

# PHIL 348: METAPHYSICS

Spring 2023

*Class schedule:* TR 9:30-10:50  
*Class Instructor:* Katherine Valde  
*Office:* DB 206

*Class Location:* DB 218  
*E-mail:* valdekg@wofford.edu  
*Office Hours:* Wednesdays 2-4pm

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*Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never traveled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect.*

-Bertrand Russell

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## **Course Description:**

This semester, we will confront some of great debates in metaphysics. We will address such questions as: Is time real or an illusion? Are our minds purely physical objects? Is there free will? How do our concepts shape our answers to these questions? Through engaging in these debates, we will hope to understand something about the nature of metaphysics, including why and how we should go about doing it.

## **Course Objectives:**

This course is designed to both provide an introduction to some questions in metaphysics and to inspire your curiosity for such questions. You will learn to both to characterize some of the main issues in contemporary metaphysics, and to discuss these arguments in an informed but neutral way. Along the way, this course will also help to develop and articulate your own perspective on these issues and inspire an excitement for creativity in approaching metaphysical questions.

## **Required Text:**

All other readings will be provided on Moodle.

## **Class Expectations:**

Do the readings. *Think* about the readings. Our class will not be engaging for you if you do not come to class prepared. Treat each other and the instructor with respect. Be prepared to be challenged. Some of the readings will be difficult, and you may have more questions than clarity. That's ok!

## **Attendance:**

You are expected to attend all class meetings. However, sometimes, for a variety of reasons, you might be unwilling or unable to attend class. If you need to miss a class meeting *for any reason*, you are able to make-up that absence by completing a written assignment based on the material for that day of class. If you do not complete the make-up assignment within 7 days of the missed class, 5 points will be deducted from your engagement grade. There are no such things as "excused" or "unexcused" absences. All missed classes are treated the same.

## Grading:

### Engagement – 20%

Engagement comes in many forms, and it is not the same as attendance. Engagement includes:

*Preparation* – reviewing materials and readings before class, eating, sleeping, etc.

*Focus* – avoiding distractions during class meetings

*Presence* – engaged and responsive during group activities

*Asking questions* – in class and out of class

*Listening* – hearing what other say, and also what they aren't saying

*Specificity* – referring to specific ideas from readings and discussions

*Synthesizing* – making connections between readings and discussions

Merely showing up and listening respectfully is considered C-level (70%) engagement.

### Reflection Writings – 20% (10% each)

Each student will complete two reading responses during the first 7 weeks of the semester. Each response piece will be no more than one-page single spaced (400-500 words). These assignments are scaffolded to help students build essential reasoning and reading comprehension skills. As such, no late assignment will be accepted as this would no longer be evaluating a student's own ability to read, comprehend, and substantially engage with the text. Should a student find themselves unable to complete their assignment before the due date, please reach out to me *before* the reading response is due.

### Take-Home Midterm Exam – 20%

This course will have one take-home midterm which will consist of short answer and long answer questions designed to check students' comprehension of key ideas from this course.

### Discussion Leadership Project – 20%

In teams of two, you will be in charge of one class discussion. Leading discussion entails reading the text ahead of time, coming up with questions, discussing them with your instructor, structuring the class discussion, and making sure your classmates leave class understanding the key ideas from the selected text.

### Final Paper Project – 20%

For this paper you will answer a question of your own design relating to some topic from class. These projects will include proposing and presenting an abstract (5%), getting project approval in a one-on-one meeting with your professor (5%), and a submitting a final paper (90%). Final papers should be approximately 1,750 - 2,000 words.

## Course Schedule:

### UNIT 1: Introduction to Metaphysics (weeks 1-8):

#### Week 1

Tuesday 02/07	Introduction
Thursday 02/09	<i>SEP: Metaphysics – Introduction &amp; Sections 1, 3</i> by Peter van Inwagen and Meghan Sullivan

#### Week 2 – Science and Metaphysics

Tuesday 02/14	Ch. 2 <i>Science and Metaphysics: Then and Now</i> by Anjan Chakravartty
Thursday 02/16	<i>What is Scientific Realism?</i> by Bas Van Fraassen and Anjan Chakravartty

#### Week 3 – Biological Causation

Tuesday 02/21	No Class
Thursday 02/23	<i>Top-down Causation Without Top-down Causes</i> Carl F. Craver and William Bechtel

#### Week 4 – Biological Entities

Tuesday 02/28	No Class
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Thursday 03/02                      *Manifesto for Processual Biology* by John Dupré and Daniel J. Nicholson

**Week 5 – Biological Identity**

Tuesday 03/07                      *Biological Processes: A Bio-Processual Way Out of the Personal Identity Dilemma* Anne-Sophie Meincke

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Thursday 03/09                      *Lady Parts: The Metaphysics of Pregnancy* by Elselijn Kingma

**Week 6 - Feminist Metaphysics**

Tuesday 03/14                      *SEP: Feminist Metaphysics* by Sally Hasslanger

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Thursday 03/16                      *The Metaphysics of Sex and Gender* by Ásta Kristjana Sveinsdóttir

**Week 7 – Religious & Metaphysics**

Tuesday 03/21                      Ch. 24 *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* by Nāgārjuna (with commentary by Jay L. Garfield)

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Thursday 03/23                      *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God – Ch. 4 The Main Premise* by J. L. Schellenberg

**Week 8**

Tuesday 03/28                      Exam Review

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Thursday 03/30                      No Class – **Exam due by 5pm**

**SPRING BREAK (NO CLASS 04/03-04/07)**

**UNIT 2: Discussion Leadership Projects (weeks 9-12):**

**Week 9**

Tuesday 04/11                      *Real Talk on the Metaphysics of Gender* by Robin Dembroff (Aislinn & Shadan)

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Thursday 04/13                      *The Metaphysics of Evolution* by John Dupré (Grayson Murray & Hank)

**Week 10**

Tuesday 04/18                      *The Unreality of Time* by J. M. E. McTaggart (Isabella and Meris)

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Thursday 04/20                      *Science and the Special Composition Question* by Andrew Brenner (Grayson McDowell and Stephanie)

**Week 11**

Tuesday 04/25                      Selections from Ch. 1 *Of God* from *Ethics* by Benedict de Spinoza

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Thursday 04/27                      *Social construction as grounding; or: fundamentality for feminists, a reply to Barnes and Mikkola* by Jonathan Schaffer

**UNIT 3: Final Paper Projects (weeks 12-14):**

**Week 12**

Tuesday 05/02                      paper project introduction

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Thursday 05/05                      **TOPIC PITCHES**

**Week 13**

Tuesday 05/09                      Individual Meetings (no class)

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Thursday 05/11                      Writing Workshop

**Week 14**

Monday 05/15                      **FINAL PAPERS DUE @ NOON**