

PHIL 4400: METAPHYSICS

PROF. ANNE SIEBELS PETERSON
UNIVERSITY OF UTAH, SPRING 2018

Class Meetings: MWF 12:55-1:45, Carolyn Tanner Irish Humanities Building 459

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Office Hours: Mondays 2:00-3:00 p.m. and Wednesdays 9:00-10:00 a.m.

Other times available by appointment

Course Description:

What is metaphysics? Does metaphysics need science, or does science need metaphysics—or both? Should the metaphysician take account of our common beliefs about the world, or put other criteria in the driver's seat? What implications do these relationships between metaphysics, science, and common beliefs have for the proper methodology for pursuing metaphysical questions?

Different views on the nature of metaphysics open the door to different ways of answering metaphysical questions—for example, the question of what exists. Is there only one fundamental level of existence (e.g., the items discussed in fundamental physics), or many equally fundamental levels (so that, e.g., biological and political entities, such as ourselves and our societies, can be real as well)? Are there abstract and immaterial objects, or are all realities material? What, after all, is it to be material as opposed to immaterial—and do we fit in either category?

Different answers to these questions about existence and what exists open the door to different questions about time, change, and freedom. Our lives seem to be bound up with, indeed defined by, development and change over time. But what is change, and how is it related to time? What sorts of changes do we undergo, and how do we undergo them? Our lives also seem to involve freedom. But what is freedom, and how is it related to possibility? What would have to be true about the world in order for us to be genuinely free? We will focus mainly on contemporary readings in metaphysics, with some discussion of historical sources and of the connections between contemporary and historical movements in metaphysics.

- **Course Objectives.** *By the end of the course, the student will be able to:*
 - Understand and compare different views on the nature and methodology of metaphysics.
 - Understand and compare different ways of answering ontological questions in metaphysics (questions about what exists) and different ways of answering questions about time, change, and possibility in metaphysics.
 - Creatively analyze and critique different views on these topics in metaphysics.

Assignments:

Each assignment is listed on the day it is due on the class schedule (see p. 5 and following).

COMPONENT 1—Attendance, In-Class Participation, and Online Reading Responses:

20%

- Class Attendance, 10%
- Class Discussion Participation, 5%

- Friday Reading Responses (due on Canvas by 9:00 a.m., every week EXCEPT the first week), 5%
 - Reading responses will be graded pass/fail, but their general quality can also enter into one’s overall class discussion grade. *Discussion threads are considered to be equivalent to classrooms, and student behavior within those environments shall conform to the Student Code.*
 - Directions for posting reading responses:
 - Post responses on canvas, under “Discussions,” using the discussion thread I have created for the appropriate date. For your reading response, you can either a) reply to my original post or b) reply to someone else's reply to my original post.
 - Length: Responses should be long enough for you to show that you have carefully read and thought critically about an important point in the reading for that day. As a rule of thumb, your response should include *at least* 100 of your own words (if you are concise and non-repetitive you could write a successful response in 100 words; if you are less concise you will probably need more). So if you include a quote from the reading to help illuminate your response, there should still be 100 of your own words as well.
 - Content of responses: Your response should address the reading assigned for that week, not with the aim of summarizing many points, but rather with the aim of focusing on *one important point* and *critically engaging with it*. If there is more than one reading for a week, you may choose one to focus on or address both. Here are some possible prompts to guide your response:
 - What was the strongest point the author made and *why* did you find it philosophically compelling?
 - What was the weakest point the author made and *why* did you find yourself taking philosophical issue with it?
 - What did you see as the most confusing point the author made, and *why is it confusing?* To explain why, you might argue that it conflicts with something else the author says or with something that we all tend to believe, or you might offer the best interpretation of this point that you can muster and explain why you’re not convinced by your interpretation.
 - How does some point made in the reading impact an issue we have discussed previously—what new questions or answers does it provoke for the previous issue?
 - Reply to someone else's response. You might take issue with a point that person makes about the reading or provide a new reason for agreeing with that person's response.

COMPONENT 2—Papers: 50%

- There will be three paper assignments, with the second a revision and extension of the first:

1. Paper 1: 10% (3-4 pages)
 2. Revision and Extension of Paper 1: 15% (5-6 pages)
 3. Paper 2: 25% (5-6 pages)
- Format: .doc or .docx file attachment, 12 pt. font, 1-inch margins, double-spaced
 - Submission: Under “Assignments” on Canvas. Late papers will be assessed a penalty of two percentage points for each day they are late, including weekends.

COMPONENT 3—Exams: 30%

- There will be two exams given.
 1. First Exam: 10%
 2. Final Exam: 20%
- The exams will be given part in-class (multiple choice/short answer, no notes allowed) and part take-home (essay, notes allowed). The final exam will be longer than the first exam (covering more weeks of material), and the in-class portion of it will be given during the final exam period instead of a regular class period.