

Metaphysics
PHIL 3600
Fall 2001
Syllabus

Professor Edward Halper
Office: Peabody Hall #128
Hours: 4:45–5:15 T, R
Other times by appointment
Telephone: 542-0668

Description and Objective: The aim of this course is to examine some of the central issues in metaphysics. In general metaphysics is concerned with the questions like what makes a thing be what it is? what sorts of things are there? what is the highest principle? and what is a cause? Precisely what metaphysics is and what it aims to do is itself a metaphysical question, and we will be concerned with some of the answers to this and to more particular metaphysical questions. We will explore different perspectives on each issue, but there are two fundamental orientations to contemporary metaphysics that are reflected by the two course texts. These orientations shape not only the answers to the issues but the character of the issues themselves.

The course is organized around several central topics that are explored by means of short reading assignments. The emphasis of the course is on understanding the readings. It is important to realize that different thinkers advance different solutions to problems and, in general, differ widely in the approaches they take. You are asked to learn not only the issues and the various solutions but also the arguments that support those solutions and the arguments advanced against alternative solutions. You should also try to see the overall approach that a thinker takes to a problem. Learning arguments on different sides of an issue can help you to do your own thinking about it. You are asked to “engage” the readings by posing your own questions and pursuing answers to them in the texts.

Texts: Heraclitus, fragments (handout)

M. Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*

van Inwagen and Zimmerman, *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*

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| Grading: | First Quiz | August 28 | 2.5% |
| | First Paper (3-5 pages) | September 25 | 25% |
| | Mid-Term | October 2 | 15% |
| | Second Quiz | October 25 | 2.5% |
| | Second Paper (3-5 pages) | November 15 | 25% |
| | Final Exam (cumulative) | December 13 (12:00–3:00) | 30% |

Paper topics will be assigned. They will not require outside reading.

Study: Most of the work for this course will lie in the preparation of the reading assignments. You will get much more out of the lectures if you have prepared the material **before** class. Reading philosophy is not like reading other material. You will need to read the assignment more than once. As a minimum, I suggest **three readings**. Begin by reading a large portion of text quickly; then, carefully prepare the section that will be discussed in class; third, read the material again after class. As you read, look for the author’s arguments and ask yourself the sort of questions that I might ask about the text. Remember, knowing what the author says is **not** enough! You should understand **why** the author takes this position: you should understand his arguments.

Added Attractions: Professor T. O'Connor will be speaking on metaphysics at a departmental colloquium Nov. 9 at 3:30 in Peabody 205S. You should be there. I will be screening two feature films pertinent to our course readings during the semester. Each will be shown on a Thursday at 6:30PM in Peabody 115, and a discussion will follow the screening.

Topical Outline: We will proceed through the readings in the following order. Page references are to van Inwagen and Zimmerman. This outline serves in place of a fixed schedule so that we can go as slowly or as quickly as is appropriate. You are responsible for finding out the daily assignment and reading it carefully before class. The last day of class, December 4, will be reserved for reviewing and concluding the course.

I. The Nature and Possibility of Metaphysics

- A. Heraclitus
- B. van Inwagen and Zimmerman: Introduction (1-13), Carnap (459-469), Flax (469-79)
- C. James, Parfit, Swinburne (415-429)
- D. Heidegger, Chapter 1

II. What is?

- A. Universals/Individuals (23-66)
- B. Appearance/Reality (267-290)
- C. Heidegger, Chapter 2

III. First Being

- A. Necessary Being (431-453)
- B. Heidegger, Chapter 3

IV. Human Being

- A. Mind/Body (291-341)
- B. Free Will (343-380)
- C. Heidegger, Chapter 4

V. Identity and Unity

- A. Identity through Time (171-219)
- B. One World (385-410)

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| August | 16 | Heraclitus |
| | 21 | “Introduction” |
| | 23 | Carnap |
| | 28 | Flax, James |