

Metaphysics

PHIL ### Syllabus

CRN: ###

Instructor: Jacob Huls

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HOW TO CONTACT: Contact via email any time. I will try to get back to you as quickly as I can.

Office hours: By appointment. There will be office hours scheduled around tests. I will notify you about these closer to those respective assignments

10:00 am–10:50 MW

Hall 214

Fall or Spring 20##

1. Course Description

This is a sample metaphysics syllabus. This course is intended to be modifiable to meet metaphysics requirements at different universities. It is also intended to give students a basic grasp of important metaphysical ideas, questions and views. We start by discussing what metaphysics *is*, if/how it's possible, and why it's important. We go on to work through a number of first-order metaphysics debates: Do abstract objects exist? How could we know about them if they exist? How does causation work? Do possible worlds exist, and, if they do, what kind of things are they? Does every contingent thing have an explanation? Does the past exist? Do chairs exist, or are there just things arranged chair-wise? Are there nations, book clubs, churches, and other social groups? We conclude by thinking about existence: are there things that don't exist?

2. Schedule and Readings

REQUIRED TEXTS: (Note to self: Ideally, there will be no readings to buy. Many university libraries have free online access to *Objects: Nothing Out of the Ordinary* by Daniel Korman [include instructions here if taught at such university]. If this syllabus is taught at a university without such access, then that book will be a required text to buy). All other readings will be uploaded to Canvas or linked in the syllabus. But, here are some resources you might find helpful:

FREE RESOURCES:

- [1000 Word Philosophy](#) – A collection of very short (approximately 1000-word) entries on many philosophical topics.
- [The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)
- [The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) – this is generally less accessible than the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy for beginners

PAID RESOURCES:

- *The Atlas of Reality* by Timothy Pickavance and Robert Koons
- *Metaphysics: The Fundamentals* by Timothy Pickavance and Robert Koons
- *Propositions* by Trenton Merricks (This book is incredibly clear and will help you get a grasp of some important metaphysical ideas).
- *Platonism and the Objects of Science* by Scott Berman
- *Scholastic Metaphysics* by Edward Feser (we're only going to do a bit of Thomistic metaphysics in the class, but this resource may be helpful for that section if you wish to dive deeper on that topic).

REQUIRED MATERIALS: Please bring a pen or pencil and plenty of paper to class. At the very least, make sure you bring plenty of paper and a pen/pencil to the final test.

READINGS: All readings are either posted on Canvas under "files" or linked on the syllabus. The file names of the articles on Canvas include the date that the article is required to be read by.

The difficulty of the required readings vary. Some of the readings are relatively easy, while others are relatively difficult. You are not expected to fully grasp the readings. When you find that you are not understanding a particular part of the reading, keep going and prepare to ask questions in class.

Readings may be removed, added, or changed (although it is unlikely this will happen). But I will notify you about any changes at least two weeks before the readings are due.

SCHEDULE

Week 1: What is metaphysics?

Mon #/#: Syllabus, What is metaphysics? How is it possible? Is it important?
Reading: "What is Metaphysics?" by Timothy Pickavance and Robert Koons (scan on Canvas)
Instructor Handout

Wed #/#: What are abstract objects?, nominalism, platonism, aristotelianism
Reading: Plato's arguments for the forms handout (on Canvas)

Week 2: Abstract Objects and Properties

Mon #/#: Arguments for Properties
Reading: "An Argument Against Nominalism" by Scott Berman (scan on Canvas)
Instructor Handout: "Several Arguments for Properties"

Wed: #/#: Contemporary Aristotelianism
Reading: "Universals as Attributes" By David Armstrong

Week 3: Abstract Objects Properties Continued

Mon #/#: Arguments against the existence and knowledge of abstract objects
Readings: “Mathematical Truth” by Paul Benacerraf (PDF on Canvas)

Wed #/#: Response to Benacerraf
Reading: [Plato’s Meno](#), The Cave Excerpt (PDF on Canvas), Instructor handout
“How could we know about abstract objects?” (PDF on Canvas)

Week 4: Modality

Mon #/#: Introduction to modality
Reading: “Necessity Circumscribed” by Alvin Plantinga (PDF on Canvas)
Instructor Handout on Modal Logic

Wed #/#: Lewis vs. others
“Modality” by Timothy Pickavance and Robert Koons (PDF on Canvas)

Week 5: Causation

Mon #/#: Humean approaches
Reading: “Causation” by David Lewis (PDF on Canvas)

Wed #/#: Powers approaches
Readings: “Causal Powers” by Edward Feser (Scan on Canvas)

Week 6: Time I

Mon #/#: Introduction to Philosophy of Time
Reading: Handout titled “Philosophy of Time: The Lay of the Land” by the instructor
“The Unreality of Time” by J. M. E. McTaggart (this is an especially difficult
reading—read what you can and prepare questions)

Wed #/#: How do we even formulate presentism and eternalism? + Zeno’s Paradox
Reading: “On Presentism and Triviality” (PDF on Canvas—shorter reading)
“Zeno’s Paradox” by Michael Huemer (Scan on Canvas)
Handout: “formulating presentism and eternalism”

Week 7: Time II

Mon #/#: Against Presentism
“Against Presentism” by Theodore Sider (scan on Canvas)
Instructor Handout: “Presentism and STR”

Wed #/#: For presentism
Reading: “The Puzzle of Change” by Mark Hinchliff (PDF on Canvas)

Week 8: Time III

Mon #/#: Time travel
“The Paradoxes of Time Travel” by David Lewis (PDF on Canvas)
Instructor Handout on Time Travel

Wed #/#: Is time continuous or discrete?
Reading: Instructor handout: “The Still Frames of Time and Explanation”

Week 9: Explanation and Grounding I

Mon #/#: The Principle of Sufficient Reason
“Introduction” by Alexander Pruss (Scan on Canvas)
Handout: “Explanation and Grounding”

Wed #/#: Arguments for the PSR
Reading: “Modal Arguments” by Alexander Pruss

Week 9: Explanation and Grounding II

Mon #/#: Grounding I
“Grounding, Ontological Dependence, and Fundamentality” by Timothy Pickavance and Robert Koons (Scan on Canvas)

Wed #/#: Grounding II
“Janus Faced Grounding” by Christopher Frugé

Week 10: Material Composition I

Mon #/#: The arguments and the positions
Reading: “The Arguments” & “The Positions” by Daniel Korman (link to instructions if free through library online, otherwise give page numbers)

Wed #/#: The counterexamples and compatibilism
Reading: “The Counterexamples” and “Compatibilism” by Daniel Korman (instructions or page numbers)

Week 11: Material Composition II

Mon #/#: Arbitrariness
Reading: “Arbitrariness” by Daniel Korman (instructions or page numbers)

Wed #/#: Vagueness
Reading: “Vagueness” by Daniel Korman (instructions or page numbers)

Week 12: Material Composition III

Mon #/#: Constitution and the many
Reading: “Constitution” and “The Many” by Daniel Korman (instructions or page numbers)

Wed #/#: A commonsense answer to the special composition question
Reading: “Toward a Commonsense Answer to the Special Composition Question” by Chad Carmichael (PDF on Canvas)

Week 13: Social ontology

Mon #/#: What are *we*?
Reading: “What are we? Collective neuroscience, metaphysics, and theology” by Eleonore Stump

Wed #/#: When is there a ‘*we*’?
Reading: Instructor handout: “The Social Special Composition Question”

Week 14: Existence and Recap

Mon #/#: Existence and the goal of metaphysics
Reading: “Ways of Being” by Kris McDaniel

Wed #/#: RECAP Q&A
How to prepare: Look at the study guide and prepare questions

4. Assignments and Grading

There will be three categories of assignments you will be graded on:

a. ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION (30% of total grade)

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class every session. Attendance + participation constitutes 15% of your total grade. Participation will be determined by the instructor's impression of how often you ask questions or answer questions (the Q&A and review sessions will be a good time to make up for participation). Participation counts for exactly 7.5% of your grade and attendance accounts for exactly 7.5% of your grade. You are granted *two free* absences without excuse. After you have missed two classes without excuse, you must contact the professor to request an absence.

TARDINESS: Being significantly late to class will generally count as an absence. If you show up a few minutes late and miss attendance, talk to the instructor after class to have your attendance recorded.

b. WEEKLY QUESTIONS (10% of total grade)

Each week you will be asked to choose one of the readings to submit questions about. Questions will be due the night before class at midnight. For more about this assignment, see the "Substantive Questions" handout on Canvas.

c. TESTS (60% of total grade)

There will be two tests for this class: one midterm and one final. The midterm test will be composed of a T/F section and a multiple choice section, and it will be taken in the testing center. The final test will have one T/F section, one multiple choice section, and one long-answer section. The final test will be taken during finals week. Both tests will be accompanied by study guides. We will have one week of in-class review before the final test.

GRADING SCALE: This course will use the following grading scale.

A (4.0):	94-100
A- (3.7):	90-94
B+(3.3):	87-90
B (3.0):	83-87
B- (2.7):	80-83
C+ (2.3):	77-80
C (2.0):	73-77
C- (1.7):	70-73
D (1.0):	60-70
F (0.0):	0-6

LATE SUBMISSIONS: Late assignments will, generally, be considered with a penalty to be determined by the instructor. The later the assignment is submitted, generally, the greater the penalty will be.

RE-DOs: Case-by-case basis. Talk to the professor about redoing assignments.

CHATGPT and AI: The use of ChatGPT or generative AI is strictly prohibited. As such, all assignments (**with the exception of weekly questions**) will be written in class or in the testing center. The use of ChatGPT or AI in class will result in a grade of zero on the assignment it was used for.

EXTRA CREDIT: There will be a number of extra credit options available throughout the semester. There will be one extra credit question at the end of both tests. Students who regularly ask questions will likely receive some extra credit at the end of the course.

5. Academic Honesty/Integrity

Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors. The mission of Saint Louis University is “the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity.” Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service through which SLU fulfills its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern. The full University-level Academic Integrity Policy can be found on the Provost's Office website at: <https://www.slu.edu/provost/policies/academic-and-course/academic-integrity-policy.pdf>

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites.

6. Disability Accommodations

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations must formally register their disability with the University. Once successfully registered, students also must notify their course instructor that they wish to use their approved accommodations in the course.

Please contact the Center for Accessibility and Disability Resources (CADR) to schedule an appointment to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Most students on the St. Louis campus will contact CADR, located in the Student Success Center and available by email at accessibility_disability@slu.edu or by phone at 314.977.3484. Once approved, information about a student’s eligibility for academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors by email from CADR and within the instructor’s official course roster. Students who do not have a documented disability but who think they may have one also are encouraged to contact to CADR. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

Note: due to accreditation requirements, regulatory differences, and/or location-specific resources, the School of Law, the School of Medicine, and SLU Madrid have their own standard language for syllabus statements related to disability accommodations. Faculty in those units should seek guidance for syllabus requirements from their dean’s office.

7. Title IX

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, domestic or dating violence, we encourage you to report this to the University. Discrimination on the basis of sex includes discrimination on the basis of assigned sex at birth, sex characteristics, pregnancy and pregnancy related conditions, sexual orientation and gender identity. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident that involves a Title IX matter, that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX Coordinator that you shared an experience relating to Title IX. This is true even if you ask the faculty member not to disclose the incident. The Title IX Coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you are pregnant or experiencing a pregnancy related condition, the Title IX Coordinator can assist you in understanding your rights and options as well as provide supportive measures.

Anna Kratky is the Title IX Coordinator at Saint Louis University (DuBourg Hall, room 36; anna.kratky@slu.edu; 314-977-3886). If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK or make an anonymous report through SLU's Integrity Hotline by calling 1-877-525-5669 or online at <http://www.lighthouse-services.com/slu>. To view SLU's policies, and for resources, please visit the following web addresses: <https://www.slu.edu/about/safety/sexual-assault-resources/index.php>.

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8. Outcomes

The purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to some of the most historically important philosophical texts, ideas, and thinkers as well as to the distinctive activity of philosophy itself. Over the course of the semester, students will:

1. Learn what great thinkers have to say in response to enduring philosophical questions and how their answers represent philosophically and dialectically distinct answers to such questions. Students will consider a range of philosophical voices and perspectives--including classic texts from Plato and Aristotle, texts from thinkers in the Catholic tradition, and texts by thinkers historically underrepresented in the western canon. In reading and discussing such thinkers and texts students will be encouraged to consider and assess both the philosophical merits and costs of the various views they encounter.
2. Learn to *explain, analyze, and evaluate* arguments for philosophical answers to ultimate questions. Students will learn to give a close reading of philosophical texts with a view toward

being able to explain and analyze the arguments they contain. By the end of the semester, students should be able to (i) identify the key premises, assumptions, and conclusions present in the texts they encounter and (ii) explain the content of the arguments in a way that (iii) illuminates how these premises support an inference to the conclusion. Finally, students will learn to evaluate the arguments they encounter by, among other things, assessing them according to logical notions of validity and soundness.

3. Begin to shape their own answers to ultimate questions by applying distinctively logical and philosophical ways of thinking to them. To this end, students will learn to raise philosophical questions, to identify unexamined presuppositions, and to reflect on their own assumptions and commitments. Students will also work at philosophically articulating their own views by learning how to offer evidence, arguments, and responses to objections to their own answers to ultimate questions.

4. Learn to articulate their own worldview and practices in dialogue with different answers to ultimate questions. Students will be provided with opportunities to reflect on the way in which their own commitments, values, and practices may overlap with or diverge from the perspectives they encounter in their readings, in lectures, and in dialogue with one another.

Ultimate Questions: Philosophy is one of 19 Core Components. The University Core SLO(s) that this component is designed to intentionally advance are listed below:

University Core Student Learning Outcomes

The Core SLO(s) that this component is intentionally designed to advance are:

SLO 1: Examine their actions and vocations in dialogue with the Catholic, Jesuit tradition

SLO 2: Integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines to address complex questions

SLO 3: Assess evidence and draw reasoned conclusions

Additionally, the Core Component-level Student Learning Outcomes are listed below:

Component-level Student Learning Outcomes

Students who complete this course will be able to:

Explain and evaluate arguments for philosophical answers, including those in the Catholic tradition, to ultimate questions concerning the nature of humanity, reality and God, knowledge, and/or the good life

Apply an array of analytic methods, conceptual tools, logical principles, and other resources to their own inquiry into ultimate questions

Articulate and reflect on their own worldview and practices in dialogue with different answers to ultimate questions, including answers in the Catholic tradition