

Philosophy 304-01 (23996)
Metaphysics
T/R 10:50-12:05
Wilson Hall 1-132
3 Units

Dr. Waller
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Primary Texts:

Are online and posted on D2L. See schedule for details.

Course Description:

In this course we will examine different philosophical theories regarding the nature of absolute reality: that which lies beyond physical description, and the essence of being. Many philosophers have believed that there is a conceiving independent reality, and have described notions of it in great detail, but others have argued that there is no such reality, or that it is unknowable. Topics in metaphysics, such as *consciousness*, *possible worlds*, *free will*, and *personal identity* will be addressed.

Grading Scale

A	93-100%	373-400 points	C	73-76%	292-304 points
A-	90-92%	360-372 points	C-	70-72%	280-291 points
B+	87-89%	345-359 points	D+	67-69%	265-279 points
B	83-86%	332-344 points	D	60-66%	240-264 points
B-	80-82%	320-331 points	F	0-59%	0-239 points
C+	77-79%	305-319 points			

Grading Policy

Grades are based on the following course requirements:
1) 2 Papers; 2) Discussions; 3) Presentations; 4) Final Exam.
The specifics of each assignment type are detailed on the following pages.

Course Requirements:

- 1) **2 Short Thesis Papers:** (9-11 pages, 100 points each, 200 points total) consisting of: a summary of the relevant current reading, and your own well-supported position on a question or issue at hand. Grades are based on: Accuracy and completeness of summary, the clarity of your thesis and how well your argument is supported, number of fatal errors (see handout), grammar, spelling, and finesse. The papers must pertain to relevant issues in philosophy currently covered in class, and must incorporate a reference to current events. You choose the position that you will critique or defend, so pick topics that interest you.
- 2) **Presentations:** (50 points for presenting, 25 points for being in the audience, 75 points total) This part of the course is designed to allow you to cover a topic in metaphysics that interests you. Presenters will work in pairs (or maybe groups of 3 – but your grade will be your own), and will summarize main points of selected readings and bring an activity (worksheet, group quiz, interactive media) for the class to complete/participate in that will help clarify concepts, arguments, and issues in the reading. Presentations should include a critique of the readings.

Your presentation should take between 20 and 35 minutes of class time, depending on how much time we have. Ideally, your presentation will help you develop your final paper.

- 3) **Discussions:** (20 Discussions, 4 points each, 80 points total) Come to class prepared, ask questions, comment on the readings. Sometimes we will work in groups to answer a question or consider an issue.
- 4) **Final Exam:** (comprehensive, essay format, 45 points) Held during the final examination period. Discussion questions will provide a good study guide for the final exam.
- 5) **Get your email** and check D2L at least **every 48 hours:** important course materials, announcements, and clarifications will come to you electronically. You are responsible for checking your email and D2L and making sure your account is working.
- 6) **Extra Credit:** (sporadic, usually involving a 15 minute presentation, or a short written summary, of a current philosophical problem of your choice as related to the course readings and campus events, up to 21 points) I will announce extra credit opportunities as they appear throughout the semester. Extra credit lets you miss a discussion without too much stress.

Argument Papers

They are not research papers, nor comparison and contrast papers.

Thesis Paragraph: State your thesis, define your primary terms, mention the relevant philosophical background, i.e., authors or arguments for and against the thesis that have been covered in class, and mention your reasons, arguments, and examples you will use to make your point.

Summary Paragraphs: explain the relevant texts and arguments clearly and completely. Do not explain or discuss anything irrelevant to your thesis. Use quotations from the texts we are using in class that are important to your view.

Argument Paragraphs: Support your view with reasons, evidence (including lived examples), and arguments. Use the views of relevant philosophers to your advantage, citing them properly as you proceed.

Objection Paragraph(s): Present a view that directly and clearly opposes your thesis. Present it briefly but completely, using philosophical texts studied in class as appropriate.

Reply to Objections: Respond to the objection(s) you presented. Be honest.

“I was thrown out of college for cheating on the metaphysics exam; I looked into the soul of the boy sitting next to me.” -- Woody Allen

Can we actually "know" the universe? My God, it's hard enough finding your way around in Chinatown.” – Woody Allen

Paper Grading Guidelines

How well your argument is supported (45pts. total, 5 pts. each error).

- Failing to state a thesis is an error. State your thesis clearly, and distinguish your position from other positions.
- Fallacies are errors. See handout.
- Distorting facts to make your case is an error. For example, claiming that the planets move in perfect circles, or that the moon only appears at night, is a distortion of our best-substantiated view of the world today and cannot be used for evidence of any view.
- Failing to define terms that are relevant to your thesis is an error.
- Failing to give a reason for your view is an error.
 - Agreeing with your other beliefs/what you were taught is not a reason
 - Making you feel good is not a reason
 - Claiming you have a right to your opinion is not a reason to believe that the opinion is true. In this culture we often agree that each person has a right to his or her own opinion. However, that does not make all opinions equally true or equally well supported. Some opinions are false, and some views have no substantiation.
- Part of supporting your argument is considering a reasonable, well thought out objection from an opposing viewpoint. Explain the other viewpoint clearly and thoroughly. Why does your opposition believe something that you do not?
- Part of supporting your argument is responding to this objection. How can you defend your view against the view you just presented? This response is usually the conclusion of a professional philosophy paper.

Accuracy and completeness of summary (45 pts. total, 5 pts. each error).

- Misattributing a view to a philosopher is an error.
- Failing to produce **three** relevant quotes from the text is an error. When citing from a web source without page numbers, note book title, author, chapter and section.
- Failing to include information important to your thesis that was covered in class is an error.
- Including information that is irrelevant to your thesis is an error. Do not wildly summarize everything that comes to mind about a philosopher or position.

Number of fatal errors (up to 10 pts.).

- *Nota Bene*, if you spell a philosopher's name incorrectly in your paper, I will remove 10 points immediately (over and above the 10 points), and then continue to count fatal errors.
- If you use philosophical terminology learned in class incorrectly, I will remove 5 points (over and above the 10 points).
- All other fatal errors appear in the attached or forthcoming handout, and are worth 1 point each.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty are Serious Offenses. Know what they are and recognize that the consequences could be worse than a failing grade on the assignment. If I discover academic misconduct, I will 1) meet with you, 2) fill out an Academic Misconduct Notification Form, and 3) provide a written request for the Dean of Students to press charges of violation of the Student Conduct Code. http://www2.montana.edu/policy/student_conduct/

Course Objectives:

This course examines questions and concepts exploring the nature of absolute reality, existence, being, essential natures of things and processes, the noumenal realm, and more. We will work with several notions, such as: ontological pluralism, idealism, monism, and physicalism, and we will discuss topics in metaphysics, such as free will, possible worlds, human nature, etc. Students will summarize, explain and critique the content of contemporary philosophical theories in ontology and metaphysics, and construct and defend arguments as professional philosophers do. Successful students will have demonstrated the ability to do the following at the completion of the course:

- **Write formal, philosophical thesis defense papers. This skill demands:**
 - Accurate use of the English language
 - Accurate use of terminology specific to philosophy and the fields of philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, epistemology and metaphysics
 - Identification, and avoidance of, fallacies of reasoning
 - Identification & description of philosophical theories, concepts, questions & issues
 - Construction of a clear, specific thesis on an issue in contemporary philosophy
 - Reading & understanding primary texts as demonstrated by accurate summaries of them, and the use of quotations from these texts to further an argument
 - Clear presentation of reasons and evidence (found in texts or originally developed by the student) that furthers the thesis
 - Avoidance of discussing irrelevant subjects
 - Recognition and precise description of objections (critiques of, or potential problems with), a theory or thesis
 - Presentation of a relevant, content-bearing response to such objections

- **Describe (orally and in writing) philosophical theories, concepts, techniques and issues, regarding such topics as:**
 - Existence, Essence, Nature, Phenomenal, Noumenal, Absolute Reality, Things in Themselves, Haecceity, Being, Monads, etc.
 - Free Will, Consciousness, Possible Worlds, Human Nature, God, Universals, Language, etc.

- **Learning Outcomes**
 - Successful students will choose, develop and defend notions of absolute reality in formal written papers. Students are expected to accurately explain course readings and presentations on the final exam and in papers, and orally for in-class presentations.
 - Students will be able to use philosophical concepts correctly, as measured on the final exam, papers and in-class presentations.

- Students will meet the course objectives listed above in the following ways:
 - Show understanding of how different theories construct and define the mind through class discussions and the final exam
 - Show understanding of philosophical approaches to the mind by choosing to critique or defend one well defined position in each paper, or alternately, showing how two approaches overlap in these papers.

- Successful students will be able to state a view fully and carefully, give reasons for that view, and defend the view against common objections, as measured by the presentations and papers.
- Students will not commit formal or informal fallacies in the presentations or papers.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a documented disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation(s), you are encouraged to contact your instructor and Disabled Student Services as soon as possible.

Ground Rules & Notes on General Civility

1. *If a disagreement arises, present facts and evidence calmly rather than a heated and useless personal attack. Some opinions are more well-justified than others, but none merit active hostility or degradation.*
2. *Missed papers, presentations, discussions, quizzes and exams cannot be made up, but an opportunity for extra credit will be provided for those who have experienced some difficulties in attending class. If you experience an extended illness or catastrophe, see me.*
3. *If something or someone in the class is genuinely and persistently bothersome, offensive and/or inhibiting your learning process, please bring it to my attention.*
4. *If work is accepted by email, it is always due at 11:59 p.m. on the stated due date. If your work does not arrive in my inbox with that time stamp (because you experience internet difficulties, your computer has problems, your computer clock is inaccurate, or for any other reason), or if I cannot open your file or if it is corrupt, you will receive 0 points for that assignment.*

SCHEDULE (subject to change)

Day	In Class	Due	Read for NEXT class
Tues, Aug. 28	Intro to course, texts and topics. What is metaphysics? Ontology? Twilight Zone Mirror Image Part 2 4:30 to Part 3 end		Boghossian “3 Kinds Relativism” from <u>The Relativism Companion</u>
Thurs. Aug. 30	Relativism, Idealism, & Realism Sesame Street Letter B	Discussion (4)	Plato: Republic 4 and Phaedo
Tues. Sept. 4	Republic 4 and Phaedo	Discussion (4)	Plato: Theaetetus
Thurs. Sept. 6	Theaetetus	Discussion (4)	Plato: Parmenides & Sophist

Tues. Sept. 11	Parmenides & Sophist	Discussion (4)	Aristotle: Metaphysics Books 1, 2 (5 & 6) 5 (2), 7 (1-6), 13 (1-3, 6-9)
Thurs. Sept. 13	Aristotle	Discussion (4)	Aristotle: De Anima Book 1 (skim) and 2
Tues. Sept 18	Aristotle	Discussion (4)	
Thurs. Sept. 20	No Class Sara out of town		Armstrong: Universals (chapter 1 on D2L)
	Unit 2: Medieval, Modern		
Tues. Sept. 25	Aristotle Universals	Discussion (4)	
Thurs. Sept. 27	Guest Speaker Professor Orlock The Metaphysics of Fly Fishing	Discussion (4)	Leibniz: Monadology
Tues. Oct. 2	Monads	Discussion (4)	Locke & Berkeley "3 Dialogues"
Thurs. Oct. 4	Naïve Realism Idealism	Discussion (4)	Kant: Antinomies
Tues. Oct. 9	Antinomies	Discussion (4)	Aquinas, Paley, Wisdom from <u>20 Questions in Philosophy</u>
Thurs. Oct. 11	God, after death, the soul, reincarnation, etc. Ghost Hunters	Discussion (4)	Wittgenstein Carnap
Tues. Oct. 16	Paper #1 Due Picture Theory Conventionalism	Paper (100) Discussion (4)	Quine: Ontological Relativity
Thurs. Oct. 18	Meaning and the myth of the museum	Discussion (4)	Pragmatism
Tues. Oct. 23	Pragmatism Can we do metaphysics? Should we?	Discussion (4)	Boyd Van Fraassen

Thurs Oct. 25	Does science study reality?	Discussion (4)	
Tues. Oct. 30	Dennett on Free Will	Discussion (4)	
Thurs. Nov. 1	Possible Worlds & Modal Theory	Discussion (4)	
Tues. Nov. 6	No Class Election Day Holiday		
Thurs. Nov. 8	No Class Today	Enjoy!	
	Begin Presentations		
Tues. Nov. 13	Presentations (50)	Participate (5)	
Thurs. Nov. 15	Presentations (50)	Participate (5)	
Tues. Nov. 20	Presentations (50)	Participate (5)	
Thurs. Nov. 22	Thanksgiving Holiday	Enjoy!	
Tues. Nov. 27	Presentations (50)	Participate (5)	
Thurs. Nov. 29	Presentations (50)	Participate (5)	
Tues. Dec. 4	Co-Convene with Peters class to discuss the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence	Discussion (4)	
Thurs. Dec. 6	Paper #2 Due Co-Convene with Peters class to discuss flying saucers and UFOs.	Paper (100) Discussion (4)	
Final Exam December 10	2:00 to 3:50 pm		