

**Philosophy 650: Metaphysics**  
Spring 2021

*Last updated: 1 February 2021*

Instructor: Ben Caplan (he/him/his)  
Time: Virtual cohort A T 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM  
Virtual cohort B Th 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM  
Office hours: T Th 12:15–1:00 PM, or by appointment  
Email: caplan@ku.edu

**Method of instruction**

Instruction will be via course content posted on Blackboard and real-time discussions on Zoom. For real-time discussions, the class will be divided into two virtual cohorts. One virtual cohort will meet on Tuesdays; the other virtual cohort will meet on Thursdays. Students will be assigned to a virtual cohort at the beginning of the semester.

Information on Zoom meeting rooms for real-time discussions and office hours is on Blackboard (under Announcements). This information will also be emailed to you.

**Description**

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

We will read work by Matthew Salett Andler, Elizabeth Barnes, Karen Bennett, Talia Mae Bettcher, Robin Dembroff, Sally Haslanger, Katharine Jenkins, Kathrin Koslicki, Kevin Richardson, Katherine Ritchie, Quayshawn Spencer, Judith Jarvis Thomson, Gabriel Uzquiano, Charlotte Witt, and Byeong-uk Yi.

**Requirements**

Quizzes	15%
Short writing assignment	15%
First paper	30%
Second paper	40%

There will be roughly one quiz each week. Each quiz will be short. The quizzes will largely cover material that we have already discussed. 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 or 4 pages. The second, final paper should be about 5–7 pages.

Due dates will be announced in discussions, by email, and on Blackboard. Due dates will be the same for students in different virtual cohorts. That means that some things might be due on a Tuesday even if you're in the virtual cohort that meets on Thursdays; and, conversely, some things might be due on a Thursday even if you're in the virtual cohort that meets on Tuesdays.

Due dates for quizzes and the short writing assignment will be announced at least five days in advance (e.g. the Thursday before a Tuesday).

Due dates for the first paper will be announced at least one week in advance.

The second, final paper will be due at **11:00 AM on Thursday, 13 May 2021**.

You will be required to consult with me (e.g. by email or by Zoom meeting) before submitting each of your two papers. 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.

### Readings

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

### Grading

Numerical grades will be converted to letter grades using the following scheme.<sup>1</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> See Ben Eggleston, “Plus/Minus Grading,” available at [benegg.net/plus-minus\\_grading.pdf](http://benegg.net/plus-minus_grading.pdf).

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

### **Prerequisite**

Introduction to Symbolic Logic (Philosophy 310), or an equivalent course, is a prerequisite or a corequisite of a prerequisite. (That is, it is a prerequisite or a corequisite of Analytic Philosophy (Philosophy 388), which is a prerequisite 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.

### **Academic misconduct**

The university policy on academic misconduct is set out in Article II, Section 6 of the University Senate Rules and Regulations. Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) "giving or receiving of unauthorized aid on ... assignments," "knowingly misrepresenting the source of any academic work," and "plagiarizing another's work." Penalties for academic misconduct include receiving a failing grade for the course, being suspended from the university, and being expelled. For further details, see <https://policy.ku.edu/governance/USRR#art2sect6>.

### **Accessibility**

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

If you anticipate or encounter any technical problems with taking this class remotely, please let me know as soon as possible.

### **Schedule**

The precise schedule will depend on the pace at which we work through the material in discussions. Information about what we're doing in any given week will be available on Blackboard. I will also send email updates ahead of each week.

The first day of class is Tuesday, 2 February 2021 (for virtual cohort A) or Thursday, 4 February 2021 (for virtual cohort B). The last day of class is Tuesday, 4 May 2021 (for virtual cohort A) or Thursday, 6 May 2021 (for virtual cohort B). The final paper is due during finals week, on Thursday, 13 May 2021 (at 11:00 AM).

## Tentative outline

The outline is tentative. I might make changes, depending on what we're interested in and how things go. I'll announce changes via email and on Blackboard.

### *Statues, numbers, and the Supreme Court*

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.

Byeong-uk Yi, "Numbers and Relations," *Erkenntnis* 49.1 (July 1998): 93–113.

Gabriel Uzquiano, "The Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Justices: A Metaphysical Puzzle," *Noûs* 38.1 (March 2004): 135–153.

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

### *Gender, race, disability, and sexual orientation*

Charlotte Witt, "What Is Gender Essentialism?," in *Feminist Metaphysics: Explorations in the Ontology of Sex, Gender and the Self*, ed. Charlotte Witt (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 11–25.

Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?," *Noûs* 34.1 (March 2000): 31–55.

Katharine Jenkins, "Amelioration and Inclusion: Gender Identity and the Concept of *Woman*," *Ethics* 126.2 (Jan. 2016): 394–421.

Talia Mae Bettcher, "Through the Looking Glass: Trans Theory Meets Feminist Philosophy," in *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Ann Garry, Serene J. Khader, and Alison Stone (New York: Routledge, 2017), 393–404.

Katharine Jenkins, "Toward an Account of Gender Identity," *Ergo* 5.27 (2018): 713–744.

Robin Dembroff, "Beyond Binary: Genderqueer as Critical Gender Kind," *Philosophers' Imprint* 20.9 (April 2020): 1–23.

Kevin Richardson (ms.), "Ontological Erasure."

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

Elizabeth Barnes, *The Minority Body: A Theory of Disability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), ix-xii, 2–6, 9–13, 38–48.

Matthew Salett Andler, "Sexual Orientation Categories," *Ergo* (forthcoming).