

INTRODUCTION TO METAPHYSICS

Spring 2020
Instructor: Jeff Tolly

Instructor Contact Information:

Email: jeff.tolly@rutgers.edu

Class Meeting Schedule: 2:50pm-4:10pm Murray Hall 213

Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:00PM-1:30PM, Gateway building, 5th floor open collaboration space.

Communication note:

Email is the best way to contact me, although, due to family commitments, I do not check email after 5:00pm or on weekends. I try to respond to emails sent to me within 1-2 business days. If I haven't responded to your email in that time frame, go ahead and send me a reminder follow up email.

Required Texts—

- i. *Metaphysics: an Introduction*. By Alyssa Ney. © 2014, Routledge
- ii. Other course readings will be made available on the class Sakai site.

Course Description:

Science can tell us lots of things about reality. It provides insightful descriptions of the different causes and effects that occur in the universe. Science also helps us understand the universe's history. But there are deeper questions about reality that science doesn't concern itself with—questions like “What is a cause?” and “What is time itself?” These are the sorts of questions addressed by metaphysics. In this course, we'll examine some of the key metaphysical debates surrounding the following questions:

- What is a person?
- Is the mind something physical or something non-physical?
- How does one's identity persist through time?
- Why is there something rather than nothing?
- What is free will, and are we free?
- What is a cause? What is an effect?
- What are space and time, and is time travel a coherent possibility?
- Fundamentally, what sorts of things exist?
- What is race?
- How should mysterious scientific theories, like quantum mechanics, alter our view of reality (if at all)?

There are two key goals for this course:

- (1) developing the philosophical skill of critical reasoning
- (2) gaining an understanding of the best reasons for and against the various positions on these metaphysical questions.

Note 1: I will make all of my overheads used in lecture available on Sakai each day after class, and provide handouts for students. This allows students to take notes more efficiently in class, knowing that they can see all the slides whenever they want. Handouts will also be posted online after each class period, in case you have to miss class.

Grading System

	<u>Possible Points</u>
Participation:	100 points
Quizzes (2)	100 points (50 points each)
Question Assignment	30 points
Conversation Forum Groups (2)	80 points (40 points each)
Final Paper	165 total points:
Prospectus	20 points
Rough Draft	50 points
Final Draft	75 points
Final Presentation	20 points
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Total Possible Points:	475 points

Grading Scale

475-445: A	329-315: C
444-425: A-	314-300: C-
424-395: B+	299-285: D+
394-365: B	284-270: D
364-345: B-	269-260: D-
344-330: C+	259-: F

Note: When looking on the Sakai gradebook, only pay attention to your point total value (for the semester) on there—*don't* pay attention to the overall letter grade that Sakai will post, (because Sakai's letter grade calculator is not using the official grade scale for the class that you see above).

Due Dates

Question assignment: assigned 1/29, due 2/3

Group Forum Response 1: Assigned 2/5, Due 2/12

Group Forum Response 2: Assigned 2/12, Due 2/19

Quiz 1: 3/11

Quiz 2: 4/22

Long Paper Assignment

 Prospectus: Assigned 2/26, Due: 3/25

 Rough Draft: Assigned 3/25, Due 4/15

 Final Draft due: Assigned 4/15, Due on our final exam period (TBD)

Assignments:

Final Paper

(165 points). 1500-2000 words. This paper will be formally assigned at the beginning of the second half of the course. I will provide a formal grading rubric and writing instructions around the time the paper is formally assigned. On the way to finishing the paper, there will be two collaborative workshops for students to strengthen their papers.

The final draft of the paper will be due on the final exam period day. Although there is no final exam for this course, part of your final paper grade will be showing up on exam day to present your final paper to your classmates in a mini conference.

Grade breakdown:

Prospectus	20 points
Rough Draft	50 points
Final Draft	75 points
Final Presentation	20 points

Philosophy Question Assignment

(30 points) In the first month of the course, I will ask you to write up and explain a philosophical question that you have about the course material. I will provide more formal instructions on this assignment later on in the course. The question is to be submitted on Sakai.

Forum Conversation Groups

(2 assignments, 40 points each) In the first half of the course, I will divide you up into groups of three, and give you a 2-part writing/response project. In the first conversation group assignment, everyone in the group will first have to respond to a thesis or argument from class that I'll give you. In the second conversation group assignment, you'll have to produce a short response/objection to an argument that one of your groupmates made in the first assignment. Each response will be roughly 250 words. To be turned in on Sakai. The members of each group will be able to see their group members' responses in Sakai. More detailed instructions will follow.

Quizzes

2 short quizzes test the student's comprehension of reading assignments and the key lessons from lecture. Each quiz is worth 50 points.

Participation

(100 points) Philosophy is best learned while *doing* philosophy. A large part of doing philosophy involves sharing and discussing one's views in community. Some of these discussions will occur in smaller groups, and some will occur with the whole class. As these discussions occur, I will be evaluating you for the quality of your contributions. See the participation rubric (on website) for how I'll evaluate your participation.

I realize that not everyone feels comfortable speaking up in class. That's okay. It's just important that everyone participate in some way, so if you don't speak much in class, you'll need to participate by coming to talk to me in office hours, or by emailing with me about your philosophical questions and thoughts.

Tip: If you feel like you'll be tempted to chatter or be off-task while sitting next to certain individuals in the class, I *highly* recommend (for the sake of your participation grade) choosing to sit somewhere further away from them.

Attendance

Attendance will be taken at each session at the beginning of class, and is a basic requirement of the course. This means that positive credit will not be given for regular attendance, though penalties will be assessed for students who have *more than three* unexcused absences. Each unexcused absence in excess of the three absence limit will result an automatic 10 points lost on the student's possible participation points for the semester.

Excused Absences fall into three different categories:

Category 1: Official university approved activities—e.g., varsity athletic events, academic field trips, university/academic art performances) For category 1 absences, BEFORE MISSING CLASS, *it is the student's responsibility* to arrange for the university sponsor of the activity (e.g., varsity coach, professor) to reach out to the instructor (me)—either by letter or email—in order to inform the instructor regarding the dates to be missed and the reasons for missing class. Also, **before class is missed**, it is the student's responsibility to arrange (with the instructor) for **make up-work on any quizzes** that were scheduled on the missed class day or turning in written work that is scheduled to be due on the class day being missed.

Category 2: Unforeseen tragedies or *serious* medical illness

In the event of a category 2 absence, students should try and notify the instructor as soon as reasonably possible.

Category 3: A non-serious illness, but nonetheless sick enough to miss class

In order for a category 3 absence to truly be counted as *excused*, students must either

- i. get the student health center to verify to the instructor (by sending me mail or email) confirming that the student did indeed come to the student health center for treatment (dated on or around the day the student misses class). The student health center at Rutgers does this quite often, so go ahead and ask them
- ii. or, if the student attended some other medical clinic on the day of missed class, the student should bring or send me some form of documentation of their doctor's visit.

Note: Car *accidents* do count as a category 3, but things like getting stuck in traffic or having your car break down on you on the way to class won't count as excused absences.

Tardiness

While any instance of tardiness will hurt a student's participation grade for that class period, any student that arrives more than 10 minutes late will be marked as absent for that day.

Electronic Devices and Texting

The use of electronic devices during class and examinations are *expressly forbidden*, unless prior consent of the instructor is given (like using laptops during a peer editing workshop). This includes but is not limited to calculators, tape-recorders, cell phones, lap-top computers, tablets, MP3 players, etc. *Students that use these electronic devices in class will be marked absent for that session.*

Suggestion: If you feel like you'll be tempted to take your phone out of your pocket and check it during class if it buzzes, then I suggest turning your phone off and putting it in your bag when class starts.

Late and Missed Assignments

Missed assignments, regardless of type, will be given a 0, unless sufficient evidence is presented for why the assignment was missed. In the case of quizzes, make-ups will be allowed only in those cases where the instructor has both been *notified in advance* about a conflict and permission has been granted by the instructor, or if an absence is adequately documented or explained and permitted by the instructor.

POLICY: Because all due dates have been provided to you at the beginning of the course, you can plan your work-weeks accordingly *ahead of time*. Hence, in order to be fair to each student, I do *not* give extensions on assignments because students have multiple assignments from other classes due around the same time or extra-curricular/work activities going on around the time of the due date.

Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct

You are expected to be familiar with and to abide by RU's policy on academic and intellectual integrity: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy>

Class Policy for Plagiarism Penalty

First offense: If I determine that a student plagiarized in a particular section of that paper, then that student won't earn any points *on that section* of the paper.

Second offense: My grade penalty will be *much* more severe.

Rule of thumb: If you're going to write down an idea that is *not yours*, don't hesitate to cite it either with a footnote or a parenthetical citation.

Students with Disabilities

If you need special accommodations because of a learning disability or for another reason, please have the Office of Disability Services (ods.rutgers.edu) get in touch with me. I want to work with you in whatever way I can.

Late Work...(Is Not Allowed)

Work turned in *after* the deadlines won't be accepted without a university approved excuse. Below are the deadlines for all of the assignments. So, students can see when they might need to hand in work earlier if they'll be gone on the due dates. For details on excused absences, see the section above on absences.

Policy for Extensions: All of the deadlines for every assignment are here on this syllabus, so that now you can adjust your social and work time accordingly to make adequate time for completing each of these assignments. This is to make things as *fair as possible for every student* on the front end. Because of this, it's **not** my policy to grant extensions for assignments due on weeks when students have many things due (from other classes)...You have all the information you need to *plan ahead* for these busy weeks.

Reading Drafts of Papers

I will read drafts of the final paper and give you comments on them at any stage in the writing process, so long as you submit your draft to me before 48-hours prior to the deadline. I will do this over email, but I prefer students to make appointments with me or come to office hours—students get the most out of their comments in that way.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Wednesday 1/22: First day-Introductions

Monday 1/27: Love and Arguments

Readings:

- (1) Video: How to Argue
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKEhdsnKKHs&t=>
- (2) “A Love Story”—Radio Documentary, *This American Life*.
<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/247/what-is-this-thing/act-three>
- (3) *Optional:* (M) pgs. 1-13

Wednesday 1/29: Love and Personal Identity

Readings:

- (1) “The Rise of Dating App Fatigue”—Julie Beck (Sakai)
- (2) Trailer: “Freaky Friday”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZ8KJ4MzzOw>

Monday 2/3: Personal Identity: Teletransporters, Split Brains, and Souls

- (1) Video: “Fission and Personal Identity”—Shelley Kagan
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRicA5zuFF0>

Due: Question Assignment

Wednesday: 2/5: Philosophy of Mind: The Mind/Body Problem

Readings:

- (1) “The Mind-Body Problem”—Thomas Nagel (Sakai)

Monday 2/10 Philosophy of Mind: Is Consciousness Something Purely Physical?

Readings:

- (1) Video: “Mary’s Room: A Philosophical Thought Experiment”—Eleanor Nelson
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGYmiQkah4o&>

Wednesday 2/12 Philosophy of Mind: Is Mental Representation Something Purely Physical?

Readings:

- (1) Video: “The Chinese Room Experiment-the Hunt for AI”—BBC
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0MD4sRHj1M&>
- (2) Video: “The Chinese Room Argument”—John Searle
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18SXA-G2peY>

Due: Forum Group assignment #1

Monday 2/17 Ontology: What sorts of things *exist*?

Reading:

(1) (M) pgs 60-74

(2) *Optional*: (M) pgs 75-86

Wednesday 2/19 Ontology: Material Composition

Reading:

(1) (M) pgs 89-109

Due: Forum Group Assignment #2

Monday 2/24: Ontology: Wrap up day

Reading:

(1) (M) pgs 110-117

Wednesday 2/26: Time: What is the nature of time itself?

Reading:

(1) (M) pgs 138-152

(2) *Optional* (M) pgs 152-167

On the schedule: Be ready to discuss with your forum group.

Monday 3/2 Time: What is the nature of persistence?

Reading:

(1) (M): pgs 170-183

(2) *Optional*: (M) 184-189

Wednesday 3/4 Time: Paradoxes of Time Travel

Reading:

(1) "The Paradoxes of Time Travel"—David Lewis

Monday 3/9 Free Will—Compatibilism and Incompatibilism

Reading:

(1) (M) pgs 239-251

(2) *Optional*: (M): 252-257

Wednesday 3/11 Free Will –Science and Free Will

Reading:

(1) Video: "Neuroscience and Free Will-Libet's Experiment"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ4nwTImcgs>

Quiz #1 in class

-Spring Break: 3/14-3/22-

Monday 3/23: Quantum Mechanics: The "Double Slit" experiment

Readings:

(1) Overview Video 1: "Easy Quantum Mechanics"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7u_UQG1La1o

- (2) More Detail-(part 1) “The Quantum Experiment that Broke Reality”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-MNSLsjjdo>
- (3) More Detail- (part 2) : “ How the Quantum Eraser Re-writes the Past”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ORLN_KwAgs

Wednesday 3/25: Paper-Writing and Prospectus Workshop

Due: Prospectus, and bring 3 copies of your prospectus to class.

Monday 3/30 : Quantum Mechanics: Metaphysical Questions

Readings:

- (1) Video: “Quantum Entanglement and the Great Bohr-Einstein Debate”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tafGL02EUOA>
- (2) *Optional Video*: “Quantum Entanglement and Spooky Action at a Distance”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuvK-od647c>

Wednesday 4/1: Free will day 3 (and paradox of free will luck problem)

- (no new reading)

Monday 4/6 Causation: David Hume, Causal Skepticism, and Laws of Nature

Reading:

- (1) (M) pgs 217-230

Wednesday 4/8 Causation: Will a Counterfactual Theory of Causation Work?

Reading:

- (1) (M) pg. 231-236

Monday 4/13 Philosophy of Race: What is Race? (day 1)

Reading:

- (1) (M) pgs. 259-269

Wednesday 4/15 Philosophy of Race (day 2)

Reading:

- (1) (M) pgs. 270-278

Due: Rough Draft

Monday 4/20 The Cosmological Argument—Why is there something rather than nothing?

Reading:

- (1) Video: “Leibniz’s Contingency Argument”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPCzEP0oD7I>
- (2) Video: “Debate on the Existence of God--Fr. Copelston vs Bertrand Russell”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QlhjcSv6Ec>
(if you’d like to read the transcript of the debate, it is posted on Sakai)

Wednesday 4/22 The Cosmological Argument—Infinities and Big Bang Cosmology

Reading:

- (1) “The Kalam Cosmological Argument” –William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Sakai)

(2) “A Critique of the Kalam Cosmological Argument”—Paul Draper (Sakai)
Quiz #2 in class

Monday 4/27 The Fine-Tuning Argument For God’s Existence (Day 1)

Reading:

(1) Pgs 1-8, “The Fine Tuning Argument”—Robin Collins (Sakai)

Wednesday 4/29 The Fine-Tuning Argument For God’s Existence (Day 2)—the “multiple universes” hypothesis.

Reading:

(1) Pgs 9-17, “The Fine Tuning Argument”—Robin Collins (Sakai)

Monday 5/4 (last day of class and rough draft workshop)

Final Exam: TBD