

## **PHIL412: Metaphysics**

Winthrop University, Spring, 2013

Section 001, CRN23113, 3 credit hours

Meeting: TR, 2-3:15pm, KINA 312

Final Exam: 3 p.m. Thurs., 4/25

Instructor: M. Gregory Oakes, Ph.D.

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### **Course Description:<sup>1</sup>**

Metaphysics is the study of the basic nature of reality. In this course, we examine central issues in this field prompted by the following questions:

- What is existence? What is it to exist? (What is being? What is it to be?)
- What is the relationship of existence (being) to time and space? Do things exist only insofar as they persist through time or are located in space, or are there other forms of being? Are there objects that exist in neither time nor space?
- What are the basic units of existence? What are “objects”? What is it to be a “subject” of existence?
- What are the basic kinds of being? Are minds different in kind from bodies? Is there more than one basic kind of “stuff” in the universe?
- What keeps existence “going”, if anything? What is it for one event to “cause” another?

We will examine answers to these questions found in both historical and contemporary philosophical literature. Student exercises will focus on the analysis, evaluation, and composition of philosophical arguments. Final exam or essay.

Pre-requisite: completion of CRTW201 with a C- or better

This course is eligible for *Arts and Humanities* general education credit.

### **Goals:**

Department Program Goal: To prepare students for a fulfilling life by equipping them with the impetus, skills, and knowledge to ask the most fundamental questions of human existence.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, this course helps the student to satisfy the following ULCs:

- Competency 1: Winthrop graduates think critically and solve problems. We address this competency via the critical nature of this discipline and specifically by construction, analysis, and evaluation of argumentative prose.
- Competency 3: Winthrop graduates understand the interconnected nature of the world and the time in which they live. We address this competency via the universality of this

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<sup>1</sup> All statements in this syllabus are subject to change. In the event of minor changes to the syllabus – e.g., to a reading requirement – the student will be so-informed by announcement in class. In the event of a more substantive change, the student will be so-informed in writing as well as by announcement in class.

<sup>2</sup> See <http://www2.winthrop.edu/philrelg/goals.htm> for the complete Department Mission Statement.

discipline: to study the human understanding of being is to understanding that of all humans in all times and places.

- Competency 4: Winthrop graduates communicate effectively. We address this competency by means of the premium in that this discipline places on verbal clarity and precision, themselves among the methodological foci of the course.

More specifically, the course has the goals of teaching the student:

- acquaintance with central metaphysical issues and concepts;
- effective analysis, evaluation, and construction of philosophical argumentation;
- construction of effective written prose.

**Outcomes:**

Students will demonstrate the following: an appreciation of fundamental issues in metaphysics; familiarity with major figures in historical and contemporary metaphysics; a satisfactory facility for critical analysis and evaluation of philosophical prose; and a satisfactory ability for the construction of cogent philosophical prose.

**Texts:**

We'll use a number of photocopied essays (via Dacus e-reserve) and texts available on the internet.

**Requirements:**

- Attendance to and preparation for class
- A number of written and oral exercises
- A final exam or final essay

**Grading:**

- Class preparation and participation: 20% of your course grade
- Writing Exercises: 40%
- Final Exam or Essay: 40%
- I will use the following scale in calculating your grade:

A	94-100%	C	73-769
A-	90-93	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	0-59

**Class Conduct:**

- No cell-phone use in class, please.
- No food in the classroom, please. (University policy.)
- Plagiarism: It is your responsibility to understand the University's policy on plagiarism. See [www.winthrop.edu/english/plagiarism.htm](http://www.winthrop.edu/english/plagiarism.htm). If you are found guilty of plagiarism in this course, you will receive an F for the course and I will report you to the Dean of Students for academic misconduct. You will not be permitted to return to class. If you are unsure of whether your use of borrowed information counts as plagiarism, consult with me, your English instructor, or the staff in the writing center.
- Responsibility for good conduct rests with students as adult individuals. The policy on student academic misconduct is outlined in the "Student Conduct Code Academic

Misconduct Policy” in the online *Student Handbook*

(<http://www2.winthrop.edu/studentaffairs/handbook/StudentHandbook.pdf>).

- Disabilities: Students with medical or other recognized disability must contact Gena Smith, Coordinator, Services for Students with Disabilities, at 323-2233, as soon as possible. Once you have your professor notification letter, please notify me immediately (and prior to the first test or assignment) so that I am aware of your accommodations. If your accommodations affect every test/assignment, please remind me prior to each one.
- Attendance: Students are expected to attend classes and should understand that they are responsible for the academic consequences of absence. The student is responsible for all requirements of the course regardless of absences. This course follows the general university attendance policy specified here: [http://www.winthrop.edu/uploadedFiles/recandreg/Catalogs/10-11/Academic\\_Regulations.pdf](http://www.winthrop.edu/uploadedFiles/recandreg/Catalogs/10-11/Academic_Regulations.pdf)

### Notable Dates:

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|---|---------------------|
| - Martin Luther King, Jr., Day                        | January 21 (Monday) |
| - Spring Break:                                       | March 11-15         |
| - Last day to withdraw from a Spring semester course: | March 6 (Wednesday) |

## Syllabus

### I. Preliminaries

- On Method (How are we to know?)
  - o (Review of Exercises, goals)
  - o Concepts, clarity, and understanding
  - o Unity of thought
- On Metaphysics, per se (What is metaphysics?)
  - o Cynthia Macdonald, *Varieties of Things*, pp. 3-14
  - o Aristotle on Metaphysics: *Metaphysics* IV.1-3
  - o Kant on Metaphysics: *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction (B-edition), excerpts
  - o Objects and subjects
    - What is it? The *out there*, the *in here*, and their relationship

**Exercise 1: 1p on metaphysics (Aristotle or Kant): state and explain a (preliminary) concept or idea.**

### II. What is being?

- Prior to the more specific examination of objects, etc., we consider being in general, the basic predicate prompting our inquiries, *x exists*. What does it mean to say, of something *out there* or *in here* or anywhere (or nowhere) that it *exists*?
- Introduction: two puzzles: Parmenides, Kant
  - o Parmenides, Fragments 1-8: what can it mean to say that something is not?
  - o Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A598-602/B626-630: what can it mean to say that something is?
- Peter van Inwagen, “Meta-Ontology”, 233-241: the meaning of being; quantification; univocity
- Colin McGinn, “Existence”, 15-26: is the standard account informative?

**Exercise 2: state and explain an issue/question, 2-3pp.**

III. The Units of Being: *Out There, objects*

- What are the units of being?
- The Problem of Change: As a way of organizing the discussion of this section, at its outset, we consider the problem of change. This problem entails a basic distinction in conceptions of material objects along with basic concepts such as properties and their substrates and inherence.
  - o David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 202-204
- Continuants v. Four-Dimensional Objects: van Inwagen, “Four-Dimensional Objects”
- Universal Composition: Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, 211-213, Sidney Shoemaker, “On What There Are”
- Options:
  - o The *out there* consists in multiple, discrete objects.
  - o The *out there* consists in a single “object”.
  - o ‘Object’ means, simply, discrete unit of being, where ‘discrete’ means ontologically distinct from another of the same kind (or something like this). I.e., is one thing fundamentally distinct from another, or is the world a piece of cheese?
  - o The objective is not distinct from the subjective? See next.

**Exercise 3: analyze and evaluate an argument, 2-3pp.**

IV. The Units of Being: *In Here, subjects*

- Is the *in here* distinct from the *out there*? Is the “subject” an “object” (i.e., a unit of being)?
- What is the *in here*?
- In order to consider the question of the nature of the “in here”, we turn to the further question of *kinds* of being and in particular the relationship between the mental and the material.
  - o Monism: materialism, idealism
    - Leibniz, *Monadology*
    - Lewis, “Mad Pain and Martian Pain”
  - o Dualism
    - Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, I.51-66
    - Thomas Nagel, “What Is It Like To Be a Bat?”
  - o Constructivism
    - Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, the Transcendental Aesthetic: space and time

**Exercise 4: formulate and defend an argument, 3-4pp.**

V. Causation

- The Cement of the Universe: Mackie
- Divine Concurrence: Descartes
- Causal Relations
  - o Taylor
  - o Hume; Lange
  - o Kant

VI. Time (– time permitting)

- Heraclitus and Parmenides
- McTaggart’s Argument
- The Time-Extended Universe: Kurt Gödel,

**Final Essay Due/Exam: 3 p.m. Thurs., 4/25**