

**Phil 304: Metaphysics**  
**Spring 2016**  
**HNZ 207**

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**Overview and course objectives:**

The aim of this course is to familiarize you with philosophical questions and topics in metaphysics, particularly focusing on questions of existence, and to have more in-depth understanding of the questions you choose to write about in your papers. You will also develop and improve your skills at philosophical writing and discussion.

**Assignments:**

***Exams***

There are two midterms and a final exam for this course. Expect short essay-style questions on the exams (so they are really more like mini-papers). All exams will be take-home, and will each cover 1/3 of the course.

***Paper***

In addition to the exams, there is an 8-10 page paper due on the last day of class. I will distribute paper prompts in advance. If you prefer to propose your own paper topic, talk to me *at least two weeks before the due date*. ***You may write on your own topic only if I approve it beforehand.***

***Extra credit talk write-up***

The department regularly hosts philosophy talks, and you are encouraged to come along! For extra credit, you can go to a talk and write up a 1-2 page (500 word) response. It should be turned in within a week of the talk that you went to. The response should address the following questions: (a) What was the speaker arguing for? (b) What was the most interesting part of the talk? (c) What could the speaker have done better, either to argue more persuasively or to clarify her points? (d) What was the most interesting question or objection that came up in discussion afterwards?

A good write-up will raise your lowest exam grade by 1/3 of a grade (e.g., from a B to a B+). A schedule of talks for the semester is attached at the end of the syllabus.

**Grading:**

Grades are calculated as specified below. Late work will be marked down 1/3 of a grade per day (e.g., from B+ to B). If you need an extension, come ask at least a week in advance and it will generally be granted.

Midterm 1	20%
Midterm 2	20%
Final exam	20%
Final paper	30%
Attendance & Participation	10%

**Absence Policy:**

Attendance is required to pass the class. I will regularly distribute a sign-in sheet. If you miss more than three meetings, are regularly late to class, or regularly violate the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Policy, you can expect this to negatively affect your grade for that portion of the class.

**20<sup>th</sup> Century Policy:**

This classroom exists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (with occasional time travel just to read articles published in the last 16 years). While you are in class, please do not make use of any electronics that would not have been available to you in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This includes all cell phones smaller than a Coke can and laptops weighing less than five pounds. Please let me know if you have a disability or special circumstance that will make it especially difficult to do the work required for class while adhering to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Policy. If any student makes a serious request along these lines, the policy will be lifted for everyone.

**Course Materials:**

There are no required textbooks for this class. Readings are available on Owlspace.

**Honor Code:**

All assignments in this class are covered by the Honor Code. This means that written work should be written **entirely by you** (and written **for the purpose of this class**, this semester) unless otherwise specified. You are encouraged to talk to one another about assignments at early stages, but any sources you consult – including one another – must be properly cited. It is common philosophical practice to cite the names of those whose remarks in philosophical discussion (verbal or written correspondence), or comments on drafts of your paper that influenced your revisions.

If you are unsure of how or whether to cite a source, come ask me. It is always better to err on the side of too many citations rather than too few! You can also look here for guidelines:

**<http://honor.rice.edu/>**

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by work, and sometimes plagiarism can seem like the only solution. If you find yourself in this situation, it is always best to come talk to me, a dean, or a counselor rather than committing an Honor Code violation.

**Students with disabilities:**

Please contact me to discuss your needs. You should also contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.

## **Schedule:**

(Subject to change. I will notify you of any changes.)

### **Personal Identity**

**Week 1**      January 11, 13, 15      *Introduction to philosophy, metaphysics, personal identity*

David Concepción, “Reading Philosophy”  
Richard Swinburne, “Personal Identity: The Dualist Theory”  
Williams, Bernard: “The Self and the Future”

**Week 2**      January 20, 22      *Psychological and bodily continuity, continued*  
(no class January 18)

Parfit, “Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons”  
Lewis, David: “Survival and Identity”

**Week 3**      January 25, 27, 29      *We are our bodies; we are animals*

Judith Jarvis Thomson, “People and their Bodies”  
**Eric Olson, TBA**

**Week 4**      February 1, 3, 5      *Metaphilosophy*  
(No class 2/5)

Carol Rovane, “From a Rational Point of View”  
Tamar Gendler, “Personal Identity and Thought Experiments”

### **Ontology**

**Week 5**      February 8, 10, 12      *Introduction to ontology*

**\*\*First Midterm due Feb 10 (before class)**

W.V.O. Quine, “On What There Is”  
David Lewis and Stephanie Lewis, “Holes”

**Week 6**      February 15, 17, 19      *Ordinary objects*

Peter Unger, “There Are No Ordinary Things”  
Amie Thomasson, “The Controversy Over the Existence of Ordinary Objects”, *Phil  
Compass*

**Week 7**      February 22, 24, 26      *Parts and wholes*

James Van Cleve, “The Moon and Sixpence”  
Ned Markosian, “Restricted Composition”

***Spring break***

**Week 8**      March 7, 9, 11      *Abstract objects*

Chris Swoyer, “Abstract Entities”  
Cian Dorr, “There Are No Abstract Objects”

### **Metametaphysics**

**Week 9**      March 14, 16, 18      *Are metaphysical debates “verbal disputes”?*

Eli Hirsch, “Ontology and Alternative Languages”  
Amie Thomasson, “Answerable and Unanswerable Questions”

**Week 10**      March 21, 23, 25      *Why metaphysics is legit*

Karen Bennett, “Composition, Colocation, and Metaontology”  
Laurie Paul, “Metaphysics as Modeling: The Handmaiden’s Tale”

### **Race and Gender**

**Week 11**      March 28, 30      *A different methodological approach to metaphysics.*  
(no class April 1)

**\*\*Second Midterm due 3/28, before class**

Sally Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are they? (What) Do we want them to be?”

\* On 3/29, Haslanger is giving a talk at Rice on this topic – highly recommended! We will talk about her talk afterwards, so hopefully several of you can go.

**Week 12**      April 4, 6, 8      *Skepticism about race; a biological view of race.*

Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections” Part 1  
Quayshawn Spencer, “A Radical Solution to the Race Problem”

**Week 13**      April 11, 13, 15      *What is gender?*

Charlotte Witt, “What is Gender Essentialism?”  
Natalie Stoljar, “Different Women: Gender and the Realism-Nominalism Debate”

**Week 14**      April 18, 20, 22      *What is biological sex? & wrap-up.*

Ásta Sveinsdóttir, “The Metaphysics of Sex and Gender”  
Odds&ends, TBD

**FINAL PAPER due April 22**

**TAKEHOME FINAL due during exam week (date TBA)**