

PHI 3500 Metaphysics

Spring 2021

University of Florida

MWF 10:40-11:30am

Course Syllabus

<u>Professor:</u>	Amber Ross amber.ross@ufl.edu
<u>Professor Office:</u>	301 Griffin-Floyd Hall (and on Zoom)
<u>Professor Phone:</u>	352-273-1811
<u>Course Location:</u>	MAT 0114 and Online
<u>Course Times:</u>	MWF 10:40-11:30 (period 4)
<u>Office hours:</u>	Wed 2-3pm and by appointment (On Zoom)
<u>Course Website:</u>	On Canvas https://elearning.ufl.edu/

Course Description:

Metaphysics is, generally speaking, the study of the fundamental nature of reality. This course will cover several core topics in contemporary analytic metaphysics. Topics we will likely cover (and the main questions associated with them) are:

- ***The Mind/Body Problem:*** Persons seem to consist of both minds and bodies, but what is the relation between these? Bodies are paradigmatic physical objects, and if any non-physical entities exist, thoughts and mental states are top contenders. But our minds certainly seem to control our bodily actions; how could a non-physical entity interact with the physical world? Or might minds be physical, despite first appearances?
- ***Identity; Type and Token:*** There are many relations that can hold between multiple individuals, and many ways that several individuals can be “the same” in some sense. But there is a special relation, self-identity, that an individuals only holds towards itself and nothing else.

Understanding the difference between this kind of identity relation and other kinds of “sameness” is key to understanding a host of puzzling philosophical problems.

- ***Time (& a bit of Space)***: What is time exactly? Is it real? Is it an objective sort of thing? How is time related to space? Is time travel theoretically possible (is it physically possible)?
- ***Personal Identity***: How is it that one person remains the same person throughout enormous changes in their lifetime? How do other, ordinary things, persist through change? Does anything really persist through change?

In addition, we may tackle an additional topic: causation, free will, modality (necessity and possibility), or... depending on class interest and facility with the subject.

Readings and Suggested Texts:

All required readings will be posted under “Files” on our Canvas website:

<https://elearning.ufl.edu>

Suggested Texts:

- If you have not encountered any introductory metaphysics before, I suggest reading [Stephen Mumford's *Metaphysics, A very short introduction*](#). It will be on reserve in the Library (the kindle edition is approx. \$6 on amazon.com)
- A very useful online guide for writing philosophy papers is available here: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Canvas e-Learning Environment

This course is supplemented by online content in the e-Learning environment known as "Canvas." To login to the e-Learning site for this course, go to <https://elearning.ufl.edu/>, click the **e-Learning in Canvas** button, and on the next page enter your Gatorlink username and password. You can then access the course e-Learning environment by selecting PHI 3930 from the **Courses** pull-down menu at the top of the page. **If you encounter any difficulties logging in or accessing any of the course content, contact the UF Computing Help Desk at (352) 392-4537.**

Student learning objectives (SLOs)

Students will gain a basic understanding of philosophy with a focus on contemporary metaphysics and learn how to utilize this knowledge to evaluate and develop their own ideas. Students will pursue these goals across these three categories:

- *Content*: Students demonstrate competence in the terminology, concepts, methodologies and theories used within the discipline. Assessment by short written assignments, essays, discussion, and formal in-class debates.
- *Communication*: Students communicate knowledge, ideas, and reasoning clearly and effectively in written or oral forms appropriate to the discipline. Assessment by short written assignments, essays, discussion, and formal in-class debates.
- *Critical Thinking*: Students analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives, using discipline specific methods, and develop reasoned solutions to problems. Assessment by short written assignments, essays, discussion, and in-class debates.

Students will satisfy these SLO's by:

1. Participating in writing focused on central ideas and arguments in the philosophical works being read in the class that will serve as the basis for class discussion at regular intervals throughout the semester;
2. Participating actively in class discussions, in which students will consider the effectiveness of their fellow students' ideas and reasoning;
3. Writing two papers- one on an assigned topic and one of the student's design- which will test students' critical thinking abilities, to be graded according to a rubric that specifies as criteria for assessment competent command of the relevant texts and material discussed in class, perspicuous identification of the issues raised by the assigned topics, and development of a response that cogently supports the students' claims with little or no irrelevance;
4. Preparing for, participating in, and evaluating students' in-class debates.

Graded Requirements:

All written work is to be submitted via Canvas unless otherwise noted.

Class attendance and participation (10%): Everyone will begin the class with a 75% participation and attendance grade. If you attend every class but do not participate, your grade will stay at 75% [C]. You have two free unexcused absences. After this you will lose 2 points on your A&P grade for every unexcused absence.

Absence due to illness will be excused! If you are ill please do not come to class! - email me when you can and let me know you were ill (no doctor's note needed- please don't abuse this policy!)

Absence due to computer issues will be excused!- Please try you best to attend class via Zoom if you are taking the course online.

Please come to class on time and prepared, and to contribute in a positive way to class. Being prepared includes having completed the reading. There is a lot of reading in this class, and the reading is difficult and dense. **I will ask you to write in the Zoom Chat several times during each class meeting- participating in these chat-writings will count towards you participation and attendance grade.**

Quizzes / In-Class Writing (10%): There will be several quizzes and in class writing assignments throughout the term. Date and format of quizzes will be announced ahead of time; in class writing will not. Cumulatively, the quizzes and in-class writing will be worth 10% of your final grade.

Discussion Board Contributions (15%): The class will be divided into 3 groups (A, B, C) and each group will be assigned 3 specific weeks to post to the discussion boards. On your assigned week, you are required to contribute 1 Original Post and 2 Comments. These discussion board posts will serve as a starting point for our Friday discussion-classes.

Original posts are due on Thursdays by 3pm- comments are due by the following Monday 11:59pm. (This allows you time to reflect on our Friday discussion before commenting on your classmates' posts).

Two medium-length papers (55% combined)

The goal of these writing assignments is to show that you have read and grappled with the material covered in this course. These papers give you a chance to display your mastery of our course content, and will involve a critical assessment of a topic that we have discussed in class. The two course papers will assess whether students have acquired:

- skill in discerning the structure of arguments, representing them fairly and clearly, and evaluating them for cogency.
- skill in formulating original arguments, anticipating objections, and responding in a conscientious fashion.
- skill in reading and discussing complex philosophical texts from historical sources and contemporary works
- and skill writing clearly and persuasively about abstract and conceptually elusive matters.

First Paper (25%): (1200-1500 words) For the first paper, I will provide you with a topic and show you the structure that the paper needs to follow.

Second Paper (30%): (1200-1500 words) For your second paper, you have the choice of writing on a topic that I provide or choosing and developing your own paper topic. If you choose to develop your own topic, your paper must be based on the material we cover in this course. The paper must be a philosophical analysis of content from this class and engage with at least one of the papers we will read this semester.

If you choose to develop your own topic for the final paper, you will need to complete the following assignments (the grade value of these assignments are part of the total grade value of the second paper):

Final Paper Proposal (3%): We will discuss how to complete this assignment as the date approaches.

Final Paper Outline (2%): (optional) We will discuss how to complete this assignment as the date approaches.

In-Class Debate (10%): During the final six class meetings we will have a series of debates over the metaphysical issues that have arisen during the course of the term. Each debate team will consist of 3-4 students, each of whom will be required to speak during some portion of the debate. There will be a written and an oral component of the debate mark; details will be discussed later in the semester.

Debate Audience Participation: There will be a Q&A session after each debate, when students who are not participating in that day's debate can ask questions of the debate teams. Asking good questions during this session will add to your **Participation Grade**.

Grade Penalty for Late Work: All assignments submitted late will automatically lose 3 points, and an additional 3 points for every 24 hours after the due date, **unless arrangements are made in advance with the instructor**.

Grading Scale	(round up from .5)
A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D+	67-69
D	64-66
D-	60-63
E	0-59

Attendance, Illness, Religious Holidays, and Twelve Day Rule

Requirements for class attendance, religious holidays, and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Excerpt from the statement on absences:

*Absences count from the first class meeting. In general, acceptable reasons for absence from or failure to participate in class include illness, serious family emergencies, special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences), military obligation, severe weather conditions, religious holidays, and participation in official university activities such as music performances, athletic competition or debate. Absences from class for court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena) must be excused. Other reasons also may be approved.***

**If you think you have an acceptable reason to be excused for your absence, you must contact the [Dean of Students Office](#) to receive an excuse letter. This prevents me from having to make difficult discriminations between excuses, and it provides you with something you can use for all of your missed classes.

Make-Up Assignments

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work are consistent with university policies specified at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism:

Most instances of academic dishonesty can be avoided by thoroughly citing the resources you have used to help you understand the topic on which you're writing. **If you have read something that helped you understand the material, cite it!** Failure to cite sources is the most common (and easily avoidable) academic offence.

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge, which states:

“We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”

The Honor Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Plagiarism on any assignment will automatically result in a grade of “E” for the course. Plagiarism is defined in the University of Florida's Student Honor Code as follows:

“A student shall not represent as the student’s own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to): a. Quoting oral or written materials, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution. b. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.”

Students found guilty of academic misconduct will be prosecuted in accordance with the procedures specified in the UF honesty policy.

Online Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Campus Resources

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Health and Wellness U Matter, We Care

If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352 392- 1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS) Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.

Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575

University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies

Academic Resources

E-learning Technical Support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to

Learningsupport@ufl.edu. <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.

Library Support <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>

Writing Studio 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

E-mail guidelines:

(1) If you need some practical information about the course you should **look at most recently updated syllabus or on the website**. E-mails requesting information which is available on the most recently updated syllabus or on the website will not be answered.

(2) If you want to discuss a substantive philosophical question you should bring it up in class or visit my office hours. E-mails asking substantive philosophical questions will not be answered. (Except maybe by a note suggesting that you come to an office hour.)

If, after reading (1) & (2) you still think you should e-mail me, you are welcome to do so at amber.ross@ufl.edu I will try to answer e-mail within a week. You must use your 'ufl' address.

Please note: I may not read email between 4pm and 9am.

How to do well in this course

1. **Be sure to read the assigned material before class.** This will help to ensure that our class time is quality time.
2. **After class, re-read the material for the session**, paying special attention to the questions that you had before. Hopefully the material will make much more sense to you now.
3. **Bring specific questions with you to class.** Even if there are aspects of the readings or study questions you didn't fully grasp, the fact that you tried should help you to narrow down what it is that you don't get.
4. **See me in office hours**, if there are still questions you are unclear about. That's what office hours are for. Don't be shy.
5. **Manage your time well.** Many students make the mistake of waiting until a few days before papers are due to start writing. That is *bad* time management. Same goes for exams. The **same number of hours** devoted to the material BEFORE class can lead to a much more efficient use of your time, better understanding, and higher grades.

On Reading Philosophy Texts

You will be expected to have done the assigned reading **before** you come to class to be able to follow and participate in the class discussion. Learning philosophy is as much learning a style of thinking and reasoning as it is learning certain contents. Therefore it is important that you try to participate actively and learn to engage with the readings critically.

You should budget enough time for the reading to be able to read each piece **at least three times**. Don't expect to be able to 'breeze through' the texts and you can avoid a lot of frustration. For all the readings you should have a pen and paper ready to take notes as you read. Philosophical writing is concerned with advancing and defending arguments. Your task will be to try to reconstruct the arguments and to critically evaluate them.

The first reading of the text should be fairly quick. Your goal here should be to get a first, rough sense of the general argument the author is advancing and the rough structure of the text. What is his or her main thesis? (write this down!) Where in the text is s/he arguing for it? Where does s/he address objections? Where does he discuss qualifications? Where does s/he motivate the argument? Don't worry, if during the first reading you don't yet understand how precisely the author is arguing for a thesis.

The second reading should be devoted to giving a reconstruction of the argument that is as sympathetic as possible. Now you should spend a lot of time on trying to understand how the author supports the main thesis, and how s/he might address potential objections. Here it is usually useful to try to jot down the following: What are the premises of the argument? How are the premises themselves supported? For example the author might appeal to shared intuitions or might claim that the premises are self-evident. What are the steps which are meant to get the author from the premises to the conclusion? (Here words like 'because' and 'therefore' can provide a clue.) You might think of yourself as engaging in a dialogue with the text here. Ask critical questions of the text, such as "You say that all simple ideas are copies of impressions. Why should I be compelled to accept this?" Then search the text for answers. At this stage your aim should not yet be to try to discover flaws or problems in the argument. Aim to make the argument as strong as possible.

Finally it is time to be critical. During a third reading you ought to try to see if you can uncover weaknesses in the arguments. If someone would want to disagree with a conclusion, there are two general ways in which one might attack the author's arguments. One, you can disagree with one or more of the premises. That is you might accept that *if* we grant the premises, *then* the conclusion follows, but you might disagree with one or more of the premises. (But then you should ask yourself how you would respond to the attempt to motivate the premises.) Or, two, you might disagree with one or more of the steps in the argument. That is, you might be willing to accept the premises, but you might deny that this commits you to the conclusion as well. If you have an objection of the latter kind you should try to explain why it is possible to accept the author's premises and yet deny his or her conclusions. (Of course you also might have objections of both kinds.)

A careful reading of a difficult text takes time. Learn to read patiently and slowly, and before you get frustrated, remember that even professional philosophers struggle with some of the texts you are reading. One of the most wonderful aspects of reading philosophy is that it allows you to engage in conversations with some of the deepest and most original thinkers. Enjoy the challenge!