

INTRO TO METAPHYSICS

PHIL 215, [Ted Sider](#), Fall 2016
Scott Hall 104, M/Th 9:50–11:10
office hrs Th 11:30–12:30 & by appt
106 Somerset St., Room 534

Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that addresses abstract and general questions about the nature of the world. Are our actions predetermined? Do we have free will? What is the nature of physical objects? Do any things other than physical objects (for example numbers, qualities, events, God) exist? What is the nature of time and space? Can anything from the present time cause things to happen in the past? What is the nature of persons? Are persons physical objects? What kinds of changes can a person undergo and still remain the same person? What kinds of changes can a physical object undergo and still remain the same physical object? What does it mean to say that something is possible? What does it mean to say that one event causes another? What is a law of nature?

We will focus on three topics: free will, persistence, and time. Free will: is human action causally determined, and if so, what bearing does this have on freedom and moral responsibility? Persistence: in virtue of what am I the same person that my parents gave birth to years ago; and in virtue of what do non-persons remain the same over time? Time: does time “pass”? Do past and future entities exist? Is time travel in-principle possible?

Required textbook

Metaphysics: The Big Questions (2nd ed), van Inwagen and Zimmerman

Website

<http://tedsider.org/teaching/215/215.html>

Paper topics, handouts, study guides, cancelled classes and other announcements will be posted here.

Readings website

Readings not in the textbook will be available here.

Assessment

Exams: three exams, worth a total of 70% of the grade. The third exam will be during the final exam period, but will *not* be cumulative

Short paper: (2–3 pages), worth 10%, due by [email](#) at 9:50am on 9/26

Longer paper: (4–7 pages), worth 20%, due by [email](#) at 9:50am on 12/12

Course schedule

Unless otherwise noted, readings are in the van Inwagen and Zimmerman anthology. “web” = available on the readings website. This schedule may be revised; check the course website for an up-to-date syllabus.

Free will and determinism

9/8 Intro to metaphysics; arguments. (Optional reading: van Inwagen and Sullivan, “[Metaphysics](#)” (web))

9/12 The problem of free will. (Optional reading: Vihvelin, “[Arguments for Incompatibilism](#)”, (web))

9/15 Hard determinism. Dietrich (Baron d’Holbach), “We Are Never Free: an Excerpt from The System of Nature.”

9/19 Libertarianism. Chisholm, “Human Freedom and the Self”

9/22 Soft determinism. Hobart, “Free Will as Involving Determination and Inconceivable without It”

9/26 Soft determinism continued. **Short paper due**

9/29 Compatibilism. Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility” (web)

10/3 Incompatibilism. Van Inwagen, “The Consequence Argument”

10/6 catch-up

10/10 **Exam 1**

Persistence

- 10/13 Introduction to personal identity. Shoemaker, “Personal Identity: A Materialist Account”, sections 1–2; Sider, “[Personal Identity](#)” (web), pp. 7–11
- 10/17 Body theory versus memory theory. Swinburne, “Personal Identity: the Dualist Theory”, section 1; Shoemaker, sections 3–5
- 10/20 Memory theory continued
- 10/24 Dualism. Swinburne, section 2
- 10/27 Temporal parts and change. Hawley, “[Temporal parts](#)” (web), sections 1–3
- 10/31 Constitution. Hawley, “[Temporal parts](#)” (web), section 4
- 11/3 catch-up
- 11/7 **Exam 2**

Time

- 11/10 Time is unreal. McTaggart, “Time”; Broad, “McTaggart’s Arguments against the Reality of Time”
- 11/14 Unreality of time continued
- 11/17 The B-theory of time. Smart, “The Space-time World”
- 11/21 The growing block universe. Broad, “The General Problem of Time and Change”
- 11/22** Presentism. Prior, “The Notion of the Present”; “Changes in Events and Changes in Things”; “Some Free Thinking about Time”
- 11/28 Presentism continued
- 12/1 Presentism continued
- 12/5 Time travel. Lewis, “The paradoxes of Time Travel”; (optional) Heinlein, “All You Zombies” (web)

12/8 Time travel continued

12/12 Time travel and freedom. Vihvelin, "What Time Travelers Cannot Do" (web). **Longer paper due**