

Florida International University
Department of Philosophy
PHI 3500 (section 1): Metaphysics

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Course Description

What is metaphysics? Metaphysics is not about the occult, or out-of-body experiences, or Ouija boards, or other such superstitious beliefs. Instead, metaphysics is the study of Ultimate Reality.

What does that mean? First, we need to acknowledge that things are not always as they seem, and often it is hard to tell appearances from reality. Metaphysics is about trying to get behind the appearances to tell the ultimate truth about the World.

What are these ultimate truths pursued by metaphysics? They chiefly include:

1. What are the most general features of the World? (What is the world like?)
2. Why does the World exist? (Why is the World like this?)
3. What is our place in the World? (What are we, and how do we fit into the World?)

Questions related to (1) include: are there many kinds of things, or really only one basic thing? Is there an external world? Is there such a thing as objective truth? What is time? causation? space?

Questions related to (2) include: why is there something rather than nothing? Are there some things that exist by necessity, or is it possible that everything that exists might instead have been nonexistent? Is the universe a product of intelligent design? Is the universe a product of anything?

Questions related to (3) include: why are there rational beings? Are rational beings essentially physical or non-physical? What is freewill and do we have it? Finally, to what extent can we answer these questions about Ultimate Reality?

This is a writing intensive course in which we will interpret difficult analytical texts, learn philosophical traditions, assess the cogency of arguments, and develop novel perspectives. My aim is to help you develop your critical thinking and modes of expression, so that you are better able to think, discuss, and write about these issues.

2. Required texts

1. Van Inwagen, P. & Zimmerman, D.W. (2008). *Metaphysics: The Big Questions* (2nd ed.): Blackwell.
2. Van Inwagen, P. (2008). *Metaphysics* (3rd ed.): Westview Press.

Recommended reading on time: <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/t/time.htm>

3. Course requirements and grading

First test: 25%
Second test: 25%
Third test: 25%
Research paper: 25%

Some remarks on course requirements:

Paper: This should be between 8-10 pages (typed, double-spaced, 1-inch margins). Further instructions and topics will be posted on Blackboard. Late papers will not be accepted.

Tests: will consist of short answer questions.

4. Topic Schedule

BQ = *The Big Questions*

V = *Metaphysics*

May 13: Introduction to the course & Universals (V: intro, BQ: intro, BQ: A, 4, 5, 6, 7)

May 15: Individuality (V:2) & Persistence (BQ: 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29)

May 20: Externalism (V:3) & Existence (BQ: 1, 2, 4)

May 22: Time (V:4 & BQ: 10-16, ~~28, 29~~)

May 27: FIRST TEST (no lecture)

May 29: no class

June 3: Objectivity (V:5) & Ontological Relativity (BQ: 55, 56, 57, 58)

June 5: SECOND TEST & Causality (BQ: 30, 31, 32, 33, 34)

June 10: God & Why is there a world? (V:6-7 ~~8-9~~ & BQ: 60, 61, ~~63~~, 64, 65)

June 12: RESEARCH PAPER due & Personal Identity (V:11 & BQ: 36, 37, 38)

June 17: Freewill (V:12 & BQ: 45, 47, 50) ADD: 23 (Lewis CHDO), 46 (Chisholm), 51 (Frankfurt & 2nd Order). Maybe also, Hume, Dennett.

June 19: THIRD TEST

Nota Bene:

1. No late assignments or alternate test dates are permitted. Exceptions to for valid reasons such as illness, compassionate grounds, etc., will only be entertained if supporting documentation is provided (e.g. a doctor's note). A missed test that

- was not the result of a verified life-emergency will receive no grade and there will be no make-up.
2. Attendance: I periodically take attendance at the beginning and end of class. For EVERY class missed (or in which you fail to sign in because you arrived too late, or left early), I will deduct ONE INCREMENT from your final grade (e.g. A- becomes a B+ after one absence).
 3. Extra credit: there are no opportunities for extra credit, so take the assigned work very seriously.
 4. Email: ONLY use the email address on this syllabus for your correspondence with me (hermanso@fiu.edu).
 5. Keep your returned assignments: It is your responsibility to hold onto them until the course has ended.
 6. You must submit a HARD COPY of your essays (no cover page, no fancy binding, stapled, numbered, double-spaced, and with a bibliography). Email submissions are not allowed.
 7. Blue books: you need 3 blue books for your tests.
 8. Texts: You must obtain both copies of the required texts *within the first week* of classes. I may ask you to bring your books to class or suffer a grade penalty.
 9. The use of computers & mobile phones is not permitted.
 10. Students taking this class are assumed to have read and understood their obligations.

Grading Scheme

A	90 – 100
A-	80 - 89
B+	77 - 79
B	73 - 76
B-	70 - 72
C+	67 - 69
C	63 - 66
C-	60 - 62
D+	57 - 59
D	53 - 56
D-	50 - 52
F	< 50