

METAPHYSICS

<p><u>Professor</u></p> <p><i>Justin Clarke-Doane</i> jc4345@columbia.edu</p> <p>Department of Philosophy 712B Philosophy Hall Office Hours: By Appointment</p>	<p><u>Teaching Assistants</u></p> <p><i>Yitu Hu</i> yh3075@columbia.edu TA Session: Tues 4:10-5pm Office Hours: TBA</p> <p><i>Shuai Liu</i> sl4644@columbia.edu TA Session: Th 7:10-8pm Office Hours: Th 8-9pm & By Appointment</p>
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Summary

Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy devoted to exactly characterizing the nature of reality, as opposed to what we can know about it, or how we manage to represent it. In this course, we will survey some basic questions of contemporary metaphysics. Is every true proposition true in virtue of the existence of something? Are there different levels to reality? What is the nature of causation and counterfactual dependence? Do facts about how the world could have been different presuppose the existence of possible objects? What is existence, anyway? What is the nature of infinity, and infinitely divisible space and time? How do advances in physics bear on such questions? What is the place of consciousness in the resulting picture? Is there room for free action? Why is the world such that we can accurately represent it in language and thought? Are there genuine answers to such questions, or are all answers somehow relative or shallow?

Meeting Details

The class meets on **MW 6:10pm-7:25pm.**

Requirements

Participation will constitute **20%** of your grade. This involves completing the assigned reading ahead of class, and participating in discussion during your TA sessions and in class. (If you are in a sufficiently different time-zone, then this requirement can be met by sending your TA questions and comments on the readings by email ahead of each TA session.)

Two exams, a take-home midterm (**due November 16**) and a take-home final, will constitute **40%** of your grade. These are meant to ensure that you have completed the readings, and have wrestled with the questions they raise.

Two 6-page papers (due **October 19** and **December 7**) will together constitute **40%** of your grade. The first paper will constitute **15%** of your grade, and the second will constitute **25%**. Topics will be distributed ahead of time.

Resources

All of the readings will be available in pdf on Courseworks.

In addition, there are a number of free online philosophy resources that we recommend you utilize. They include:

- My [Outline of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics](#)
- [The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)
- [The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)
- [PhilPapers](#)
- Jim Pryor's Guide to [Writing](#) and [Reading](#) Philosophy, and his guide to [Philosophical Terms and Methods](#)
- James Lenman's [How to Write a Crap Philosophy Essay: A Brief Guide for Students](#)
- Greg Restall's [Lectures on Logic](#) (including elementary, mathematical and non-classical)

Schedule of Readings

(selections to be determined)

September 9 - Truth and Correspondence

Russell, *Logical Atomism*

September 14-- Truthmakers

Armstrong, *Truth and Truthmakers*

September 16 -- Quantification

Quine, "On What There Is"

September 21-- Existence

Fine, "The Question of Ontology"

September 23 -- Causation

Cartwright, "Causal Laws and Effective Strategies"

September 28 -- Causation Contd.

Field, "Causation in a Physical World"

September 30 -- Modality and Counterfactuals

Williamson, "Philosophical Knowledge and Knowledge of Counterfactuals"

October 5 -- Possible Objects

Bennett, "Two Axes of Actualism"

***FIRST PAPER TOPICS DISTRIBUTED**

October 7 -- Convention

Putnam, "Truth and Convention"

October 12 -- Relativism

Sosa, "Nonabsolute Existence and Conceptual Relativity" and "Addendum: Objections and Replies"

October 14 -- Pluralism

Dupre, *The Disorder of Things*

October 19 -- Infinity

Whittle, "On Infinite Size"

***FIRST PAPER DUE**

October 21 -- Paradoxes of Space

Salmon, "A Contemporary Look at Zeno's Paradoxes"

October 26 -- The World of Relativity

Smart, "The Space-Time World"

October 28 -- Experience in Spacetime

Lee, "Consciousness in a Spacetime World"

November 2 -- NO CLASS (ACADEMIC HOLIDAY)

November 4 -- Materialism

Churchland, "The Hornswoggle Problem"

***TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DISTRIBUTED**

November 9 -- Probability in Quantum Physics

Feynman, "The Concept of Probability in Quantum Mechanics"

November 11 -- Entanglement and Relativity

Miller, "Two Notions of Holism"

November 16 -- Free Will

Ismael, *How Physics Makes Us Free*

***TAKE-HOME MIDTERM DUE**

November 18 -- Free Will Contd.

Rosen, "Skepticism about Moral Responsibility"

November 23 -- Moral Realism

McGrath, “Moral Disagreement and Moral Expertise”

***SECOND PAPER TOPICS DISTRIBUTED**

November 25-- Realism and Idealism

Hofweber, “Idealism and the Harmony of Thought and Reality”

November 30 -- NO CLASS (ACADEMIC HOLIDAY)

December 2 -- Conceptual Schemes

Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme”

December 7 -- Something rather than Nothing

Parfit, “The Puzzle of Reality: Why Does the Universe Exist?”

***SECOND PAPER DUE**

December 9 -- Meta-metaphysics

Thomasson, “Answerable and Unanswerable Questions”

***TAKE-HOME FINAL DISTRIBUTED**

December 14 -- Review

***TAKE-HOME FINAL DUE DECEMBER 18**

Academic Integrity

Please familiarize yourself with Columbia University’s policies on academic integrity at:
<http://www.college.columbia.edu/academics/academicintegrity>

Please also familiarize yourself with Columbia University’s honor code at:
<https://www.college.columbia.edu/ccschonorcode>

Failure to comply with Columbia’s policies can result in serious disciplinary action.

