

SAMPLE SYLLABUS: METAPHYSICS

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COURSE: PHIL XXXX
CREDIT HOURS: 3
PREREQUISITIES: NONE
SEMESTER: SPRING 2016
MEETING TIME: XXXX
CLASSROOM: XXXX

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course is a topical introduction to contemporary metaphysics. Metaphysics is often described as the study of the ultimate nature of reality, but this is a rather unhelpful and vague description. The best means for securing a better understanding of this area of philosophy is via acquaintance with the questions, problems, and debates discussed in metaphysics. In this course we will discuss metaphysical questions such as the following: What is the nature of time? Is time travel possible? In what way do things and persons persist through time? Is a person to be identified with her body or with her psychology? What is free will? Do people have free will? If so, to what extent do we have free will? Is there a ready-made world of facts waiting to be discovered? Or do we, in some sense, construct these facts? Are categories such as species, race, and gender real and mind-independent or did we create these categories?

TEXTS: There is a *required* course packet of readings available at the University Bookstore. However, I also *recommend* purchasing a copy of Carroll and Markosian's *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (Cambridge University Press, 2010). ISBN: 0521533686.

Students interested in looking at additional reading are advised to start by look at either the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (www.iep.utm.edu) or the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (www.plato.stanford.edu) – the former is the less technical. *DO NOT* consult sources such as Wikipedia, blogs, online forums (e.g. reddit), or the dictionary for philosophical insight. These sources have not been vetted; their quality varies *widely* and they are *overall* unreliable.

INSTRUCTOR E-MAIL: On normal weekdays I will dedicate 2:00pm – 3:00pm to responding to student e-mail. On weekends and holidays I won't have a dedicated time for responding to e-mail but I will strive to respond within 24 hours. Plan accordingly.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT AND STUDENT EXPECTATIONS:

- *E-mail and class website:* Check your e-mail and the class website at least once a day. Also, there will be discussion forums on the class website. These are meant to provide a venue for students to continue discussion beyond class, or to help you study with your fellow students. Be respectful of one another on these forums. You are *NOT* required to post anything to these online forums.
- *Come prepared:* Come to class prepared to discuss the topic for the day. This involves bringing your textbooks, bringing materials for taking notes, and doing the assigned readings *before* class. Philosophy is a dialogical activity; you should always be ready to engage in discussion about the topics with your teachers, classmates, and the authors of the readings.
- *Careful reading:* Philosophical writing can be dense and difficult to understand. Read *carefully*. Do not just skim the reading. Actively engage with the text while you read it. Underline or highlight important passages, write summaries and questions in the margins, copy down crucial definitions and distinctions, think of examples illustrating the ideas you're reading about, and attempt to reconstruct any arguments you find. You might also have to do read the selections multiple times.

- *Technology in class:* Using technology in ways *unrelated to the course* is prohibited. In fact, unless you have a special need of this technology, I *recommend* that you do not use a laptop even for taking notes. Research suggests that taking notes with paper and pencil helps students to better process, retain, and understand the information they receive in their classes.
- *Etiquette:* We will be discussing some controversial topics to which many of you might have a strong emotional connection over which reasonable people will disagree. Take care to articulate your views and arguments in ways that are respectful to your fellow students. Be especially careful when posting on the online discussion forum.

LEARNING OUTCOMES: By studying these topics students will gain a wide range of knowledge and skills whose value extends well beyond the classroom. Given that you put in the required time and effort, by the end of this course you will be able to:

1. Evaluate simple ordinary language arguments for validity, soundness, strength, and cogency.
2. Interpret, paraphrase, and explain difficult passages of philosophical prose and argumentation.
3. Reconstruct arguments found in the text into premise/conclusion format.
4. Construct cases for use with the counterexample method, and utilize different strategies for responding to supposed counterexamples.
5. Articulate the fundamentals of various metaphysical theories and topics such as bodily and psychological criteria of personal identity; physicalism and substance dualism; presentism, growing block theory, and eternalism; fatalism, determinism, libertarian accounts of free will, compatibilist free will, and the relation between science and free will; realism, anti-realism, and natural kinds.
6. Appreciate and appraise the strength and weaknesses of competing philosophical theories.
7. Construct your own arguments challenging or defending philosophical positions.
8. Appreciate weaknesses and anticipate objections to your own arguments.

GRADING SCALE:

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
100-93	92-90	89-87	86-83	82-80	79-77	76-73	72-70	69-67	66-63	62-60	59-0

GRADING BREAKDOWN:

ASSIGNMENT	PERCENT OF FINAL GRADE	TOTAL
Exam 1:	10%	10%
Exam 2:	10%	20%
Exam 3:	10%	30%
Paper 1:	13%	43%
Paper 2:	13%	56%
Paper 3:	24%	80%
Paper Presentation:	10%	90%
In-Class Activities	10%	100%

EXAMS 1-3: These exams will be take-home tests that will consist of short answer and essay questions of the material covered in the readings and in class. *Exams are NOT cumulative.*

PAPERS 1 AND 2: The first two papers will be short 3-4 page (double-spaced) papers developing your own argument defending or criticizing one of the epistemological views discussed in class.

PAPER 3: The third and final paper will be a longer 8-10 page (double-spaced) argumentative paper that will ask you to introduce a controversial philosophical issue, present an argument for your own view on that issue, and predict and respond to a potential objection to your argument. You will also be required to do some outside research on the topic and incorporate outside readings into your paper. As indicated on the schedule, you will have to turn in a thesis statement, annotated bibliography, and a reconstruction of your own argument *prior* to the due date of the final paper.

PAPER PRESENTATION: During the last week of class, each student will be required to give a 10-minute presentation to the other students on the argument they are developing for their final paper. This presentation should be focused on giving a brief explanation of your thesis and how you are arguing for that thesis. You should NOT simply summarize the views or readings you've encountered on the topic.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES: The in-class activities will consist of various forms of both individual and group work. These might consist of worksheets, free writing sessions, directed writing sessions, group work, writing test questions, peer-review projects, etc. These assignments are my way of grading attendance and participation, and are my way to make sure you are keeping up with the readings.

- Each in class assignment will be graded on a 0-2 point scale
 - 0 = Assignment wasn't attempted
 - 1 = Assignment shows only minimal effort or a failure to do the readings.
 - 2 = Assignment shows good effort and good-faith attempt to do the readings.
- The lowest three in-class assignments will be dropped at the end of the semester.

LATE WORK AND MAKE-UP POLICY: *Unexcused* late papers will receive a 3% grade reduction for each day that they are late. *Unexcused* missed tests/exams will receive a 3% grade reduction for each day that passes prior to taking a make-up exam. Since in-class activities are my way of tracking attendance and participation, these can *only* be made up when you have an excused absence. If you have an *excused* absence during an exam or in-class assignment, you should contact me within a week to initiate arrangements to make up the work.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION POLICY: Attendance and participation in class will be factored into your grade via the in-class activities as explained above. See the student handbook for more information on the University's attendance policy. NOTE: leaving early for a scheduled university holiday or break is *NOT* an excused absence. Schedule your rides and flights accordingly.

ACADEMIC HONESTY: I will use turnitin.com. Plagiarism and cheating will not be tolerated. Plagiarism and cheating will result in a zero for the assignment and will be reported to the university. I expect that you understand what constitutes plagiarism, but if you are unsure then please see the university's student academic integrity webpage (see link below). *Trust me... Plagiarism is not in your best interest; I will catch you!*

NOTES ABOUT THE SCHEDULE: A *tentative* schedule for the course can be found on the next page.

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: Introduction	Introduction	
WEEK 2: Personal Identity	John Locke: Of Identity and Diversity	
WEEK 3: Personal Identity	Bernard Williams: The Self and the Future Jennifer Whiting: Friends and Future Selves	
WEEK 4: Personal Identity	Derek Parfit: Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons	<i>Monday: Paper 1 Due</i>
WEEK 5: Personal Identity	Tamar Gendler: Exceptional Persons	
WEEK 6: Time	Ted Sider: Four-Dimensionalism Ch. 2 (11-52)	<i>Monday: Exam 1 Due</i>
WEEK 7: Time	Dean Zimmerman: The Privileged Present	
WEEK 8: Time	Laurie Paul: Temporal Experience	<i>Wednesday: Paper 2 Due</i>
WEEK 9: Time Travel	Robert Heinlein: All You Zombies David Lewis: The Paradoxes of Time Travel	
WEEK 10: Free Will	Peter Van Inwagen: The Powers of Rational Beings	
WEEK 11: Free Will & Science	Kadri Vihvelin: Free Will Demystified Benjamin Libet: Do We Have Free Will?	<i>Monday: Test 2 Due</i>
WEEK 12: Free Will & Science	Eddy Nahmias: Is Free Will an Illusion?	
WEEK 13: Realism and Antirealism	Paul Boghossian: Constructing the Facts Nelson Goodman: The New Riddle of Induction	<i>Monday: Thesis & Annotated Bibliography Due</i>
THANKSGIVING BREAK		
WEEK 14: Realism and Antirealism	Sarah-Jane Leslie: Essence and Natural Kinds	<i>Monday: Argument Summary Due</i>
WEEK 15: Paper Presentations	PAPER PRESENTATIONS	
FINAL EXAM & PAPER DUE		