

PHIL 650
Metaphysics

Last updated: 24 August 2024

Instructor Contact Information

Instructor Name and Preferred Title: Prof. Ben Caplan (he/him)

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Office: 3075 Wescoe Hall

Office Hours (starting Week 2): M 1–2 PM, W 3–4 PM, or by appointment

Class Time and Location

Class Time: MW 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM

Class Location: 4008 Wescoe Hall

Semester: Fall 2024

Course Hours and Instructional Methods

Credit Hours: 3. Each credit hour corresponds to “a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks” (adapted from <https://policy.ku.edu/registrar/credit-hour>).

Instructional method: LEC. This is an in-person class. It will include lecture, in-class discussion, and small-group activities.

Course Description

An examination of some of the central issues in metaphysics. Topics may include causation, the mind-body problem, free will and determinism, modality, natural kinds, the nature of properties, and personal identity.

Additional Course Description

We will talk about the metaphysics of statues and sports teams. We will also talk about the metaphysics of gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, and intersectionality. Along the way we will talk about topics like parthood, time, and modality; objects, properties, and relations; and essence, form, and matter.

Learning Outcomes

This course satisfies Goal 6 Outcome 1 (AE61), Capstone (CAP). Upon reaching this goal, students will be able to analyze and combine information from different areas within or across disciplines to approach and explain existing questions and problems from new perspectives, to pose new questions, and to generate new ideas.

Course Materials

Readings are, or will be, available on Canvas. Sometimes we will carefully read small amounts of text in class. This will make more sense if you have the relevant text in front of you.

Course Assignments and Requirements

Quizzes	10%
Short writing assignment	10%
Paper workshopping	10%
First paper	30%
Second paper	40%

There will be roughly one quiz each week on Canvas. Each quiz will be short. The quizzes will largely cover material that we have already discussed in class. Late quizzes will not be accepted, but only the 10 quizzes on which you score the highest will be counted.

The short writing assignment should be less than a page. The first paper should be about 3 pages. The second paper should be about 5 or 6 pages.

You will be required to workshop each of your papers before submitting them. This will involve consulting with me and your peers. The goal is to ensure that the decisions that you make in each case (about topic, approach, etc.) will allow you to write a well-structured paper that best reflects your ideas and interests.

Prerequisite

Introduction to Symbolic Logic (Philosophy 310), or an equivalent course, is a pre- or corequisite of a pre- or corequisite. (That is, it is a prerequisite or a corequisite for Analytic Philosophy (Philosophy 388), which is a prerequisite or a corequisite for this course.) I might use some notation from symbolic logic (e.g. $\exists xFx$ or $a=b$), and I will explain it when I introduce it if I do, but you might find this course easier if you have already taken Introduction to Symbolic Logic.

General Assignment Information

- All quizzes, assignments, and papers will be available on Canvas and secured with a username and password.
- All quizzes, assignments, and papers are due on the date indicated on the course schedule (on Canvas), unless indicated otherwise ahead of time.
- Further instructions for the assignments and papers will be provided on Canvas.
- Further instructions for paper workshopping will be provided on Canvas and in class.

Evaluation Criteria and Grading Scale

Student Survey of Teaching

I always welcome feedback on what is working well and what could be improved. In addition, you will be asked to complete an end-of-semester, online Student Survey of Teaching, which will inform modifications to this course (and other courses that I teach) in the future.

Grading

Numerical grades will be converted to letter grades using the following scheme.¹

From	To	Letter grade
93.50	100.00	A
90.00	93.49	A-
86.50	89.99	B+
83.50	86.49	B
80.00	83.49	B-
76.50	79.99	C+
73.50	76.49	C
70.00	73.49	C-
66.50	69.99	D+
63.50	66.49	D
60.00	63.49	D-
00.00	59.99	F

Grades will be recorded on Canvas, but I won't be using Canvas to calculate your final grade; rather, I'll be using my own spreadsheet. If you're curious about your grade at any point, please ask me by email or during office hours.

Incomplete Grades

You may be assigned an 'I' (Incomplete) grade if you are unable to complete some portion of the assigned coursework because of an unanticipated illness, accident, work-related responsibility, family hardship, or verified learning disability. An Incomplete grade is not intended to give you additional time to complete course assignments or extra credit unless there is indication that the specified circumstances prevented you from completing course assignments on time.

Attendance Policy

Please see the University Excused Absences policy (USRR 2.2.1) at <https://policy.ku.edu/governance/USRR#excused>.

¹ See Ben Eggleston, "Plus/Minus Grading," available at benegg.net/plus-minus_grading.pdf.

Academic Success

I'm committed to making this class as accessible as possible. If you have any accommodation requests, please let me know as soon as possible.

Please see the Student Resources Page on the Academic Success website at <https://academicsuccess.ku.edu/student-resources-0>.

In addition to any policies and resources noted above, the KU Academic Success Student Resources website (<https://academicsuccess.ku.edu/student-resources-0>) provides links to KU Policies and Resources pertaining to academic misconduct, grading policies, harassment and discrimination, diversity and inclusion, mandatory reporting, equal opportunity and affirmative action, and student rights and responsibilities. Please visit the site to familiarize yourself with these policies and resources. If you have questions or concerns about any of these policies, statements, or resources, please let me know, or contact Student Affairs directly.

Concealed Carry

If you carry a concealed handgun, familiarize yourself both with the relevant state and federal laws and with KU's weapons policy at <https://concealedcarry.ku.edu/information>.

Course Schedule

The first day of class is Monday, 26 August 2024. The last day of class is Wednesday, 11 December 2024. There is no class on the following dates: Monday, 2 September 2024 (Labor Day); Monday, 14 October 2024 (Fall Break); Wednesday, 27 November 2024 (Thanksgiving Break).

A detailed (but tentative) schedule is available on Canvas. I reserve the right to make changes to the schedule as we go along; these changes will be reflected in an updated or revised version of the schedule on Canvas.

Tentative reading list

Statues

Judith Jarvis Thomson, "The Statue and the Clay," *Noûs* 32.2 (June 1998): 149–173, esp. pp. 149–154.

Karen Bennett, "Spatio-Temporal Coincidence and the Grounding Problem," *Philosophical Studies* 118.3 (April 2004): 339–371, esp. pp. 339–342.

Kathrin Koslicki, "Towards a Hylomorphic Solution to the Grounding Problem," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 82 (2018): 333–364.

Groups and teams

Katherine Ritchie, "What Are Groups?," *Philosophical Studies* 166.2 (Nov. 2013): 257–272.

Kevin Richardson, "Social Groups Are Concrete Material Particulars," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 52.4 (May 2022): 468–483.

August Faller, "How Groups Persist," 198.8 *Synthese* (Aug. 2021): 7149–7163.

Gender and gender identity

Charlotte Witt, *The Metaphysics of Gender* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Chapters 1, 3, and 4.

Additional reading: Ann E. Cudd, Mari Mikkola, Ásta, and Charlotte Witt, "Commentaries on *The Metaphysics of Gender*," *Symposia on Gender, Race, and Philosophy* 8.2 (Spring 2012).

John Horden and Dan López de Sa, "Gender Essentialisms," *Feminist Philosophical Quarterly* 9.2, Article 2: 1–24.

Elizabeth Barnes, "Gender without Gender Identity: The Case of Cognitive Disability," *Mind* 131.523 (July 2022): 838–864.

Race

Sally Haslanger, "Tracing the Sociopolitical Reality of Race" and "Haslanger's Reply to Glasgow, Jeffers, and Spencer" from *What Is Race? Four Philosophical Views* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 4–37.

Quayshawn Spencer, "A More Radical Solution to the Race Problem," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volumes* 93 (2019): 25–48.

Katharine Jenkins, "Two Routes to Radical Racial Pluralism," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volumes* 93 (2019): 49–68.

Disability

Elizabeth Barnes, *The Minority Body: A Theory of Disability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), Introduction and Chapter 1.

Elizabeth Barnes, "Against Impairment: Replies to Aas, Howard, and Francis," *Philosophical Studies* 175.5 (May 2018): 1151–1162.

Additional reading: Dana Howard and Sean Aas, "On Valuing Impairment," *Philosophical Studies* 175.5 (May 2018): 1113–1133.

Sexual orientation and sexual identity

E. Díaz-León, "Sexual Orientations: The Desire View," in Keya Maitra and Jennifer McWeeny, eds., *Feminist Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 294–310.

Matthew Andler, "Queer and Straight" in Brian D. Earp, Clare Chambers, and Lori Watson, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Sex and Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 117–130.

Intersectionality

Robin Dembroff, "Intersection Is Not Identity, or How To Distinguish Overlapping Systems of Injustice," in Ruth Chang and Amia Srinivasan, eds., *Conversations in Philosophy, Law, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 383–398.

Marta Jorba and Dan López de Sa, "Intersectionality as Emergence," *Philosophical Studies* 181.6–7 (July 2024): 1455–1475.