

PHI 441 Metaphysics

Spring 2007

Classroom: CHE 101
Class Time: MW 1:00-2:15
Instructor: Dr. Alan Rhoda
Office: CDC 422
Office Hours: MW 2:30-3:30 and by appt.
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Course Description

Metaphysics is the study of fundamental questions of existence: What does it mean for something to exist? How many basic kinds of things exist? What are these kinds? How are these basic kinds of things related to each other? And do these kinds of things *have* to exist? Is it *possible* that some or all of them not exist? In what ways, if any, could reality have been fundamentally different than it is? And what is the status of common-sense conceptual categories like time, space, causation, mind, matter, agency, individuality, possibility, and so forth? How should these categories be understood? Are any of them metaphysically basic? If so, which ones? And how can the non-basic ones be reduced to the basic ones? Etc.

As you can see, metaphysics covers a lot of ground, and the questions are typically highly abstract, which can make metaphysics a difficult subject. In this course we will survey many of the basic metaphysical issues, paying special attention to the metaphysics of space and time. I chose this topic in part because it is my primary metaphysical specialty and in part because the issues it raises are intrinsically fascinating and generally accessible to beginners, making it a good entry point into metaphysics in general.

Course Texts

Peter Van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 2nd edition, Westview Press (M)
Peter Van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman, eds., *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, Blackwell (B)
Robin Le Poidevin, *Travels in Four Dimensions*, Oxford (T)

Summary of Course Requirements

Exams (3) (or 2 plus an optional term paper)	90%
Participation	10%

Borderline grades will be decided at the discretion of the instructor on the basis of attendance, participation, general comportment, and progress throughout the course of the semester.

Details

My plan is to have three take-home exams. Each will require you to pick two questions from a list I will give you and to type up a 3½–5 page answer to *each* question. So that's 7–10 pages total *per exam*. Each exam will be worth 30% of your final grade.

In each case, I'll pass a list of questions out and your typed responses will be due back to me one week later. While I encourage you to discuss the questions with each other, I expect you to write your answers by yourself. *Plagiarism will not be tolerated and will be prosecuted to the full extent the University allows* (an "F" for the exam, at least). You must not pass off someone else's work as your own, and you must fully document all your sources. Similar penalties apply to those who willingly allow their own work to be used by someone else.

Optional. You may substitute a 7–10-page term paper for *one* of the exams. If you choose to take advantage of this opportunity, you will need to get my approval on a topic *in advance*.

Participation

The success of this class depends to a great extent on your attendance, preparation, and involvement in class discussion. I will take role at the beginning of each class to track attendance. Every *unexcused* absence after the second will result in a 1% reduction of your final grade. Showing up late or leaving early will count as ½ of an unexcused absence. As for preparation, you should do the readings *before* class and be prepared to discuss them.

Also, each class day (except the last) I will assign one member of the class to take notes for that day. At the beginning of the following class, that person will be expected to distribute copies of their notes and then, in about 10-minutes, (1) present a summary of the previous day's class, (2) pose a further question to the class pertaining to the topics discussed, and (3) briefly share some thoughts on the matter. Given the size of our class (current enrollment is 16), everyone will be required to do this at least once (and probably twice) during the semester.

I have three reasons for requiring this. First, I've been told by students in the past that it helps to have someone else's notes to supplement or compare with your own. Different people pick different things out of a lecture and often make different (and useful) connections. Second, metaphysics is a difficult subject and my way of presenting things may not always "click" for you. Sometimes another student finds a way of getting across an important idea more effectively than I was able to. Third, you'll find that the effort of polishing your own notes for presentation will give you a much firmer grasp of that day's material.

Excuses and Late Work

Excused absences and time extensions for exams and papers will be given only in the case of serious illness or other extenuating circumstances (death in the family, religious holiday, etc.). In *all* cases, appropriate documentary evidence (note from a doctor on official stationary, a funeral program or bulletin, etc.) must be produced by the student. The maximum extension *for any reason* will be one week from the original due date.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability that may require assistance, you should contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) located in the Reynolds Student Services Complex, room 137. You can contact the DRC at 895-0866 (Voice), 895-0652 (TDD), 895-0651 (Fax), or via the Internet at <http://www.unlv.edu/studentlife/drc>.

Schedule

Note: This is a guideline only, and I reserve the right to revise this schedule as we go. If you miss a class for any reason, you should check my website (<http://www.alanrhoda.net>), where I will keep a running log of readings and occasionally links to supplementary articles and online resources.

Week	Topic	
	Monday	Wednesday
1	No class - MLK Jr. Day	Class introduction (M, 1-18; B, 1-13)
2	Individuality (M, 19-41)	Bradley's Regress (reading TBA)
3	Externality (M, 42-55)	Time and change (T, 1-28)
4	Absolute vs. relational space (T, 30-51)	Incongruent counterparts & higher dimensions (T, 52-72; B, 108-120)
5	The "A" and "B" theories of time (M, 56-64; B, 80-101)	McTaggart against the reality of time (B, 67-79; T, 122-147; M, 64-72)
6	No class - President's Day	The nature of time (Bourne (reserve); Rhoda (reserve))
7	The nature of time (B, 104-107; B, 192-204)	Temporary intrinsics (B, 204-219)
8	Limits to space and time (T, 73-100; Craig (reserve))	Limits to space and time (cont.)
9	Spring Break (no class)	
10	Zeno's paradoxes of motion (T, 101-121; B, 120-149)	Zeno's paradoxes (cont.)
11	Time travel & changing the past (T, 164-184; B, 159-169)	Objectivity (M, 73-85)
12	Why does anything exist? (M, 87-114)	No class – I'll be away at a conference.
13	Why does anything exist? (M, 115-134)	Top-down vs. bottom-up (M, 135-165)
14	Dualism, physicalism, & personal identity (M, 166-186)	Dualism, physicalism, & personal identity (M, 187-201; B, 296-310; B, 317-333)
15	Dualism, physicalism, & personal identity (cont.)	Free will & determinism (M, 202-217)
16	Free will & determinism (B, 343-380)	Wrap-up (M, 218-220)
	Final exam: Due Wednesday, May 9 by 5:00 pm	