available in the “Files” section of Courseworks, in the “Readings” folder.

**Assessment**

*Participation*  *Logs* 20%

*Writing Exercises* 20%

*First Paper* 25%

*Final* *Paper* 35%

As their due dates come up, the details for the assignments will be available in the “Files” section of Courseworks, in the “Assignments” folder.

 *Participation Logs:* You should come to class having done the readings, and having reflected on the “focus questions” attached to them. We’ll discuss those questions in class, in breakout groups and then as a whole class. For your participation grade, you’ll submit two participation logs, worth 10% each. In those logs you’ll describe some of your contributions to our discussions, and reflect on the way that your participation contributed to the class.

 *Writing Exercises*. These are four short assignments (100-300 words), worth 5% each. They will give you the chance to practice the basic skills needed to write a successful argumentative paper. The instructions will be posted on Courseworks.

 *First Paper.* A 1000-word paper, explaining one of the debates we’ve discussed in class and arguing for a position on it. (You can also pick a different debate, or some other topic, in consultation with me.)

*Final Paper*. A 2000-word paper, explaining one of the debates we’ve discussed in class and arguing for a position on it. (You can also pick a different debate, or some other topic, in consultation with me.) If you work hard at the writing exercises and the first paper, you’ll be well-prepared to write a successful paper.

**Schedule and Readings**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Topic** | **Reading** | **Due** |
| 7/6 | Introduction |  |  |
| 7/7 | Selves (1): Introduction | Conee & Sider, Chapter 1 |  |
| 7/8 | Selves (2): Bundles and the “Deep Self” | Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Part 4, Section 6 |  |
| 7/9 | Selves (3): Bodies and Minds | Thomson, “People and their Bodies” | **Writing Exercise 1** |
| 7/13 | Selves (4) A Cognitive Approach | 1. Dennett, “Where am I?”2. Ismael, “Saving the Baby” |  |
| 7/14 | Freedom (1): Introduction | Conee & Sider, Chapter 6 |  |
| 7/15 | Freedom (2): Compatibilism | Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility” |  |
| 7/16 | Freedom (3): Hard Determinism | Strawson, G., “The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility” | **Writing Exercise 2** |
| 7/20 | Freedom (4): Another Compatibilism | Strawson, P. F., “Freedom and Resentment” | **Writing Exercise 3** |
| 7/21 | Freedom (5): A New Compatibility Problem | Nadelhoffer, “The Threat of Shrinking Agency and Free Will Disillusionism” |  |
| 7/22 | Universals (1): Introduction | Conee & Sider, Chapter 8 |  |
| 7/23 | Universals (2): Nominalism | Quine, “On What There Is” | **Participation Log 1** |
| 7/27 | Universals (3): Trope Theory and Ostrich Nominalism | 1. Williams, “The Elements of Being”2. Devitt, “Ostrich Nominalism or Mirage Realism” | Mid-Semester Review (Ungraded) |
| 7/28 | Universals (4): Paraphrase, Companionship, and Imperfect Communities | 1. Armstrong, Chapter 62. Jackson, “Statements about Universals”3. Pap, “Nominalism, Empiricism and Universals” |  |
| 7/29 | Universals (5): Fictionalism | Varzi, “Fictionalism in Ontology” |  |
| 7/30 | *Co-working Session* | *None* |  |
| 8/3 | Particulars (1): Bundle Theory | Black, “The Identity of Indiscernibles” | **First Paper** |
| 8/4 | Particulars (2): Substratum Theory | Allaire, “Bare Particulars” |  |
| 8/5 | Naturalism (1): Science as Metaphysics | Ismael, “Causation, Free Will, and Naturalism” |  |
| 8/6 | Naturalism (2): Science as Ontology | Dennett, “Kinds of Things” |  |
| 8/10 | Naturalism (3): Science and Cognition | Dunbar, “Science as Category” |  |
| 8/11 | Realism & Anti-Realism (2): Constructivism | Boghossian, Fear of Knowledge, Chapters 3 & 4 |  |
| 8/12 | Realism & Anti-Realism (3): Constructivism Cont. | Haslanger, “Ontology and Social Construction” | **Writing Exercise 4** |
| 8/13 | TBD (*Co-Working Session*) | TBD (*None*) | **Participation Log 2** |
| **8/17** |  |  | **Final Paper** |

**Other Policies**

*Late Policy.* Officially, late assignments will be docked 1/3 of a grade per day (so a B+ two days late becomes a B-) unless you have an extension. I’ll be generour with extensions, so do ask if you need one. But since the class is on a compressed schedule it will be very easy to fall behind, so, if you can help it, try not to use extensions unless you absolutely need to.

 *Accessibility.* **Please** let me know if there’s anything I can do to make the class more accessible or inclusive, or if there’s any way I can help you participate. The Disability Services office asks me to show you the following blurb, but if you have any questions or trouble working through them, you can come directly to me. *“In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations for this course, students must first be registered with their school Disability Services (DS) office. Detailed information is available online for both the* [*Columbia*](https://health.columbia.edu/content/disability-services) *and* [*Barnard*](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__barnard.edu_disabilityservices_students_register&d=DwMFAg&c=G2MiLlal7SXE3PeSnG8W6_JBU6FcdVjSsBSbw6gcR0U&r=xoKP0qUxR6_tEJLXNSVHlG-kKDR9o5VBoWcSc61R9q8&m=IaiVWpsGNNjTmSJQenAdC1XVk3V7kkdiZBbQQo5NBEM&s=6695MzqtrQAXjHYFnU7Rb5glgs0UIk5rtcXppCpaT1o&e=) *registration processes. Refer to the appropriate website for information regarding deadlines, disability documentation requirements, and*[*drop-in hours*](http://health.columbia.edu/getting-care/drop-offices/disability-services-drop-hours)*(Columbia)/*[*intake session*](https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__barnard.edu_disabilityservices_students_register&d=DwMFAg&c=G2MiLlal7SXE3PeSnG8W6_JBU6FcdVjSsBSbw6gcR0U&r=xoKP0qUxR6_tEJLXNSVHlG-kKDR9o5VBoWcSc61R9q8&m=IaiVWpsGNNjTmSJQenAdC1XVk3V7kkdiZBbQQo5NBEM&s=6695MzqtrQAXjHYFnU7Rb5glgs0UIk5rtcXppCpaT1o&e=)*(Barnard).”*

 *Office hours.* I’ll stick around after each class, on the same Zoom meeting, for anyone who wants to talk. **Please take advantage of these**, and don’t feel like you have to come with fully thought-out questions. I’m also very happy to answer other questions about metaphysics, philosophy in general, graduate school, etc., in addition to discussing course material. If you can’t stay after class, get in touch and we’ll set up another time to meet. And if there is anything you’d like to talk about that you don’t feel comfortable discussing in a small-group setting after class, let me know and we can set up a one-on-one meeting at another time.