

Introduction to Metaphysics

Philosophy 116

Spring 2022

MWF 12–1:10 | GDH 104

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Course Description

This course examines the nature of things.

In this course, students will be introduced to the study of metaphysics by considering such questions as: (1) Is a hotdog a sandwich? (2) Does a band or other group become a new entity each time it loses or gains a member? (3) Are characters in works of fanfiction truly "the same" as those that appear in the canonical source material? and (4) Are you the same person now as you were ten years ago (or even when you started reading this course description)?



Image source: [doodlewash](https://www.doodlewash.com)

By the end of the term, you should be able to:

- **Articulate** some important metaphysical theories.
- **Articulate** salient objections to some important metaphysical theories.
- **Defend** your own views on some thorny metaphysical issues.

COURSE details

Website: Accessible via <https://classroom.google.com>

Required Readings: All readings are available as PDF's on Google Classroom.

Author Interviews: I have interviewed some of our authors about their work as part of my YouTube series, *Polite Conversations: Philosophers Discuss the Arts (PC:PDA)*. < [link](#) > These videos are assigned throughout the term (see the schedule below). You should watch them at normal speed.

Participation: You should come to class regularly and prepared to participate. If you ever feel unwell, especially if you have any Covid-19 symptoms, don't come to class. Missing class, being disengaged from class discussion, or turning work in late too frequently will negatively impact your grade, at my discretion. So, talk to me (sooner rather than later) if any of these becomes an issue for you.

Late Assignments: There is enough flexibility built into both the assignments and the structure of the course that you shouldn't find it too difficult to turn the work in on time. However, if you feel like you need some additional time and would like to negotiate reasonable, alternative deadlines for **any assignment for any reason**, including if you have academic accommodations, get in touch with me as soon as you can—preferably before it's due.

Honor Code: This course operates within the parameters set by the Honor Code. Students are encouraged to talk through all course material with one another and to function as interlocutors for one another. This extends to preparing to write your prompts and reflection letter. However, each student is required to write their own work, to cite all sources fully, and to give explicit credit where particular formulations of claims, arguments, and examples are the product of cooperative work.

Assignments

Online Discussion Forum | 90%

Each week, you will have the opportunity to select **one** significant passage from **one** of that week’s readings or a significant quote from one of that week’s videos, and write a **200–250 word** response to it. A passage may be chosen because it rings true or seems wrong, it is illuminating or confusing, it resonates or conflicts with another philosopher’s view, etc. Whatever the nature of your response, it should reflect your familiarity with the reading as a whole, not just its first few pages. You will post your response on Google Classroom as a prompt for discussion in that week’s **“Prompt”** assignment.

You will also have the opportunity each week to reply, for credit, to **two** of your classmates’ prompts and **two** of your classmates’ replies. **“Replies”** should be *substantive* and should deal with the *substance* of what your classmates have written. You can offer reasons to further support their views or reasons to revise or reject them. You can relate their ideas to those presented by other classmates or to other philosophers we’ve read. You can also piggyback off other classmates’ ideas. Whatever the nature of your replies, though, they should be *thoughtful* and move the discussion forward *productively*. You are welcome to post more than four per week, but no more than four count for credit.

Grading: Prompts & Replies will all be graded as either **Satisfactory (S)** or **Needs Work (N)**. The following table indicates how many S scores within each type of assignment you must obtain in order to receive a particular base grade:

Assignment type	A	B	C	D	(%)
Discussion Prompts	6	5	4	3	(50)
Replies to Prompts	14	12	10	8	(20)
Replies to Replies	14	12	10	8	(20)

You may post at most **one** Prompt per week for credit, by *no later than* 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday.

You may post at most **four** Replies per week for credit, by *no later than* 11:59 p.m. on Friday.

Final Paper | 10% To cap off the term, you will also write a short paper of 800–1000 words, in which you defend a position with respect to one of our topics from the term.

Schedule

Week 1 (Mar. 23–27) <i>What Is a Sandwich?</i>	
3/23	W “Sandwich Metaphysics” (with Elizabeth Cantalamessa) link
3/25	F Further Discussion
Week 2 (Mar. 28–Apr. 3) <i>Artifact Identity</i>	
3/28	M Thomas Hobbes, “The Ship of Theseus”
3/30	W Daniel Z. Korman, “The Metaphysics of Establishments”
4/1	F Further Discussion
Week 3 (Apr. 4–10) <i>Group Identity</i>	
4/4	M Wesley D. Cray, “Fightin’ Words: Sabbath Doesn’t Need the Ozzman”
4/6	W <i>PC:PDA</i> , Cray (Ep. 02 Part 1 & Part 2)
4/8	F Further Discussion
Week 4 (Apr. 11–17) <i>Personal Identity</i>	
4/11	M John Locke, “Of Identity & Diversity”
4/13	W Identity & Persistence: Thought Experiments
4/15	F No Class Instead, work on your replies!

The Amount of Work

The amount of reading (or watching) assigned each week is meant to be manageable so that you’ll have plenty of time to meet the Wednesday online discussion prompt deadline. Further, with your prompts, you will collectively produce up to 21 pages of additional reading each week, which you will need to sift through carefully prior to the Friday replies deadline.

Week 5 (Apr. 18–24) | *Racial Identities*

4/18 M Charles W. Mills, "But What Are You *Really?*" pp. 41-54
4/20 W Charles W. Mills, "But What Are You *Really?*" pp. 54-66
4/22 F Further Discussion

Week 6 (Apr. 25–May 1) | *Persons & Personae*

4/25 M Robin Dembroff & Dee Payton "Why We Shouldn't Compare Transracial to Transgender Identity" | [link](#)
4/27 W Wesley D. Cray, "Transparent and Opaque Performance Personae"
4/29 F Further Discussion

Week 7 (May. 2–8) | *Fictional Characters*

5/2 M Amie L. Thomasson, "If We Postulated Fictional Objects, What Would They Be?"
5/4 W Stacie Friend, "Fictional Characters"
5/6 F Further Discussion

Week 8 (May. 9–15) | *Fictional Characters*

5/9 M **No Class | Flunk Day**
5/11 W David Friedell, "Abstract Creationism & Authorial Intention"
5/13 F *PC:PDA*, Friedell & Cray (Ep. 02 | [Part 1](#) & [Part 2](#))

Week 9 (May. 16–22) | *Fanfiction*

5/16 M Craig Derksen & Darren Hudson Hick, "On Canon"
5/18 W *PC:PDA*, Derksen & Hick (Ep. 32 | [link](#))
5/20 F No Class | Work on paper

Week 10 (May. 23–31) | *Final Paper*

5/23 M No Class | Work on final paper
5/25 W No Class | Work on final paper
5/31 Tu Final Paper due by 10 p.m.

Prompts & Replies

Prompts | Wednesdays by 11:59 pm
Replies | Fridays by 11:59 pm

Grades

A	4.0	B \bar{X}	2.67	D+	1.33
A \bar{X}	3.67	C+	2.33	D	1.0
B+	3.33	C	2.0	D \bar{X}	0.67
B	3.0	C \bar{X}	1.67	F	0.0

Further information on all assignments can be found on Google Classroom.