

Philosophy 650: Metaphysics
Spring 2023

Last updated: 20 January 2023

Instructor: Ben Caplan (he/him/his)
Time: T Th 12:30–1:45 PM
Location: 4011 Wescoe
Office hours: T Th 2:30–3:30 PM, or by appointment
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Description

We will talk about the metaphysics of statues and the Supreme Court. We will also talk about the metaphysics of gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, and intersectionality. 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 Andler, Elizabeth Barnes, Karen Bennett, Robin Dembroff, E. Díaz-León, Sally Haslanger, Dana Howard and Sean Aas, Katharine Jenkins and Aness Kim Webster, Kathrin Koslicki, Kevin Richardson, Katherine Ritchie, Quayshawn Spencer, Judith Jarvis Thomson, Gabriel Uzquiano, and Charlotte Witt.

Requirements

Quizzes	15%
Short writing assignment	15%
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.

Due dates will be announced in class and on Canvas. 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 paper will be due at **1:00 PM on Wednesday, 10 May 2023**.

You will be required to consult with me 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 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.

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 email me.

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.

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

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.

Electronic devices

You are permitted to use electronic devices (e.g. laptops, tablets, phones) in class for legitimate academic purposes (e.g. consulting the readings, taking notes). But please use electronic devices responsibly. There’s empirical evidence to suggest that laptop and tablet use in class negatively affects student scores for everyone in the class.²

Concealed carry

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

Schedule

The precise schedule will depend on the pace at which we work through the material in class. Information about what we’re doing on any given day will be available on Canvas.

The first day of class is Tuesday, 17 January 2023. There is no class on these dates: Thursday, 23 February 2023 (Central APA); Tuesday, 14 March 2023 (Spring Break); and Thursday, 16 March 2023 (Spring Break). The last day of class is Thursday, 4 May 2023. The final paper is due during finals week, on Wednesday, 10 May 2023 (at 1:00 PM).

² Susan Payne Carter, Kyle Greenberg, and Michael S. Walker, “The Impact of Computer Usage on Academic Performance: Evidence from a Randomized Trial at the United States Military Academy,” *Economics of Education Review* 56 (Feb. 2017): 118–132.

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 in class and on Canvas.

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.

The Supreme Court

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.

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

Gender

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

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; 150–175, esp. pp. 150–156.

Quayshawn Spencer, "How to Be a Biological Racial Realist" and "Spencer's Reply to Glasgow, Haslanger, and Jeffers" from *What Is Race? Four Philosophical Views* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 73–110; 203–244, esp. pp. 203–232.

Disability

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

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

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

Katharine Jenkins and Aness Kim Webster, “Disability, Impairment, and Marginalised Functioning,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 99.4 (2021): 730–747.

Sexual orientation

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, “Sexual Orientation, Ideology, and Philosophical Method,” *Journal of Social Ontology* 5.2 (Aug. 2019): 205–227.

Intersectionality

Robin Dembroff, “The Metaphysics of Injustice,” in Ruth Chang and Amia Srinivasan, eds., *Conversations in Philosophy, Law, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).