

# Metaphysics Syllabus

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Online office hours: By appointment via email

## Course Description

This course explores some of the main themes in metaphysics. After a brief introduction to the discipline, we will discuss topics such as: personal identity (what are we?), free will, death, God, and the nature of time.

No textbook is required: the readings are available either through UM library or through external links.

## Goals

By the end of the class the student will be able to:

Understand what metaphysicians are interested in and how they explore their areas of interest.

Think about issues in metaphysics in a knowledgeable way.

Write clearly about the topics covered in the class.

## Requirements and grading

Every assignment will be graded, apart from the first assignment (the introduction videos). Every assignment will be worth 10 points. Apart from the short assignments throughout the course, there will also be two exams: a midterm and a final, as well as a paper *that will be revised once*.

Assignment deadlines: complete the assignments of a given module by the end of the module (not the end of the week).

Assignments: 25% of the final grade

Paper: 25% of the final grade

Midterm: 25% of the final grade

Final: 25% of the final grade

A = 93-100%

C- = 70-72%

A- = 90-92%

D+ = 67-69%

B+ = 87-89%

D = 63-66%

B = 83-86%

D- = 60-62%

B- = 80-82%

F = 0-59%

C+ = 77-79%

C = 73-76%

Please note: There are no makeup assignments

## Tentative Schedule

**\*\*Anything in this syllabus is subject to change at the instructor’s discretion at any time during the semester\*\***

**\*\*Some readings will be supplemented with news articles\*\***

Please note that I will log in every week to see the progress of the student, even if not contacted by any student.

***Assignment due dates: all assignments are due by the end of the module.***

Dates	Module	Subject	Reading	Assignment
6/27-6/28	1. What is Metaphysics?	Philosophical argumentation	None	Introduction video
6/29-6/30	1. What is Metaphysics?	The kinds of questions metaphysicians ask	David and Stephanie Lewis, “Holes”.	Group discussion
7/1-7/5	2. Identity and Persistence	What is identity?	Max Black, “The Identity of Indiscernibles”	Short writing assignment (a few paragraphs)
7/6-7/7	2. Identity and Persistence	Persistence	None	Short writing assignment
7/8-7/10	3. Personal identity	The psychological account and the bundle account	John Locke, “Of Identity and Diversity.” From: <i>An Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> . Pages 195 (beginning in section 9) – 201 (including section 24)  Derek Parfit, “Personal Identity”.  David Hume, “Of Personal Identity” (From: <i>A Treatise of Human Nature</i> )	Assignment 1: Group discussion based on the first reading (Locke) and a video.  Assignment 2: Writing assignment based on the Parfit reading.
7/11-7/12	3. Personal identity	Animalism and the Soul view	Eric Olson, “Was I Ever a Fetus?”  Descartes, Sixth Meditation, from: <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> . pages: 57 (beginning with the paragraph: “Now there is nothing...”, focus especially on pages 60- the end of the meditation)	Assignment: quiz on the module (focused on comparing the main points of each view)
7/13-7/14	4. The mind-body problem	Dualism and Identity theories	Robinson, Howard, “Dualism.” Section 1.1.  J.J.C. Smart. “Sensations and Brain processes.”	Writing assignment (on Smart)

7/15-7/17	4. The mind-body problem	Midterm	None (preparation for the midterm)	<b>Midterm:</b> You have 3 days to prepare. The midterm covers the material in this module and in the previous modules.
7/18-7/19	5. Death	Immortality	John Perry. "A Dialogue on Personal Identity and Immortality: The First Night".	Assignment 1: Before the reading: Writing assignment (relating this topic to the personal identity topic)  Assignment 2: Group discussion
7/20-7/21	5. Death		Thomas Nagel, "Death".	Quiz (on the Nagel reading)
7/22-7/24	6. Free will and determinism	Determinism Vs. Compatibilism	Baron d'Holbach. (1770/translation: 1820-21). "Chapter XI: Of the System of Man's free agency." (From: <i>The System of Nature</i> ).  Harry G. Frankfurt "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person"	Group discussion based on the two readings and two videos.
7/25-7/26	6. Free will and determinism	Free will (incompatibilism)	Taylor, Richard, "Freedom and Determinism (Chapter 4)." (From: <i>Metaphysics</i> ).	Writing assignment
7/27-7/28	7. God	The Existence of God	Aquinas: The five ways	Assignment 1: Before the reading: Answer the following questions: (a) Suppose there is God, what is God like? What are His attributes? (b) Why does it matter whether or not God exist?  Assignment 2: After the reading: Group discussion
7/29-7/31	7. God	The problem of evil	J.L Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence".	Writing assignment AND <b>Final paper assignment</b>
8/1-8/2	8. Time and time travel	Is time real?	J. M. E. McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time"	Quiz
8/3-8/4	8. Time and time travel	Time travel	Heather Dyke, "The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Time Travel."	Prepare for Final  <b>Final exam (on modules 5-8)! Keep writing the final paper!</b>