

PHL 342: Metaphysics | Fall 2020

Instructor: Dr. Marc Johansen / ✉ marcjohansen@creighton.edu

Class meetings: Monday & Wednesday 2:00 – 3:15 / Online

Office hours: Monday & Wednesday 11:00 – 12:15 & by appointment / Online

Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy concerned with what the world is like, as opposed to, say, what the world *ought* to be like or how we *know* what the world is like. In this respect metaphysics is not unlike the natural sciences. But metaphysics is not physics (or chemistry, or biology, or...). The issues that it concerns are more general and abstract. For example, physics tells us that it is a natural law that an object in motion stays in motion unless acted on by an outside force. In contrast, metaphysics aims to tell us — among other things — what it is to be a natural law, what it is to be an object, and what makes a moving object the same object despite the fact that it undergoes change. This course will focus on a number of central topics in metaphysics: ontology & objects, time & persistence, personal identity, and free will.

Texts

- Alyssa Ney: *Metaphysics: An introduction* (Routledge 2014)
- Kim, Korman, & Sosa (eds): *Metaphysics: An anthology* (2nd ed.) (Wiley-Blackwell 2012)
- Additional articles will be available via BlueLine.

Grading

Course grades are determined by the weighted average of the following items. A score of 93–100 is an A, 90–92 is a A-, 87–89 is a B+, 83–86 is a B, 80–82 is a B-, 77–79 is a C+, 73–76 is a C, 70–72 is a C-, 60–69 is a D, and a score below 60 is an F.

- **Review Quizzes (10%)** There will be a short quiz at the end of every week that covers some of the central ideas that have been covered that week. Quizzes will be conducted on BlueLine. They will become available by noon on Friday and must be completed by 11:59am Central Time on Sunday. *Quizzes cannot be made up.* If you miss a quiz due to an excused absence, the quiz will be waived for you.
- **Critical response papers (3 x 10%)** You will need to write three short (400 – 500 word) critical response papers during the course. The goal of these papers is for you to respond to a position or argument presented in class or the reading by developing an objection to it or presenting a new argument in support. Responses are due electronically by 11:59pm one week after the class discussion they are responding to. (E.g., responses to material discussed on September 9 would be due by 11:59pm on September 16.) **At least one response must be completed before September 30 and at least one response must be completed after September 30. All three responses must be completed no later than October 30.** Papers will be graded on the originality and strength of your argument and the clarity of your presentation.

- **Exams (2 x 20%)** There will be two exams covering the readings and lectures. Exams will be held on the following dates: **September 30** and **November 19 @ 10:00a – 11:40a**.
- **Paper (20%)** The paper will ask you to present and evaluate an argument or debate that we've studied during the course. In it, you'll present one or more positions, their supporting arguments, and provide your own critical evaluation of those arguments. Assignment details will be posted to BlueLine. Papers are to be 2000 – 2500 words. Due electronically on **November 13 @ 11:59pm**.

The work you submit must be your own. I encourage you to study and discuss course material in groups. The best way to learn philosophy is by doing it and one of the best ways to do philosophy is by talking about it with other people. However, when it comes time to take what you've learned and produce work for evaluation, you must be the sole author of that work.

Schedule

Readings found in *Metaphysics: An Anthology* are indicated with 'KKS' and their chapter number. Readings from *Metaphysics: An Introduction* are indicated 'NEY' and their chapter number. Page or section numbers are noted where relevant. All other articles will be available on BlueLine (BL). Starred reading is (often strongly) recommended but not required.

This schedule is tentative and subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class and on BlueLine.

“My desire and wish is that the things I start with should be so obvious that you wonder why I spend my time stating them. This is what I aim at because the point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it.” – Bertrand Russell

Aug 17 Course introduction

Free will

Aug 19	Ney: Free will * van Inwagen: Freedom of the will	NEY 9 (pp. 239 – 246) BL
Aug 24	Lewis: Are we free to break the laws Ney: Compatibilism	BL NEY 9 (pp. 246 – 251)
Aug 26	Kane: Incompatibilism Ney: Libertarianism & Skepticism about free will	BL NEY 9 (pp. 252 –257)
Aug 31 Sep 2	Frankfurt: Freedom of the will and the concept of a person TBA	BL

Ontology & Objects

Sep 7	— Labor day (No class) —	
Sep 9	Quine: On what there is * Ney: An introduction to ontology	KKS 1 NEY 1 (pp. 30 – 50)
Sep 14	Carnap: Empiricism, semantics, and ontology * Ney: Carnap's two critiques of metaphysics	KKS 2 NEY 4 (pp. 120 – 127)
Sep 16	Lewis & Lewis: Holes	KKS 3
Sep 21	Unger: I do not exist Ney: The problem of the many	BL NEY 3 (pp. 100 – 103)
Sep 23	van Inwagen: When are objects parts? * Ney: The special composition question	KKS 47 NEY 3 (pp. 103 – 114)
Sep 28	Wrap up and review	
Sep 30	— Exam 1 —	

Time & Persistence

Oct 5	Zimmerman: The privileged present * Ney: Time	BL NEY 5 (pp. 138 – 152)
Oct 7	Ney: Persistence Sider: Temporal parts * Haslanger: Endurance and temporary intrinsics	NEY 6 (pp. 170 – 175) BL (pp. 241 – 247) KKS 38 (pp. 506 – 509)
Oct 12	Sider: Temporal parts Ney: The paradoxes of material constitution * Ney: A solution to some paradoxes...	BL (pp. 247 – 257) NEY 3 (pp. 98 – 100) NEY 6 (pp. 175 – 178)
Oct 14	Smart: How to reidentify the ship of Theseus * Ney: The paradoxes of material constitution	BL NEY 3 (pp. 91 – 98)

Personal identity

Oct 19	Perry: A dialogue on personal identity...	BL (pp. 1 – 20)
Oct 21	Perry: A dialogue on personal identity... * Williams: The self and the future	BL (pp. 21 – 27) KKS 41
Oct 26	Parfit: Personal identity	KKS 42
Oct 28	Olson: An argument for animalism	KKS 46
Nov 2	TBA	
Nov 4	TBA	

Nov 9 TBA
Nov 11 TBA

Nov 16 Wrap up and review
Nov 19 ——— Final exam @ 8:00a – 9:40a ———

Other policies

- **Course modality** This course is considered by the university to be a Remote Instruction (SD300) course. Instructors and students meet synchronously using digital technology (e.g., Zoom) at the scheduled times according to the schedule of classes. No room is assigned. This option is reserved for (a) large courses for which a hybrid social-distance modality cannot be implemented, (b) courses with individuals who have additional health risks or (c) courses in which the learning objectives can be met with a technology-mediated pedagogy.
- **Attendance** I expect you to attend class. Though attendance itself does not directly count towards your grade, your success in the course will depend on your coming to class prepared and participating. If you will not be able to attend class for medical or religious reasons or due to a conflict with a university sponsored activity, please let me know as soon as possible — preferably in advance of your absence. I'll gladly excuse legitimate and verifiable absences *provided you notify me no later than 24 hours after the class meeting from which you were absent.*
- **Late assignments** Late work will be accepted only in cases of excusable absences that receive my approval, in which case I will provide you with a new due date. If you know that you will be unable to turn in an assignment on the day it is due, please let me know in advance.
- **Disability accommodations** Any student who requires accommodations to complete the requirements and expectations of this course because of a disability is invited to make his or her needs known to the instructor and to the Office of Disability Accommodations. I am glad to work with you to provide any reasonable accommodations. See the [Office of Disability Accommodations](#) for more information.
- **Academic integrity** I take academic integrity *very seriously*. Plagiarism and cheating on any assignment, quiz, or exam is a very serious offense and will not be tolerated in any way. All suspicious assignments will be investigated. Any assignment that is found to contain plagiarized material or have resulted from cheating will at a minimum receive no credit and may, at my discretion, result in automatic failure from the course. Students who plagiarize or cheat in any way will be reported to the Dean. Creighton University policy also permits the Dean to impose a more serious penalty where warranted, “up to and including expulsion from the University.” Students have the right to appeal charges of academic dishonesty.

If you are unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, make sure you speak to me before turning in any written work. You may also consult Learning in the Academy: An Introduction to the Culture of Scholarship at www.creighton.edu/fileadmin/user/CCAS/docs/

[LearningInAcademy.pdf](#)

Copies of the most current college procedures on academic honesty can be found at:
[www.creighton.edu/fileadmin/user/CCAS/curriculum/CCAS_Academic_Honesty_Policy .pdf](http://www.creighton.edu/fileadmin/user/CCAS/curriculum/CCAS_Academic_Honesty_Policy.pdf)

- **Class recordings** Learning takes place in the face to face and virtual classrooms through a variety of means, including lectures, discussions, activities, etc. For learning to take place, these environments need to be a safe space. As part of that safe space, we should speak respectfully to and with each other. That is not to suggest that any of us will never misspeak. To learn from these conversations, we need to ensure that what happens in our face to face and virtual classrooms stays in the classroom.

For this reason all course materials, including handouts, problem sets (and solutions), and lecture and discussion materials (powerpoint slides, videos, lecture and discussion recordings, etc.) that are posted on the course BlueLine site are considered to be copyrighted and are intended to be used only by students enrolled in that class, for the purposes of fulfilling the course objectives. Only the instructor may record common class sessions. Only the instructor may distribute any and all recorded materials, including individual student discussion posts. Sharing any of these materials with others outside of the course will be considered "misuse of academic resources," as defined in the Creighton University Student Handbook as an act of academic misconduct, and students can be penalized, up to and including failure of the course.

In the case of recorded live lecture and discussion material, students should be aware that recording may continue during class breaks. Therefore, private conversations should be held elsewhere in order to avoid inadvertent recording.

There are additional consequences for cyberbullying or otherwise using a recording in violation of our code of conduct or Title IX policies.

Recordings of classroom content may not be available in real time, as sometimes it takes up to 24 hours for classroom recordings to become available.

- **Video etiquette** While you zoom, your background is visible unless you choose a virtual background. Please remove distractions and remind roommates/family of your schedule. Additionally, please keep your audio muted when you are not speaking.
- **Class cancellation** In the unlikely event that class must be cancelled because an emergency prevents me from attending class, an announcement will be sent to your university email account via BlueLine and/or a printed announcement will be posted in the classroom. In the event the university closes because of inclement weather, an official announcement will be made on the university's weather hotline at 402-280-5800. Unless the university officially closes, always assume that class will meet as scheduled.
- **Required technology** There are university tech standards for students and you can view these at <https://www.creighton.edu/node/170088>.

- **Office hours** Office hours are time that I've reserved for you outside of class. If you have questions or concerns about the course or course material, need help with a writing assignment, etc., I encourage you to stop by. To help that run smoothly, I ask that you let me know in advance that you'd like to meet — an email or word after class is more than enough. This will help me accommodate more students, especially around deadlines and exams.
- **Statement from the Provost** Creighton University may modify, suspend, or postpone any and all activities and services immediately and without notice because of force majeure causes beyond Creighton's control and occurring without its fault or negligence including, but not limited to, acts of god, fire, war, governmental action, terrorism, epidemic, pandemic, weather, national emergencies, or other threats to the safety of students or staff. Creighton may, at its option, alter the academic schedule or provide alternate instruction modalities to meet course objectives and competencies and program outcomes, including, but not limited to, distance or remote learning, until such time as Creighton determines normal operations may resume safely.