

**Phil 420: *Metaphysics*
Fall 2023**

Class meeting time: T 4:00-6:45 pm
Classroom: Hum 125
E-mail: jeelooliu@fullerton.edu

Instructor: Dr. JeeLoo Liu
Office location: H-311G
Office hours: Tu Th 2:20 - 3:50 pm
or by appointment

“Philosophy, especially metaphysics, is useless for the increase of our knowledge regarding matters of fact, but is indispensable for the elevation of our mind.”
— Fung Yulan (1895–1990)



Text:

Van Inwagen and Zimmerman (eds.), *Metaphysics: The Big Questions* (2d edition) [BQ]

Course Description: This course is designed to be an introduction to *contemporary analytic* metaphysics. The issues in metaphysics, such as what kinds of things exist and how they exist, began with ancient Greek philosophers. In this course we will take a look at how contemporary analytic philosophers deal with these same old issues.

- (1) Realism vs. Anti-realism: What is “reality”? Do we really know the reality? Is reality simply what we perceive, or is it what we as humans have created together? Is human science *advancing toward* reality, or are we simply shifting from one scientific paradigm to another? Is what we call ‘reality’ constructed out of humans’ conceptual schemes?
- (2) The Puzzle of *Time*: Is time real or unreal? What constitutes “the *present*”? Is time travel possible?
- (3) Four-Dimensionalism and Persistence through Time: Can there be identity over time? Do we have “temporal parts” or do we persist through time as a single entity? Four-Dimensionalism is the view that persistence through time is like extension through space. A road has spatial parts in the subregions of the region of space it occupies; likewise, an object that exists in time has temporal parts in the various subregions of the total region of time it occupies. Three-Dimensionalism, on the other hand, is the doctrine that things “endure”, or are “wholly present.” We will examine this debate.

- Course Objectives:**
1. Students will demonstrate general understanding of several key issues in contemporary metaphysics.
 2. Students will master the skills to write a philosophy paper that includes critical reasoning, sustained argumentation, and insight. Students will also learn the basics of doing research in philosophy.
 3. Students will demonstrate the ability to organize and present course materials in class. This training can enhance their ability to teach or communicate ideas in public.

4. Students will improve their philosophy literacy and be able to read difficult analytic philosophical articles on their own.

Grading:

Mid-term exam	20 %
2 Short Expository Essays (2 pages each)	10 %
Mid-semester short paper (5-6 pages)	20 %
Discussion Forum Postings (20 points = 100)	20 %
1 final paper (8-10 pages)	20 %
Student Paper Presentation	10 %
Full attendance [not a single missed class]	2 points extra credit

To receive a final grade for the course, no portion of your grade can be a “zero”.

COURSE GRADES: Calculated on the following scale

98%	A+	74%	C
94%	A	70%	C-
90%	A-	67%	D+
87%	B+	64%	D
84%	B	60%	D-
80%	B-	Under 60	F
77%	C+		

Grading Policy:

1. To receive a final grade for the course, all mandatory assignments must be completed.
2. Philosophy majors earning grades of C- or lower must repeat the course.

Late Assignments Policy:

1. No make-up exam will be given unless you obtain permission from the instructor at least two days in advance or if you present your special reason with acceptable documentation.
2. Term paper must be turned in by the assigned deadline. The paper will receive a half-grade deduction for each day it is late.

Academic Dishonesty:

“Academic dishonesty is comprised of obtaining or attempting to obtain credit for work by the use of any dishonest, deceptive, fraudulent, or unauthorized means.” The most commonly observed form of academic dishonesty is copying others’ writings on the Internet **or using any form of ChatGPT** to compose your essay. Even when you are merely borrowing a single sentence from someone else, doing so without proper quotation marks and author-attribution counts as plagiarism. **Students who commit acts of academic dishonesty will automatically fail the course and the misconduct will be**

reported to the Dean of Students Office. Students with questions about how to cite others' work should see the instructor.

Attendance Policy and Class Participation:

1. Students must be conscientious about attending classes on a regular basis. Any consecutive absences must be given proper explanation. If you can't make it to class on any given day, you should send me an e-mail explaining the reason in order to receive excused absences.
2. Attendance is highly emphasized in this class. Students are allowed up to three absences without explanation. **After the 3rd absence, every unexcused absence will constitute a 2% deduction in your final grade.** Do not squander your three absences – there are always unexpected things that would prevent you from coming to class on a given day.
3. **We will have a discussion forum on the reading materials set up on the Canvas class page. Everyone must submit at least one critical comment/answer and one discussion question for each reading/session before noon on the lecture day.** The discussion will begin right after the previous lecture and I will post a question on the next reading to start the thread. The first respondent answers my question and then post a new question. Others follow the thread: you need to first respond to someone else's question, and then raise a further question for the next respondent. The question/response should be posted on the Canvas via your Fullerton portal. The question should be thoughtfully composed, and NOT in the nature of inquiring about the meaning of a paragraph, a sentence, or a word, etc. The response should also reflect your thoughtful thinking. Your question will be viewed by all students in the class. You are also encouraged to post general discussion on the weekly forum. Each week's postings by students will be graded based on the amount and quality of your postings. This portion of your performance constitutes 20% of the course grade.
4. **There are 11 weeks of forum postings.** The grade for each week's postings is 10 pts. You may skip one week's posting and still receive full credit, or you can post all 11 weeks to earn extra points for this portion.
5. You are to write one mid-term paper and one term paper on a topic of your choice (my approval required). **Your term paper can be an expansion of your mid-term paper. During the final two weeks of the semester, you will be giving a PPT presentation of your final paper.** I will give you feedback for further improvement on your paper. The revised paper is due on the final exam date. **A half-grade deduction will be made for each day delayed (for both deadlines).** I will schedule a paper conference with you to discuss your term paper project.
6. Midterm Exam will be given in the form of essay questions (study questions will be prepared for each exam). **No make-up exam will be given unless you obtain permission from me at least two days in advance or if you present your special reason with acceptable documentation.**
7. **Full attendance (not even having any excusable absence) will be rewarded 2% extra credit.**
8. Class participation includes active discussion in class, raising relevant questions, answering questions, and paying close attention in class. Everyone (each student as

well as the instructor) is responsible for making this class interesting, engaging, and thought-provoking.

Classroom Etiquettes:

Classroom environment is for the instructor and all students to interact with one another in a professional and intellectual manner. Students are expected to observe common classroom etiquettes. Behavior that interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior. Such behavior includes (but not restricted to)

- (i) constant late arrivals;
- (ii) early departures without proper explanation;
- (iii) chatting with your neighbors during lectures;
- (iv) doing things unrelated to the course in class, such as reading other books, doing assignments for other courses, or playing with your laptop.
- (v) **not turning off your cell phone in class.**

Students with repeated disruptive behavior will be asked to leave the classroom.



Course Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Content of discussion</u>	<u>Assignments for this class</u>
[World, Worlds, and Existence]		
T 8/22	Introduction: What Is Existence? David Lewis and Stephanie Lewis: Holes	BQ, 19-21 BQ, 22-28
T 8/29	W. V. O. Quine: On What There Is	BQ, 28-40 Forum posting #1
T 9/5	Michael Devitt: What Is Realism? Hilary Putnam: Why There Isn't A Ready-Made World	PDF on Canvas PDF on Canvas Forum posting #2
T 9/12	Hilary Putnam: After Metaphysics, What? Ernest Sosa: Putnam's Pragmatic Realism (or an excerpt in <i>The Big Questions</i>)	BQ, 547-551 PDF on Canvas Or BQ, 558-568 Forum posting #3
T 9/19	Derek Parfit: Why Anything? Why This? Richard Swinburne: Response to Derek Parfit [Expository Essay #1 Due]	BQ, 576-594 BQ, 594-596 Forum posting #4
[The Puzzle of Time]		
T 9/26	J. M. E. McTaggart: The Unreality of Time (Supplement: McTaggart: Time)	PDF on Canvas BQ, 116-123 Forum posting #5
T 10/3	A. N. Prior: The Notion of the Present Dean Zimmerman: The Privileged Present: Defending An "A-Theory" of Time	BQ, 129-131 PDF on Canvas Forum posting #6
T 10/10	D.C. Williams: The Myth of Passage J. J. C. Smart: The Tenseless Theory of Time [Expository Essay #2 Due]	BQ, 149-160 PDF on Canvas Forum posting #7
T 10/17	David Lewis: The Paradoxes of Time Travel	BQ, 224-235 Forum posting #8

[Identity Over Time and Four-Dimensionalism]

T 10/24 Michael J. Loux, Endurantism and Perdurantism PDF on Canvas
John Hawthorne, Three-Dimensionalism PDF on Canvas
vs. Four-Dimensionalism **Forum posting #9**

[Mid-term Paper Due]

T 10/31 Mark Heller: Temporal Parts of Four-Dimensional Objects PDF on Canvas
Forum posting #10

T 11/7 Sally Haslanger: Persistence Through Time PDF on Canvas
Forum posting #11

T 11/14 **Final Exam**

T 11/21 **Thanksgiving Break [No Class]**

T 11/28 **Student Paper Presentations**

T 12/5 **Student Paper Presentations**

Final Paper Due: Tuesday , December 12 5:00 PM

