

PHIL 356-01: METAPHYSICS (WR)

T/Th 1:00 – 2:15 p.m., Education Room 113

This course satisfies the following programmatic requirements in the College of Arts & Sciences: **WR** (6 hours required) and **300+ Humanities**. In the Philosophy major and minor it constitutes a **300+ elective** in the old (24-hour) major, and satisfies a **Metaphysics & Epistemology distribution requirement** in the new (33-hour) major.

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Office Hours: T/Th 11:00 – 12:30 and by appt.

Office: Humanities Room 314

Web: <https://blackboard.louisville.edu>

Purpose and Aims of the Course:

This course presents a survey of some, but by no means all, major issues in contemporary “Anglo-American” or “Analytic” metaphysics.

Metaphysics, broadly speaking, is the theory of the nature of reality. Main questions in metaphysics include

- What is there?
- What are space and time?
- Is there an “external” world? Is it material? Does it have its (familiar) features, by and large, independent of our minds?
- Could things have been different?
- What am I?
- In what does my survival consist?
- How do mind and body interact? How is mental experience possible?
- Do I have “free will”? (Could I have acted or chosen differently than I did?)

In part our aim in addressing these questions is simply to find the most consistent, compelling answers to them that we can. They are, after all, important questions. But in doing philosophy we are also developing important skills of careful reading, clear and critical thinking, clear writing, and creativity.

Contemporary Metaphysics in the Analytic tradition is very closely bound up with philosophical logic, set theory, quantum mechanics and relativistic physics, and the philosophy of language. We will, however, not be delving too deeply into these “technical” methods. Van Inwagen introduces Metaphysics with a writing style that is very clear and engaging, and links up closely to the experience and concerns of people who have not previously studied the subject. However, the price of this is that the content of his textbook is somewhat idiosyncratic, and must be supplemented if you are to have a survey of the field. Rudder Baker’s book is an extended defense of a particular metaphysical thesis, drawing out its implications and testing it in a number of respects.

TEXTS:

1. Peter van Inwagen, *Metaphysics*, 3rd ed. (Westview Press). You **must** use the 3rd edition. **[PVI]**
2. Lynne Rudder Baker, *The Metaphysics of Everyday Life* (Cambridge University Press). **[LRB]**

3. Occasional articles available online or on Blackboard, as noted in schedule below.

Evaluation:

Term Paper:	35%
Short papers:	40 (8 points each)
Supp. Focus:	16 (8 points each)
Participation:	<u>9</u>
Total:	100

Requirements:

Term Paper: This paper, of 8-10 pages, is a sustained defense of a clear and controversial philosophical thesis on one of the topics we discuss over the semester. I will hand out a list of suggested topics around mid-semester. You may develop your own topic, but if you do so, you *must* discuss it with me first. When I return the papers you will have a choice. If you are satisfied with your grade you may leave it as-is. If you are not satisfied you may revise the paper in light of my comments and resubmit it, accompanied by a brief explanation of how you have revised your paper. Your grade on the second go-round, whether higher or lower, will be your grade on the paper.

Short Papers: We have eleven readings by van Inwagen and 4 chapters of LRB. You must write a short paper on **5 of these 15 readings**. The ones you have to do are marked off by last name in the schedule below: A-I, J-R, and S-Z. Response papers should be about 2-4 pages. Addressing either the chapter as a whole or a part of it, you should lay out the key question(s) at issue, state a proposed answer to them, and give some reasons in favor of and against that answer, explaining in the process whether you think that answer succeeds and what you think are the best reasons for or against it.

Supplementary Readings Focus: We have 8 readings labeled “**Supp.**” in the schedule below. On **two** of these I will expect you to come to class having typed up a brief outline of the reading and ready to take the lead in discussion of it. At the end of the class session you should hand in your outline. I will pass around a signup sheet. Grades for the focus assignments will be based on your performance in class as well as your outline. [An outline is a numbered or bullet-point statement of the key propositions of the article/chapter, organized so as to lay bare the structure of the argument from premises to conclusion – for instance, using connectors such as “therefore,” “from 1 and 2,” etc., as opposed to just listing points in order.]

Attendance is required. Every two unexcused absences will reduce your attendance grade by 1 point. Thereafter, each unexcused absence will reduce your grade by a full letter.

Handing in Assignments:

Papers are due at the beginning of class. Outlines are due at the end of class. Assignments are officially late starting 15 minutes after they are due, and will be penalized one grade per school day. I am not flexible on this policy. In general, the only acceptable reason for failure to complete or submit an assignment on time is physical impossibility or a death in the family. Even in these cases, if at all possible you must communicate with me in

advance about your situation. In such dire (and rare!) circumstances, at my discretion, lateness will be excused.

You may hand in assignments in hard copy or electronically. Paper submissions should be without frills but must be typed and stapled. Electronic submissions must be in one of the following formats: **.doc, .docx, .odt, or .rtf**. I cannot guarantee that I will be able to open other formats, and if I cannot open your file it has not been submitted. Electronic files should be emailed to me either through Blackboard's "send mail" function or by email **using your U of L email**. Always **cc yourself and keep a copy** at least until you receive it back from me with a grade.

Academic Integrity:

According to the University of Louisville's *Code of Student Conduct*, Section 5 ("Academic Dishonesty"): "Academic dishonesty is prohibited at the University of Louisville. It is a serious offense because it diminishes the quality of scholarship, makes accurate evaluation of student progress impossible, and defrauds those in society who must ultimately depend upon the knowledge and integrity of the institution and its students and faculty."

See Section 5 of the *Code* for a full explanation of behaviors covered by this policy. It is your responsibility to know this code and comply with its requirements. If I discover violations of this policy I will pursue the required disciplinary channels. If you have any questions about how to comply with this policy, ask me *in advance*.

Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments/notes
T 1/11	Introduction: What is Metaphysics?		
Th 1/13		PVI, chap. 1	A-I
T 1/18	Individuality	PVI, chap. 2	J-R
Th 1/20	Some key concepts: Parthood, Sums, Classes, Sets, Supervenience, Emergence	Supp: O'Connor & Wong, "Emergent Properties" (online)	
T 1/25	Externality	PVI, chap. 3	S-Z
Th 1/27		continued	
T 2/1	Temporality	PVI, chap. 4	A-I
Th 2/3		Supp.: Hawley, "Temporal Parts" (online)	
T 2/8	Objectivity	PVI, chap. 5	J-R
Th 2/10		Supp: Putnam, "Is there still anything to say about reality and truth?" (on Blackboard)	
T 2/15	Necessity and	PVI, chap. 6	S-Z

	Contingency		
Th 2/17		Supp.: Yagisawa, "Possible Objects" (online)	
T 2/22	Mind, Body, World: Dualism and Physicalism	PVI, chap. 10	A-I
Th 2/24		Supp: Horgan, "Materialism, Minimal Emergentism, and the Hard Problem of Consciousness" (on Blackboard)	Monday 2/28 is last day to withdraw
T 3/1	Personal Identity	PVI, chap. 11	J-R
Th 3/3		Supp.: Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity" (online)	
T 3/8	Free will	PVI, chap. 12	S-Z
Th 3/10		Supp.: Gary Watson, "Free Agency" (online)	
T 3/15-Th 3/17	Spring break – no class		
T 3/22	The unreality of Ordinary Things	Van Inwagen, chapters on Blackboard	A-I
Th 3/24	The reality of ordinary things	LRB chap. 2	J-R
T 3/29		Continued	
Th 3/31	Constitution	LRB chap. 8	S-Z
T 4/5		LRB chap. 9	A-I
Th 4/7		Continued	Final Papers/drafts due
T 4/12	Human Persons	LRB chap.4	J-R
Th 4/14		Supp: Eric Olson, "Was I ever a Fetus?" (online)	
T 4/19	Being	PVI, Coda: Being	S-Z
Th 4/21	Continued and Conclusions	Supp: Quine, "On What There Is" (online)	
F 4/29			Final paper revisions due by 5:00 p.m.