

# METAPHYSICS

Ted Sider, Spring 2005  
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This course will be a topical introduction to metaphysics, a branch of philosophy that tries to comprehensively describe the world at a very fundamental and abstract level. Metaphysical questions include: Are people's actions determined? Do people 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 kind of changes can a person undergo and still remain the same person? What kind of changes can a physical object undergo and still remain the same physical object? What does it mean to say that a certain state of affairs 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 logically possible?

## Readings

- *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, ed. by Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman
- Additional articles will be placed on reserve. In particular, I highly recommend "Improving Academic Writing", by Jonathan Bennett and Samuel Gorovitz, which is available online as a reserve for this course.

## Requirements/Grading

Paper topics, handouts, study guides, exam dates, cancelled classes, and other announcements will be posted on the course web site:

<http://fas-philosophy.rutgers.edu/~sider/teaching/415/>

Grades will be calculated on the following basis:

- Exams: three exams, worth a total of 70% of the grade, dates TBA. The third exam will be during the final exam period, but will *not* be cumulative
- Short paper (2-3 pages), worth 10%, topic and due date TBA
- Longer paper (4-7 pages), worth 20%, topics and due date TBA

## Tentative course schedule

Unless otherwise noted, readings are in the van Inwagen and Zimmerman anthology. “reserve” = available online through the library’s reserve system. “web site” = available on the web site for this course.

### 1. FREEDOM AND DETERMINISM

- (a) Hard determinism. Paul Rée, “Determinism and the Illusion of Moral Responsibility” (web site)
- (b) Indeterminism. Roderick Chisholm, “Human Freedom and the Self”
- (c) Soft determinism. R. E. Hobart, “Free Will as Involving Determination and Inconceivable without It”
- (d) Sophisticated soft determinism. Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” (reserve)
- (e) Incompatibilism. Peter van Inwagen, “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism” (reserve)

### 2. PERSISTENCE

- (a) Introduction to personal identity. Sydney Shoemaker, “Personal Identity: A Materialist Account”, sections 1-2
- (b) Body theory. Richard Swinburne, “Personal Identity: the Dualist Theory”, pp. 317-320
- (c) Psychological theory. Swinburne, pp. 320-327; Shoemaker, sections 3-5
- (d) Dualism. Swinburne, section 2
- (e) Constitution. Ted Sider, “Constitution” (web site)

### 3. TIME

- (a) Time is unreal. J.M.E. McTaggart, “Time”; C. D. Broad, “McTaggart’s Arguments against the Reality of Time”
- (b) The B-theory of time. J. J. C. Smart, “The Space-time World”
- (c) The growing block universe. C. D. Broad, “The General Problem of Time and Change”
- (d) Presentism. Arthur N. Prior, “The Notion of the Present”; “Some Free Thinking about Time”
- (e) Time travel is possible. David Lewis, “The paradoxes of Time Travel”; (optional) Robert Heinlein, “All You Zombies” (reserve)