

Metaphysics (with fewer borders)

Mondays 12:00 - 14:30

Office Hours: Wednesdays 12:30-2:30, and by appointment

Overview:

This class is designed to improve your ability to think clearly and critically about issues in metaphysics; since it is a class that all philosophy graduate students must take, I will try to make it as interesting and exciting as possible. But my primary aim is to help you to think *more broadly* about what it means to do metaphysics. People from a wide range of cultures, with a wide range of differing assumptions, have found themselves doing metaphysics for a long time; we will try to think about why people from different backgrounds have found themselves doing metaphysics, and we will try to think about why different starting points yield different metaphysical hypotheses.

Presentations:

Each member of the seminar must prepare a 10-15 minute presentation which: 1) offers a brief overview of the issues discussed in the reading for the week, and 2) raises some critical questions to guide our discussion during the first half of the course meeting. Each member of the seminar must also come prepared to field questions from the class for one session during the seminar (I'll always be prepared to help if necessary!) The sign-up sheet is posted at the end of this document.

Writing:

Over the course of the semester, each member of the seminar must write **two** 1500-2500 word book reviews. Each of these reviews should be constructively engaged with one of the texts that we read over the course of the semester; and each of your reviews should be submitted no more than two weeks after our final discussion of the relevant text. In writing these reviews, I recommend looking at some of the [recently published reviews at NDPR](#), to get a sense of the kind of review I would like you to write. (To be honest, I recommend [subscribing to the NDPR email list](#), if you haven't already done so. This a very good way to stay on top of recently philosophical research).

Final Paper:

Each member of the seminar will also write **one** short paper (max 3000 words), which addresses one of the arguments or positions that we have discussed in class. A successful paper will be the sort of thing that you could submit to the APA (American Philosophical Association) or to a similar sort of conference. In past semesters, I have worked with students to write successful conference papers, and I am happy to do so again!

Accessibility and diversity:

One finds a great deal of diversity in teaching and learning styles in a modern university. These styles may not always mesh in ways that are conducive to the success and wellbeing of everyone in a course. But there are often ways of improving things. I am happy to discuss the structure of the course, and to try to make it more accessible to everyone in the class. So please talk to me if things could be better. I sincerely think that every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating classroom experience! Disabled students and students on record with the university as requiring particular accommodations, please let me know that this is the case, in confidence, during the first few weeks of the semester—and please take advantage of the services provided by the university. And if you find that additional accommodations are necessary, please let me know.

Tentative reading schedule (number of pages in blue); Readings are available [here](#), though you may want to purchase the books.

Building relations and fundamentality	
8/29	Karen Bennett , <i>Making things up</i> , Chapters 1-4 (99)
9/10	Karen Bennett , <i>Making things up</i> , Chapters 5-8 (135)
Monism (a lot of logic, some ancient Greek themes, and some Buddhist arguments)	
9/17	Graham Priest , <i>One</i> , Preface & Chapters 1-5 (81)
9/24	Graham Priest , <i>One</i> , Chapters 6-10 (82)
10/1	Graham Priest , <i>One</i> , Chapters 11-15 (68)
Dynamical systems, teleology, and the nature of agency	
10/15	Alicia Juarrero , <i>Dynamics in action</i> , Introduction & Chapters 1-6 (95)
10/22	Alicia Juarrero , <i>Dynamics in action</i> , Chapters 7-12 (90)
10/29	Alicia Juarrero , <i>Dynamics in action</i> , Chapters 13-15 (63)
Realism, skepticism, and rationality	
11/5	Jonardon Ganeri , "Rationality, emptiness and the objective view" (27) Nāgārjuna , <i>Vigrahavyāvartanī</i> (23) NB: This is difficult reading
11/12	Jonardon Ganeri , "The rational basis of metaphysics" (24) Udayana , <i>Lakṣanavali</i> (16) & <i>Kiraṇavali</i> (35) NB: This is difficult reading
A more pragmatic and deflationary approach to ontology	
11/19	Amie Thomasson , <i>Ontology made easy</i> , Introduction & Chapters 1-2 (126)
11/26	Amie Thomasson , <i>Ontology made easy</i> , Chapters 3-5 (83); Optional: Chapters 6-10
The ontology of social kinds (with a focus on race)	
12/3	Ron Mallon , <i>The construction of human kinds</i> , Introduction & Chapters 1-5 (133)
12/10	Ron Mallon , <i>The construction of human kinds</i> , Chapters 6-9 (79)