

METAPHYSICS (PHL-3020)

SPRING 2019

Instructor: Dr. Zita Toth, Department of Philosophy

Prerequisites: Modern Philosophy

Meeting times: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:40–2:58 p.m.

Credit hours: 3 credits

Office: St. Maur, room A 002

Office hours: MW 10–11:30 a.m., and by appointment. To make an appointment, please go to http://zitavtoth.com/2_teaching/ and click on the desired slot.

Phone: 2924 (office extension); 917-544-3364 (cell; please use it with consideration).

E-mail: ztoth@conception.edu.

Expected time required outside class: Approximately 2 hours for every class hour.

Tutoring: Please ask Fiona Holly in the library.

REQUIRED TEXTS

There is one required book for the course; additional materials will be available on Moodle. Although the library has electronic access to this book, please get it in hard copy and bring it to class whenever you can.

- Robert Pasnau. *Metaphysical Themes 1274–1671*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2011. ISBN: 978-0-19-967448-0.

DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Aristotle defines metaphysics as the study of being as being. Although there has been considerable subsequent disagreement about the meaning of this definition, and even more disagreement about what the subject matter of metaphysics really is, most philosophers would agree that metaphysicians are interested in something very basic. In this course, we are going to look at how one might attempt to describe the world, on this very basic level, in a broadly speaking Aristotelian framework. What is Change? How is it possible? What are the kinds of things that are capable of change? What is matter? What is physical extension? Why can't, even in principle, two things be at the same place at the same time (or, can they)?

- Students will learn to understand and appreciate metaphysical questions and their difficulties;
- will familiarize themselves with various thinkers who thought a lot about these questions, especially in the later medieval and early modern period;
- and will develop their philosophical speaking and writing abilities.

GRADING

Grading scale:

Grade	GPA	Description
A	4.00	excellent, outstanding
A-	3.67	still excellent
B+	3.33	very good
B	3.00	good; solid, and above average
B-	2.67	good; still above average
C+	2.33	average
C	2.00	acceptable
C-	1.67	minimally acceptable
D	1.00	passing but unsatisfactory
F	0.00	failure

Grade break-down:

Component	Percentage
In-class participation	20%
Notecards	20%
Presentations and argument rehearsals (total)	30%
Research paper	20%
Final exam	10%

Participation: Conversation is essential to Philosophy. Everyone, even if they are bored or shy or anxious is expected to participate in class. Here are a few suggestions with regard to class discussion:

- Charity is very important in every engaging discussion. You should answer to your peers' suggestion according to the best interpretation you can give them.
- Criticism can be very useful, but be careful not to direct it towards the person instead of the idea.
- Please be willing to change your mind if the evidence so dictates.
- To prepare for class participation: You will see that metaphysical questions, as discussed in the reading, can be very difficult. Be sure to make notes about: (1) the main thesis or idea of the reading; (2) metaphysical terminology and concepts; (3) the main argument (if any); (4) the main examples the reading uses to illustrate the point; and any questions or remarks you have about the reading.

Notecards: The notecards require that you show that you put effort into the readings and are prepared to participate well. After completing the reading for each class, write down a short summary on a 3×5 notecard. The summary should be the kind of summary that you would write for an annotated bibliography; it should not be just an abbreviated version of the text but demonstrate understanding of the main problems the text discusses. You might also raise questions or offer comments about the reading. You will need to put your notecard on my desk before the beginning of class. Notecards are graded on a \times (D), \checkmark - (C), \checkmark (B), \checkmark + (A) scale. A \checkmark + is reserved for incisive, well-articulated summaries. Because notecards are part of the

preparatory work for class discussions, notecards cannot be turned in late. If you have an excused absence, that day will simply not count toward your average.

Presentations: You will be asked to give two presentations during the semester, based on the reading assigned for that meeting. The aim of the presentation is *not* to give a summary of the reading (since presumably everyone will have read it) but to generate discussion. You should choose one or two of the main points of the reading, explain them in greater detail and either criticize or defend them. If you wish to focus on one section of the reading instead of the whole (which is advisable in most cases), you should let the class know to do only that portion of the reading. You need to do this by the previous class at the latest.

Argument rehearsals: You will be asked to turn in a written version of your presentation (which might not be exactly identical to the presentation you gave in speech). In the paper, you should select a single point or argument from the reading, and reconstruct it step by step. In this assignment, you do not need to be original; you need to demonstrate that you understood the main terms, concepts, and logical steps of the argument presented in the reading, and that you can explain these to someone who does not know the topic. This assignment will not be graded on its own but will be a prerequisite for getting a grade for the presentation. You might redo this assignment to achieve a passable grade.

Research paper: You will have to write a research paper on a metaphysical topic of your choice. You will need to discuss the topic with me in advance, and prepare an annotated bibliography. Details will follow. Here are the standards for distinguishing between Excellent, Good, Average and Poor papers:

- **Writing Quality:** Papers should demonstrate good grammar as well as good spelling. They should also be copy-edited to reduce or eliminate typos. Writing should be clear and exhibit good structure. Paragraphs should be cohesive and build towards a complete essay with a substantial thesis (as opposed to a string of disconnected thoughts).
- **Accuracy and Understanding:** Papers should be able accurately to recreate an argument or a position. They should find the relevant issues and argument(s) worthy of analysis.
- **Argument:** Papers should argue for or against a position rather than merely exchange opinions. Is the argument for or against a position constructed persuasively within the confines of the paper?

Final exam: Details will follow; the final exam will cover all the material assigned throughout the course.

COURSE POLICIES

Electronic Devices: Electronic devices are not allowed in class. They can be very distracting, and new research shows that even when computers are used solely for taking notes, learning is impaired, because the keyboard encourages taking verbatim notes while the pen requires you to process as you take notes.¹ Apparently, we even

1. Pam A Mueller and Daniel M Oppenheimer, "The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking," *Psychological Science*, 2014,

retain the content of texts much better when we read them on paper.² Everyone is expected to leave their devices (phones, laptops, tablets, etc.) at home or keep them turned off and out of sight during class time. Failing to do so will result in the confiscation of the device for the class period. For any special concerns about this policy, please ask me directly.

E-mail: There will be some official communication via e-mail, and everyone is expected to check their e-mail accounts regularly and read their e-mails carefully. You can expect me to read and answer my e-mails within 24 hours; please do not send me e-mails at midnight expecting a response by the next morning class.

Outside resources: Apart from the research paper, you will not have to do outside research beyond the assigned reading. If you feel you must read more than what is assigned, please do not rely on wikipedia (which tends to be rather unreliable in philosophy). Instead, I recommend an excellent and free website, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: plato.stanford.edu. For looking up philosophy papers on a specific topic, you can always consult philpapers.org.

Plagiarism: If you use or copy a source without properly citing it, you commit plagiarism. Plagiarism is a form of stealing. It is very easy to detect, and will result in your automatic failure of the course.

Lateness: Late assignments will not be considered unless for very serious reasons. If you have such reasons, please let me know as soon as you can. I will not accept excuses related to technology (“my e-mail address wasn’t working,” “it remained in my Draft folder,” etc.) unless it is a major technical issue that affects the campus and the IT department knows about it.

Attendance: Attendance is expected from everyone, and we start on time. If I do not receive your notecard by the time the class starts, I may refuse to accept it. *If it turned out you cannot be here on the day you are supposed to present*, you need to arrange for an exchange (i.e., ask someone to switch their presentation time with you). The schedule of the course is fixed, so you will need to change topics in this case. If you cannot arrange for an exchange, you will lose that portion of your presentation grade. Every unexcused absence will lower your participation grade by third of a letter grade. After your first excused absence I will only consider your absence excused if either I sign a paper for you in advance, or I get a note from your chaplain explaining your absence.

This course complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act in making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Please present your written request for accommodation to me and the Academic Dean before the fourth day of class.

2. Patricia A Alexander and Lauren M Singer, “A new study shows that students learn way more effectively from print textbooks than screens,” *Business Insider*, [October 15, 2017](#).

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

The schedule is tentative, which means it might change at any point during the semester. I will post any changes and will call your attention to it in advance.

Abbreviations: M = on Moodle; PMT = Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes*

Matter		
Jan 8	Introduction	Lewis Carroll, <i>Alice in Wonderland</i> , ch. 7 (M)
10	Some background	PMT, Introduction; <i>Categories</i> I (M)
15	Substratum	PMT, ch. 2
17	Prime matter	PMT, ch. 3
22	Matter and extension	PMT, ch. 4
Substance		
24	Subjects and substances	PMT, ch. 6
29	The veiled subject	PMT, ch. 7
31	Cartesian substances	PMT, ch. 8
Feb 5	Lockean substances	PMT, ch. 9
Accidents		
7	Real accidents	PMT, ch. 10
12	Inherence	PMT, ch. 11
19	Categories	PMT, ch. 12
Extension		
21	Quantity and extension	PMT, ch. 14
26	Impenetrability	PMT, ch. 15
28	Mind and extension	PMT, ch. 16
Mar 5	Location	PMT, ch. 17
12	Successive entities	PMT, ch. 18
Quality		
14	Real qualities	PMT, ch. 19
19	Primary qualities	PMT, ch. 21
21	TBA	
28	Secondary qualities	PMT, ch. 22
Apr 2	Causal powers	PMT, ch. 23
Identity		
4	Substantial form	PMT, ch. 24
9	Unity and dualism	PMT, ch. 25
11	Parts and wholes	PMT, ch. 26
16	Real essences	PMT, ch. 27
23	Permanence and corruption	PMT, ch. 28
25	Identity over time	PMT, ch. 29
30	Substance in Locke	PMT, ch. 30
May 2	Review	
TBA	Final exam	