

This course is a survey of issues in metaphysics, with a focus on recent debates. Topics include the nature of existence, abstract objects, causation, kinds, social ontology, and the metaphysics of science.

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Office hours: Tu 11:00–noon, Fr 1:00–2:00, and by appointment

Texts: Alyssa Ney, *Metaphysics: An Introduction*. Second edition. 2023.

Additional course readings will be available via Brightspace.

Response papers: Students are required to write a 300–500 word critical response to the assigned readings each week. These should be turned in via Brightspace by midnight (end of day) on **Monday** before the class meeting for which the reading is assigned.

A reading response paper should address one of the assigned readings for the week and do three things.

1. Quote and cite a sentence or two of the assigned reading which could be taken as the the thesis, capturing the core claim being made. (Direct quotations do not count toward the assigned length.)
2. Provide a critical summary of one of the readings. State in your own words what the author is trying to do. Ask yourself: What *reasons* does the author give for believing their thesis? Why do they think it matters?
3. End by raising at least one question about the reading.

Reading response papers should *not* outline the whole reading. You should not try mention everything. Decide what you think is the most important thing, and leave out parts that do not relate to that. *This is especially important if you pick one of the chapters from Ney's textbook!*

You may pose an objection, but you still need to concisely state what you're objecting to.

If parts were confusing or hard to follow, then you can say so! You are not expected to understand every reading fully before we meet to discuss it. The goal is to engage with the reading, struggle with it, and form an opinion of how things fit together.

Presentations: Students registered for 512 will make two short presentations. Students registered for 412 may choose to do a presentation for extra credit.

#1: During a regular class meeting, offer a summary of the central claim and argument of a reading and raise points to open class discussion. It should not be a point-by-point repetition of the reading! It may dig in on one particular theme, evaluate how successful the article is, or connect the article to earlier readings in the course. The target length is 5–15 minutes.

#2: At the final class meeting, pitch your term paper.

Final papers: Students registered for 412 will write a 5–8 page (about 2000 word) final paper which may be on an assigned topic.

Students registered for 512 will write a 10–12 page (about 3000 word) paper on a topic of their own choosing.

Grading: The two lowest response paper grades will be dropped. Late response papers will be marked at a penalty, based on how late it was and how much of a habit the student has made out of turning things in late.

Undergraduates (422) 10% Participation, 60% Response papers, 30% Final paper

Graduates (522) 10% Participation, 50% Response papers, 10% Presentations, 30% Final paper

Electronic devices in the classroom: Students are welcome to use laptops or tablets for class readings and note taking. Electronic device should not be used in class for purposes unrelated to class. . . . That said, I realize that there are other things going on. If you have to take an important call or message during class, you should leave the room with a minimum of fuss.

Absences: Attendance contributes part of the participation grade, but absences for legitimate reasons will be excused. Let the instructor know in a timely fashion. If you are or suspect you are contagious, *do not* come to class.

Academic honesty: You are encouraged to discuss issues from the course with each other and with others outside of class, but you are responsible for your own ideas and your own words. Students who turn in work that is not theirs will be failed for the assignment on the first infraction and failed for the course on the second infraction.

Note that turning in text which you have harvested from an AI counts as plagiarism. Don't make the mistake of thinking that an AI can write better than you can. It can put together pretty sentences sometimes, but the fundamental point of writing in this course is to collect and convey your thoughts.

Schedule of topics

This is a tentative schedule. Any changes will be announced in class and on Brightspace.

Week 1 28 aug - introduction

Week 2 4 sep - ontology

Ney, *Metaphysics* chapter 1

David and Stephanie Lewis, "Holes" (1969)

optional: Ney, *Metaphysics* chapter 0

optional: WVO Quine, "On What There Is" (1953)

Week 3 11 sep - abstract objects

Ney, *Metaphysics* chapter 2

Cian Dorr, "There are No Abstract oObjects" (2008)

Week 4 18 sep - material objects

Ney, *Metaphysics* chapters 3 and 9

Week 5 25 sep - anti-metaphysics

Ney, *Metaphysics* chapter 4

AJ Ayer, "The Elimination of Metaphysics" (1935)

recommended: Rudolf Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology" (1950)

Week 6 2 oct - social ontology - artifacts

Ney, *Metaphysics* chapter 5

Maarten Franssen and Peter Kroes, "Artefact Kinds, Ontological Criteria and Forms of Mind-Dependence" (2014)

Week 7 9 oct - social ontology - race and gender

Ney, *Metaphysics* chapter 6

Robin Dembroff, "Reimagining Transgender" (forthcoming)

recommended: Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race" (2000)

Week 8 16 oct - fundamentality

Ney, *Metaphysics* chapter 7

Ross Cameron, "Turtles All the Way Down: Regress, Priority and Fundamentality" (2008)

Amie Thomasson, "It's a Jumble Out There: How Talk of Levels Leads Us Astray" (2014)

Week 9 23 oct - modality

Ney, *Metaphysics* chapter 10

Bradley Armour-Garb, "New Problems for Modal Fictionalism" (2015)

Week 10 30 oct - causation

Ney, *Metaphysics* chapter 11

Nancy Cartwright, "Fundamentalism vs. the Patchwork of Laws" (1994)

Week 11 6 nov - natural kinds

Muhammad Ali Khalidi, *Natural Kinds* (2023)

Week 12 13 nov - case studies of natural kinds

Alexandria Boyle, "Disagreement & Classification in Comparative Cognitive Science" (2023)

David Calação, "What Counts as a Memory?" (2022)

Week 13 20 nov - art - film and music

David Davies, "What Type of 'Type' is a Film?" (2012)

Joseph Moore, "Musical works: A Mash-up" (2012)

No class! 27 nov - thanksgiving

Week 14 4 dec - conclusion

final presentations, discussion