

Metaphysics (with fewer borders!)

Wednesdays, 14:00-16:30

Overview: This class is designed to improve your ability to think clearly and critically about issues in metaphysics; since it is a class that all philosophy graduate students must take, I will try to make it as interesting and exciting as possible. And my primary aim this semester is to help you to think *more broadly* about what it means to do metaphysics. It may come as a surprise, but people from a wide range of cultures, with a wide range of differing assumptions, have found themselves doing metaphysics for a long time, and we are going to try to think about why they have, and about how different starting points get you to different kinds of metaphysical hypotheses. (As a side-effect of taking this course, you should also find yourself prepared to write a successful comprehensive exam in metaphysics, since this is something that most of you will have to do).

This course will be writing intensive, and each of you will write something every week. Specifically, you will write brief responses to something we have read, which are no longer than 600 words in length. These assignments are due by midnight on Tuesday, and they are intended to foster critical engagement with the things we are reading. They can do this in many ways: they can link ideas from the reading to other ideas you are working on; they can offer an objection to one of the arguments we are addressing; or they can attempt to extend an idea from the reading to a novel domain. To be quite frank, I don't care *what* you write about, so long as you show me that you are trying to make sense of the readings, and so long as you show me that you are trying to see what possibilities the readings afford.

Each seminar member will also write one short paper, which will be no longer than 3000 words in length. This paper will address an argument or position that we discuss in class, and a successful paper will be the sort of thing that one can submit for a presentation at the APA (American Philosophical Association), or a similar conference. In past semesters, I have often worked with students to write successful conference papers, and I am happy to do so again this semester!

Finally, each seminar member will take part in three group presentations (the days for these presentations are marked on the reading schedule). On the days that you present, the course will be broken into 30-minute sections (One for each article or chapter, and one for general discussion). Each group will explain the core claim from the assigned reading, explain why it's interesting and relevant to the issues that we are discussing, and explain what possibilities the position opens up for understanding the world we live in.

Accommodations and diversity: One finds a great deal of diversity in teaching and learning styles in a modern university. These styles may not always mesh in ways that are conducive to the success and wellbeing of everyone in a course. But there are often ways of improving things. I am happy to discuss the structure of this course, and to accommodate the learning styles people have to the best of my abilities. So please talk to me if things could be better. I sincerely think that every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating classroom experience! Disabled students and students on record with the university as requiring particular accommodations, please let me know that this is the case, in confidence, during the first few weeks of the semester—and please take advantage of the services provided by the university. Finally, if you find over the course of the semester that additional accommodations are necessary, please let me know.

Reading schedule: If we find reason to dwell on some particular issue, I am happy to revise the syllabus to suit your interests. But the tentative course reading schedule is as follows:

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| 1/20 | David Lewis & Stephanie Lewis , "Holes" David Lewis , On the Plurality of worlds, Chapter 1 |
| 1/27 | David Lewis , On the Plurality of worlds, Chapter 2 Saul Kripke , "Meaning and Necessity" |
| 2/3 | David Lewis , On the Plurality of worlds, Chapter 3 Gideon Rosen , "Modal Fictionalism" |
| 2/10 | David Lewis , On the Plurality of worlds, Chapter 4 Neil Sinhababu , "Possible girls" |
| 2/17 | Peter Van Inwagen , <i>Material beings</i> (Chapters 1-3, 6, 8, 10) Jonathan Shaffer , "From nihilism to monism" |
| 2/24 | Nāgārjuna , <i>Mūlamadhyamakakārikā</i> , Chapter 24; Vasubandhu , <i>Trisvabhāvanirdeśa</i> ; Śāntarakṣita , <i>Madhyamākalamkāra</i> (Neither-one-nor-many argument); (Optional Background reading) Mark Siderits , <i>Buddhism as philosophy</i> , Chapters 3 & 5 |
| 3/2 | Jonardon Ganeri , "An irrealist theory of self" Amber Carpenter , "Person's keeping their Karma together" |
| 3/16 | Jim Maffie , <i>Aztec Philosophy</i> , Chapters 1 & 3 (Optional) Jim Maffie , <i>Aztec Philosophy</i> , Chapter 2 |
| 3/23 | Jim Maffie , <i>Aztec Philosophy</i> , Chapters 4-6 |
| 3/30 | Jim Maffie , <i>Aztec Philosophy</i> , Chapters 7-8 |
| 4/6 | Elisabeth Barnes , "Going Beyond the Fundamental" Ron Mallon , "Passing, Traveling, and Reality" |
| 4/13 | Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir , "The Metaphysics of Sex and Gender" Mari Mikkola , "Ontological Commitments, Sex and Gender" Sally Haslanger , "Gender and Race: (What) Are they? (What) Do we want them to be?" |
| 4/20 | Charles Mills , "Blackness Visible" Lucius Outlaw , "Toward a Critical Theory of 'Race'" Anthony Appiah , "Why there are no races" |
| 4/27 | Koffi Maglo "The Case against Biological Realism about Race" Quayshawn Spencer , "A radical solution to the race problem" |