

INTRO TO METAPHYSICS

PHIL 215, [Ted Sider](#), Fall 2022
Scott Hall 220, M/W 2:00–3:20
office hrs M 12:45–1:45 & by appt
106 Somerset St., Room 534

Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that addresses abstract and general questions about the nature of reality. It is about how reality *is*, not about how it *ought* to be (ethics), what we *know* about it (epistemology), etc.

Here are some examples of metaphysical questions: 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? Do we have free will? What kinds of changes can a person undergo and still remain the same person? What kinds of changes can other physical objects 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 possible?

Required textbook

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

Website

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

Go here for paper topics, handouts, study guides, and announcements.

Canvas site

<https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/189616>

Go here to access readings not in the textbook and turn in papers.

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 on Canvas on 9/26

Longer paper: (4–7 pages), worth 20%, due on Canvas on 12/14

Papers must be turned in via Canvas by the start of class on the due date. Late papers will be penalized as described here: http://tedsider.org/teaching/215/lateness_policy.pdf. (Short version: two day grace-period with no lateness penalty; 2.5 points per day subsequently; exceptions only for documented serious circumstances; technological mistakes are not excuses.) Missed exams will receive a grade of zero, except in documented serious circumstances.

Learning goals

There are three main goals for the course. First, to introduce some of the major issues in metaphysics: freedom and determinism, persistence, and time. Second, to develop the ability to analyze rational argumentation. And third, to learn to write clear, carefully structured papers in which arguments are set out and criticized.

Course schedule

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

Free will and determinism

- 9/7 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))

- 9/14 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"
- 9/21 Soft determinism. Hobart, "Free Will as Involving Determination and Inconceivable without It"
- 9/26 Soft determinism continued.
- 9/28 Compatibilism. Wolf, "Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility" (Canvas) **Short paper due**
- 10/3 Incompatibilism. Van Inwagen, "The Consequence Argument"
- 10/5 catch-up
- 10/10 **Exam 1**

Persistence

- 10/12 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
- 10/19 Memory theory continued
- 10/24 Dualism. Swinburne, section 2
- 10/26 Temporal parts and change. Hawley, "[Temporal parts](#)" (web), sections 1–3
- 10/31 Constitution. Hawley, "[Temporal parts](#)" (web), section 4
- 11/2 catch-up
- 11/7 **Exam 2**

Time

- 11/9 Time is unreal. McTaggart, "Time"; Broad, "McTaggart's Arguments against the Reality of Time"
- 11/14 Unreality of time continued
- 11/16 The B-theory of time. Smart, "The Space-time World" (Canvas)
- 11/21 The growing block universe. Broad, "The General Problem of Time and Change"
- 11/28** Presentism. Prior, "The Notion of the Present"; "Changes in Events and Changes in Things"; "Some Free Thinking about Time"
- 11/30 Presentism continued
- 12/5 Presentism continued
- 12/7 Time travel. Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel"
- 12/12 Time travel continued
- 12/14 Time travel and freedom. Vihvelin, "What Time Travelers Cannot Do" (Canvas). **Longer paper due**