

# METAPHYSICS – PHL 426-001

Monday 2:30-5pm - Feinsein 203

*Instructor:* Antonella Mallozzi

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*Office:* Siena Hall, Room 139

*Office Hours:* Monday 12-2pm and by appointment

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

This course is designed as an introduction to central issues in contemporary metaphysics. Broadly speaking, metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that investigates most general, abstract questions concerning reality. Such “big questions” include, for example: are people’s actions determined, or do we have free will? Does God exist, and can we prove it? What is the nature of time? Do any things other than physical objects, for example numbers, exist? What is the nature of persons, and what kind of changes can a person undergo and still remain the same? What does it mean to say that a certain state of affairs is possible? Are racial categories socially constructed, and to what extent? Throughout the course, we will examine these and other issues. In the process, you will sharpen your analytic reading, thinking, and writing skills.

## **READINGS:**

- The required textbook is:  
Alyssa Ney, "Metaphysics. An Introduction", Routledge 2014 ISBN: 9780415640756
- Additional readings will be made available each week in electronic format on Sakai

All readings are required, and must be completed before class.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

This is a writing-intensive course, including several low-stakes assignments and peer-review sessions throughout the semester. You will discuss the topic of your final paper with me in advance, and submit a draft one week before the semester ends. Aim to give yourself enough time to write several drafts before submitting! I also strongly encourage you to participate in the class discussion, as it can boost your final grade up to 10%.

This is how your final grade will be calculated:

10 Blog Posts	20%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Paper	20%
Final Exam	20%
10 Reading Assessments	10%
Participation	10%

**BLOG POSTS (20 points):**

300-350 words on the current week's reading, to be submitted weekly, by Sunday night 11:59pm, on the Sakai class blog (Forum). In order to get full credit, you must submit 5 posts before the midterm exam and 5 after the midterm and before the final, for a total of 10 posts. The first post is due on February 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**MIDTERM EXAM (20 points):**

A combination of short answers and multiple-choice questions on the topics covered during the first part of the semester. It will take place on March 18<sup>th</sup>.

**FINAL EXAM (20 points):**

A combination of short answers and multiple-choice questions on the topics covered during the second part of the semester. It will take place on May 13<sup>th</sup>.

**FINAL PAPER (20 points):**

Approximately 1200, to be submitted on Sakai by 10am on May 13<sup>th</sup>. NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.

A draft of the paper is due a week before, on May 6<sup>th</sup>. Bring two printed copies of your draft to class. Although you won't receive a grade on your draft, failure to turn it in will result in a 10% deduction from the mark you receive on the final version of the paper.

**READING ASSESSEMENTS (10 points):**

Reading assessments are short questions based on the assigned readings. They will be given at the beginning of class and you will have 5-8' to respond in paragraph form. You will not receive a letter grade for the free writes, but *minus (-) check (✓)*, or *plus (+)*. These assignments will ensure that everyone is on time and has done the readings, and they will be a springboard for discussion.

**ATTENDANCE & CLASS PARTICIPATION (10 points):**

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Unjustified absences are not allowed: your final grade will drop a whole letter if you are absent after one unexcused absence. You should come to class prepared and ready to engage in philosophical discussion. Actively participating in the in-class discussion will count towards 10% of your final grade.

**EXTRA CREDIT:**

No extra credit! You will have enough opportunities to improve your grade through assignments and class participation.

**GRADING SCHEME:**

A	95-100%
A-	91-94%
B+	87-90%
B	83-86%
B-	80-82%
C+	77-79%
C	73-76%
C-	70-72%
D+	67-69%
D	63-66%
D-	60-62%
F	0-59%

RESOURCES:

If you need clarification on the readings always make sure to ask in class, or during office hours, or to email me at [amalloz1@providence.edu](mailto:amalloz1@providence.edu)

I also recommend looking at the following sites as a resource on philosophical topics and authors:

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

As part of the College Core Curriculum, this course will

- Focus primarily on the analysis of philosophical questions, arguments, and/or perspectives
- Provide students with the opportunity to explain, analyze, and evaluate philosophical questions, arguments, and/or perspectives
- Demonstrate how understanding philosophical concepts helps to illuminate contemporary issues

PLAGIARISM:

Plagiarism and other forms of cheating are not tolerated and will be subject to penalties in conformity with the College's policy on Academic Integrity. All papers will be submitted to Turnitin on Sakai. Make sure you understand what plagiarism is and the consequences it might have. You can find the most recent policy here:

[http://catalog.providence.edu/content.php?catoid=25&navoid=856#Academic\\_Honesty](http://catalog.providence.edu/content.php?catoid=25&navoid=856#Academic_Honesty)

A broader listing of Providence College Academic policies is located here:

<http://catalog.providence.edu/content.php?catoid=25&navoid=856>

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*Students with documented disabilities (learning, physical, medical, temporary) will be provided reasonable academic accommodations in this course, coordinated by the Office of Academic Services (OAS). Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the assistant director for disability services to discuss their needs and arrange individualized services. You are also encouraged to contact me at the beginning of the course to make me aware of your needs.*

\*\*\*There might be changes to the schedule below in due course. Always make sure to refer to the latest version of the syllabus by checking Sakai or asking me at [amalloz1@providence.edu](mailto:amalloz1@providence.edu) \*\*\*

**CLASS SCHEDULE:**

(All chapter and page references are to our textbook: Alyssa Ney, *Metaphysics. An Introduction*)

Date	Topic	Readings
1/14	Syllabus & Policies + Philosophical Reasoning	“Preparatory Background. Logic for Metaphysics”, pp 1-18
1/21		<b>NO CLASS</b> (Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday)
1/28	Ontology	Ch. 1, pp. 30-50 + Quine, “On What There Is” (Sakai) + <i>Writing Workshop</i> : Pryor, “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper” (distributed in class)
2/4	Ontology (continued)	Ch. 1 pp. 50-58 + Schaffer, “On What Grounds What” (Sakai)
2/11	Abstract Entities	Ch. 2, pp. 60-71 and 77-80
2/18		<b>NO CLASS</b> (President’s Day Holiday)
2/19 (Monday schedule)	Material Objects	Ch. 3 pp. 89-103 + Smart, “How to Re-identify the Ship of Theseus” (Sakai)
2/25	Time	Ch. 5 pp. 138-152 + Sider, “Time” (Sakai) + *McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time” (Sakai) optional
3/4	The Mind-Body problem	Chalmers: “The Hard Problem of Consciousness” (Sakai) Montero: “The Body Problem” (Sakai) *Chalmers: “How Do You Explain Consciousness?” (TED talk) optional
3/11		<b>NO CLASS</b> (Spring recess)
3/18		<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>

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3/25	Modality	Ch. 7 pp. 190-201 and 207-215 + Plantinga, Selections from <i>The Nature of Necessity</i> (Sakai) + Lewis, Selections from <i>On the Plurality of Worlds</i> (Sakai)
4/1	Causation	Ch. 8 pp. 217-222 + Hume, Selections from <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> (Sakai)
4/8	God	Conee & Sider, “God” (Sakai) + Maudlin, “The Calibrated Cosmos” (Sakai)
4/15	Free Will	Ch. 9 + Chisholm, “Human Freedom and the Self” (Sakai)
4/22		<b>NO CLASS</b> (Easter Recess)
4/24 (Monday schedule)	Personal Identity	Conee & Sider, “Personal Identity” (Sakai) + Parfit, “Personal Identity” (Sakai)
4/29	Metaphysics of Race	Ch. 10
5/6		Final review + <i>Writing Workshop</i> . <b>Draft of final paper due. Bring two copies</b>
5/11		<b>FINAL EXAM (1:30-3:30pm)</b> <b>FINAL PAPER DUE</b>