

## METAPHYSICS

### PHIL3601

INSTRUCTOR: Andrew Richmond  
 LOCATION: Zoom, link on Courseworks  
 DATE/TIME: M/T/W/R, 1:00-2:35pm (July 6 – Aug 14)  
 OFFICE HOURS: Every day after class, or by appointment

#### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Metaphysics is the study of two questions: *what is there*, and *what it's like*? The questions, of course, are not as simple as they sound. Metaphysicians ask whether there are such things as selves, souls, or minds. And they ask about the most fundamental building blocks of reality: what is our world made up of? Are there different kinds of building blocks, e.g., *objects* as opposed to *properties*? If so, what *are* objects and properties, and how do they build the world we live in?

We'll start by discussing some difficult cases, close to home — the metaphysics of the self and free will. Then we'll move to more fundamental questions about the building blocks of reality. And finally, we'll discuss higher-order questions about metaphysics itself. Can metaphysics reveal the way the world is *objectively*, or just how it appears to us? And science is one of our most useful tools for making sense of the world — can it play a role in metaphysics?

By the end of the course you will be comfortable with central debates in contemporary metaphysics and prepared for more advanced courses in the subject. You will have gained experience evaluating arguments, writing argumentative papers, and participating in group inquiry into difficult problems. And you will be able to take a philosophically- and metaphysically-informed perspective on concrete problems.

#### TEXTS

All the readings will be available in the “Files” section of Courseworks, in the “Readings” folder.

#### ASSESSMENT

<i>Participation Logs</i>	20%
<i>Writing Exercises</i>	20%
<i>First Paper</i>	25%
<i>Final Paper</i>	35%

Details for the assignments will be available in the “Assignments” folder on Courseworks.

*Participation Logs*: You should come to class having done the readings, and having reflected on the “focus questions” attached to them. We'll discuss those questions in class, in breakout groups and then as a whole class. For your participation grade, you'll submit two participation logs, worth 10% each. In those logs you'll describe some of your contributions to our discussions, and reflect on the way that your participation contributed to the class.

*Writing Exercises*. These are four short assignments (100-300 words), worth 5% each. They will give you the chance to practice the basic skills needed to write a successful argumentative paper. The instructions will be posted on Courseworks.

*First Paper.* A 1000-word paper, explaining one of the debates we’ve discussed in class and arguing for a position on it. (You can also pick a different debate, or some other topic, in consultation with me.)

*Final Paper.* A 2000-word paper, explaining one of the debates we’ve discussed in class and arguing for a position on it. (You can also pick a different debate, or some other topic, in consultation with me.) If you work hard at the writing exercises and the first paper, you’ll be well-prepared to write a successful paper.

## SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Date	Topic	Reading	Due
7/6	Introduction		
7/7	Selves (1): Introduction	Conee & Sider, Chapter 1	
7/8	Selves (2): Bundles and the “Deep Self”	Hume, <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> , Part 4, Section 6	
7/9	Selves (3): Bodies and Minds	Thomson, “People and their Bodies”	<b>Writing Exercise 1</b>
7/13	Selves (4) A Cognitive Approach	1. Dennett, “Where am I?” 2. Ismael, “Saving the Baby”	
7/14	Freedom (1): Introduction	Conee & Sider, Chapter 6 Chiang, “What's expected of us?”	
7/15	Freedom (2): Compatibilism	Wolf, “Sanity and the Metaphysics of Responsibility”	
7/16	Freedom (3): Hard Determinism	Strawson, G., “The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility”	<b>Writing Exercise 2</b>
7/20	Freedom (4): Another Compatibilism	Strawson, P. F., “Freedom and Resentment”	<b>Writing Exercise 3</b>
7/21	Freedom (5): A New Compatibility Problem	Nadelhoffer, “The Threat of Shrinking Agency and Free Will Disillusionism”	
7/22	Universals (1): Introduction	Conee & Sider, Chapter 8	
7/23	Universals (2): Nominalism	Quine, “On What There Is”	<b>Participation Log 1</b>
7/27	Universals (3): Trope Theory and Ostrich Nominalism	1. Williams, “The Elements of Being” 2. Devitt, “Ostrich Nominalism or Mirage Realism”	Mid-Semester Course Evaluation (Ungraded)
7/28	Universals (4): Paraphrase, Companionship, and Imperfect Communities	1. Armstrong, Chapter 6 2. Jackson, “Statements about Universals” 3. Pap, “Nominalism, Empiricism and Universals”	
7/29	Universals (5): Fictionalism	Varzi, “Fictionalism in Ontology”	
7/30	<i>Co-working Session</i>	<i>None</i>	

8/3	Particulars (1): Bundle Theory	Black, "The Identity of Indiscernibles"	<b>First Paper</b>
8/4	Particulars (2): Substratum Theory	Allaire, "Bare Particulars"	
8/5	Naturalism (1): Science as Metaphysics	Ismael, "Causation, Free Will, and Naturalism"	
8/6	Naturalism (2): Science as Ontology	Dennett, "Kinds of Things"	
8/10	Naturalism (3): Science and Cognition	Dunbar, "Science as Category"	
8/11	Realism & Anti-Realism (2): Constructivism	Boghossian, Fear of Knowledge, Chapters 3 & 4	
8/12	Realism & Anti-Realism (3): Constructivism Cont.	Haslanger, "Ontology and Social Construction"	<b>Writing Exercise 4</b>
8/13	TBD ( <i>Co-Working Session</i> )	TBD ( <i>None</i> )	<b>Participation Log 2</b>
8/17			<b>Final Paper</b>

## OTHER POLICIES

*Late Policy.* Officially, late assignments will be docked 1/3 of a grade per day (so a B+ two days late becomes a B-) unless you have an extension. *I'll be very generous with extensions*, so do ask if you need one. But since the class is on a compressed schedule it will be easy to fall behind, so, if you can help it, try not to use extensions unless you really need to.

*Accessibility.* **Please** let me know if there's anything I can do to make the class more accessible or inclusive, or if there's any way I can help you participate. The Disability Services Office blurb is below, and would really appreciate knowing about anything that makes the class harder to participate in, or just less fruitful, for anyone.

*In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations for this course, students must first be registered with their school Disability Services (DS) office. Detailed information is available online for both the [Columbia](#) and [Barnard](#) registration processes. Refer to the appropriate website for information regarding deadlines, disability documentation requirements, and [drop-in hours](#)(Columbia)/[intake session](#) (Barnard).*

*Office hours.* I'll stick around after each class, on the same Zoom meeting, for anyone who wants to talk. **Please take advantage of these**, and don't feel like you have to come with fully thought-out questions. I'm also very happy to answer other questions about metaphysics, philosophy in general, graduate school, etc., in addition to discussing course material. If you can't stay after class, get in touch and we'll set up another time to meet. And if there is anything you'd like to talk about that you don't feel comfortable discussing in a small-group setting after class, let me know and we can set up a one-on-one meeting at another time.