

Summer 2017

Rutgers



Introduction to Metaphysics

Hardenbergh Hall A2 Tuesdays 1-5

Instructor: Ben Burgis

Course Description

This course will focus the three core metaphysical issues in the title of the first of the two textbooks we're using, *Time, Change and Freedom*. Twenty-four centuries ago, Aristotle worried about whether we really had free will if there were "currently" facts about what will happen in the future. Before Aristotle was born, Heraclitus and then Plato worried about the sticky problems about change and identity over time raised by examples like the Ship of Theseus, one plank of which is replaced every day. (We'll be talking about that one on the first day of class.) You'll be relieved to know that you don't need to come up with such amazingly convincing solutions to these puzzles that all future debate will end in order to get a good grade in this class....but you will get a chance to think deeply about them, see what cutting-edge contemporary philosophers think about the ancient problems, and write a paper where you work out some of your own views.

Office Hours

My office is Room 547 on the 5th Floor of 106 Somerset Street, right next to the Rutgers Barnes & Noble. Office hours are [TBA]. You can always drop by without an appointment, but I'll also try to meet with each one of you individually a few times over

the course of our short semester to make sure that everything's going well and you're getting all the help you need.

Reading Schedule

You don't need to buy a textbook for this class. Both of the books (*Time, Change and Freedom* and *No Fate But What We Make*) as well as the articles we're reading on the side are available as PDFs on the Readings tab of the course Sakai site.

No reading for May 30th: First Day of Class

Reading for June 6th: *Time, Change & Freedom*, Introduction by Quentin Smith & Dialogues 1-5

Reading for June 13th: *Time, Change & Freedom*, Dialogues 6-10 & *The Identity of Indiscernibles* by Max Black (Dialogue-Form Article)

Reading for June 20th: *Time, Change & Freedom*, Dialogue 11, *The Paradoxes of Time Travel* by David Lewis (article), Chapter One of *No Fate But What We Make* by Ryan Lake, *Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility* by Harry Frankfurt (Article)

Reading for June 27th: *The Time to Punish* by Saul Smilansky (Article), *Compatibilist Objections to Prepunishment* by Ryan Lake (Article), Chapters Two of *No Fate But What We Make* by Ryan Lake

Reading for July 4th: The Last Four Chapters of *No Fate But What We Make* by Ryan Lake

Grading Scheme

The whole megillah adds up to 200 points, so your final grade will just be (whatever grades you get)/2. Here's the breakdown:

Opening Day Pre-Quiz (Full Credit for Enthusiastic Participation)=25 points

Five Reading Quizzes (15 points each)=75 points

Five Discussion Forums (15 points each)=75 points

Final Paper=25 points

The One Question You Should Never Ask Any Instructor

“Are we doing anything important today?” (or, “Are we doing anything important next time?”)

If you spend three or four seconds thinking about it, you'll realize that this is an extremely offensive question. Whatever we're doing in class, we wouldn't be doing it if I didn't think it had any value. No instructor is ever going to respond to such a question by saying, "No, today's going to be a complete waste of time. You should go ahead and do that other thing you were thinking of doing instead of coming to class."

That Said...

...obviously it's sometimes unavoidable that you have to miss class, and I'm not going to be unreasonable about it. Just try your best to make it. With only six sessions, it's a *very* short semester!

