

Course Description: This class takes as its subject-matter the fundamental nature of being. We begin by exploring questions about existence: What exists? Do possible worlds exist? Under what circumstances, if any, do objects come together to compose other objects? We then turn to an examination of some issues surrounding persons: what, if anything, is the nature of personhood? Are persons more than biological animals? Or are we only bodies? Next, we ask some questions about causation: Is causation the mere regular occurrence of one type of event after another? Or need we understand causation by appeal ways the world might have been had the purported causal impetus not occurred? We conclude by surveying several philosophical issues surrounding free will: is freedom ruled out by metaphysical determinism? Or is there a way to make sense of freedom that is compatible with determinism?

Learning Outcome Goals: By completing this course, students should gain significantly greater abilities to: (1) carefully engage in close reading of demanding texts; (2) produce a precise and carefully structured piece of writing; (3) participate in reasoned discussion of difficult topics; (4) employ modern deductive logic in their philosophic work; and (5) develop and defend their own philosophical positions and to engage in sustained and critical reflection on their own values and beliefs.

Course Requirements:

- (1) One 2 page writing exercise (topic to be announced). Late papers are accepted but 1/3 of a letter grade will be deducted for every 24 hours that the paper is late.
- (2) One 7-10 page paper on a metaphysical issue of the student's choice (a list of suggested paper topics to be provided). Students will submit both a rough draft and a final draft. Again, late papers will be deducted 1/3 of a letter grade for every day they are late.
- (3) 7 quizzes based on assigned reading. These will typically be true/false, multiple-choice, or fill in the blank questions. Quizzes may not be made up. The student's two lowest quiz grades will be dropped in calculating his/her final grade.
- (4) A take-home midterm examination
- (5) An in-class cumulative final examination
- (6) Class attendance and meaningful class participation, based in part on assigned reading, is expected.

Grading: Final grade calculation: 10% for quizzes; 15% for writing exercise; 20% for midterm; 20% for final exam; 10% for class participation; 25% for final paper.

Absences: University policy excuses the absences of students for illness (of one's self or one's dependent), religious observances, participation in University activities at the request of university authorities, and compelling circumstances beyond the student's control. Students must *request the excuse in writing and supply appropriate documentation*, e.g., medical documentation to the TA. Students with written, excused absences are entitled to a makeup midterm exam (but not a makeup quiz) at a time mutually convenient for the instructor/TA and student.

Canvas space for the course: The course will use the Canvas web space to post assigned readings and other course materials. Go to elms.umd.edu [note: no www at beginning]. Sign on with your usual directory ID and password. If you are not familiar with Canvas, there are various tutorials available at the ELMS site.

Classroom Etiquette: Please arrive on time and leave only after the class is over. Please do not talk to your neighbor during class. Turn off and put away all cell phones and message devices. Laptops may NOT be used during lecture (unless proper DSS documentation is provided).

Accommodations: If a student has a documented disability and wishes to discuss academic accommodations with the instructor, please contact the instructor and the TA in writing (email is OK) as soon as possible. If a student is a member of a religious group that will require accommodations in the academic calendar, please send email to both the instructor and the TA within the first three weeks of class to indicate what the conflict is and what accommodation is requested.

Honesty: Honesty on the part of students is presumed. The University has approved a **Code of Academic Integrity** (<http://www.shc.umd.edu/code.html>), administered by the Student Honor Council, which prohibits students from cheating on exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, facilitating academic dishonesty, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. Plagiarism policy: all quotations taken from other authors, including from the internet, must be indicated by quotation marks and referenced. Paraphrasing must be referenced as well.

Students may get help with the grammar and structure of their writing, such as at the **Writing Center** (see <http://www.english.umd.edu/writingcenter> or call 301-405-3785 for appt.). However, students may not get unacknowledged help with the content of their work. Please contact the TA with any questions about what is acceptable or unacceptable outside help.

Required Texts: Most assigned readings will be uploaded onto ELMS by at least one week prior to when they are assigned. However, there are two (relatively inexpensive) books which are required for the course:

- van Inwagen, Peter. *Material Beings*. (1990), Cornell University Press.
- Kane, Robert. *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*. (2005), Oxford University Press

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

Major grading events are indicated by: (***)

Week 1 (1/28, 1/30): **Introduction: What is Metaphysics?**
Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: "Metaphysics"

Week 2 (2/4, 2/6): **Ontology**
Quine: "On What There Is"
Carnap: "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology"

Week 3 (2/11, 2/13): Ontology Continued
Recommended: Yablo: "Does Ontology Rest on a Mistake?"
Schaffer: "On What Grounds What"

2 page writing exercise assigned

Week 4 (2/18, 2/20): **Modality**
Adams: "Actualism and Thisness"
Lewis: "A Philosopher's Paradise"

*****February 23rd: 2 page writing exercise due to me by email by 11:59pm**

Week 5 (2/25, 2/27): Modality Continued
Rosen: "Modal Fictionalism"

Week 6 (3/4, 3/6): **Composition**
van Inwagen: *Material Beings*: Chapters 1-4

Week 7 (3/11, 3/13):
van Inwagen: *Material Beings*: Chapters 6, 8-9

Take-home midterm assigned

Week 8: SPRING BREAK

Week 9 (3/25, 3/27): **Causation**
Russell: "On the Notion of Cause"
Mackie: "Causes and Conditions"

*****March 30th: Take-home midterm due to me by 11:59pm**

Week 10 (4/1, 4/3):
Anscombe: "Causality and Determination"
Lewis: "Causation"

Week 11 (4/8, 4/10) **Persons**

Williams: "The Self and the Future"

Parfit: "Personal Identity"

Week 12 (4/15, 4/17)

Baker: "The Ontological Status of Persons"

Olson: "An Argument for Animalism"

*****April 20th: First draft of 7-10 page paper due to me by email by 11:59pm**

Week 13 (4/22, 4/24): **Free Will**

Kane: *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*: Chapters: 1-3

Week 14 (4/29, 5/1)

Kane: *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*: Chapters: 4-6

Week 15 (5/6, 5/8)

Kane: *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*: Chapters: 7-8

5/13, **Final Exam Review**

*****May 15th: Final draft of 7-10 page paper due to me by email by 11:59pm**

*****May 16th: 8:00-10:00am, Final examination in lecture classroom**

No change in time allowed

This syllabus may change. Students will be notified of important changes. The most recent version will be posted on ELMS.