INTRODUCTION TO METAPHYSICS
Philosophy 2640
Fall 2016
MW 2:55-4:10 and section either Th or F 12:20-1:10

Professor Karen Bennett
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322 Goldwin Smith Hall
Office hours: Mondays 11:15-12, or e-mail me for an appointment
   Note: My office is not wheelchair accessible. Please e-mail me if you want to meet in an alternate location.

   Metaphysics is the study of the ultimate nature of reality. It addresses questions like the following. What are numbers? What is causation? What is time? What is it for one thing to be part of another? What is a law of nature? (Does F=ma merely describe what objects happen to do, or does it somehow more actively govern their behavior?) What is going on when we say that two things are both red, that they are the same color—is there really some one thing, redness, that they both have? What is the difference between change and destruction? A bookcase continues to exist if you paint it blue, but presumably the Mona Lisa doesn’t.

   In this course, we will focus on questions about time, change, freedom, and possibility. We will start out by considering what kind of thing a person is, and what sorts of changes we can and cannot survive. (We survive minor physical changes like haircuts and skinned knees. But what about larger physical changes, or large psychological changes?) We will then address the question of change in general. Do objects change by in some sense moving through time, or by having different parts at different times, in the way they have different parts at different places? This will lead us to consider the nature of time itself. Does it make sense to say that it passes? Is the past and perhaps even the future just as real as the present? Is time travel possible? If it is, why can’t I go back and kill my younger self? Next, we will turn to some related questions about the possibility of human freedom and choice. Finally, we will take a very brief look at possibility itself—in particular, the question of whether we should believe that there are other possible worlds.

Teaching Assistant:
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Required Text:
   • Digital coursepack available through the Cornell Store.

Further Resources:
   Note: you must cite these resources if you consult them for papers.
   • On reserve at Uris:
      A Companion to Metaphysics, eds. Jaegwon Kim and Ernest Sosa
      Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction, Michael Loux
      Metaphysics: The Big Questions, eds. Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman
      Four Dimensionalism, Theodore Sider
      Riddles of Existence, Theodore Sider and Earl Conee
      Metaphysics, Peter van Inwagen
      Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics, eds. Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne, and Dean Zimmerman
      Free Will, ed. Gary Watson
• On the web:
The Cornell Library maintains a list of philosophy resources here:
  http://guides.library.cornell.edu/philosophyresearch
In particular, I recommend the following:

Evaluation:
  • Papers: 70%
    You will write three 5-7 page papers. The first will be worth 15%, and the second and third will be worth 25% each. More details on what I expect later.

  • Final Exam: 20%
    A final exam will be held during the time slot scheduled by the registrar, which will be made available in mid-September.

  • Homework and Participation: 15%
    Your participation grade will reflect the extent to which you are actively engaged in the course: attendance, contributions to class discussion, participation in the optional section, and individual meetings all count. Homework: Every week, you will be given a brief assignment that will take you perhaps 15 minutes. These will not be graded; your homework grade will be based on the percentage of assignments you have completed. The two different sections will have different assignments and likely different deadlines.

Grading Policies
1. Extensions can be granted on papers, but you have to talk to Dean or me a minimum of 24 hours in advance. If you do not make arrangements beforehand, late papers will be downgraded by 1/3 letter grade per day.
2. To pass this class, you must complete all three writing assignments and take the final exam.

Notes on Academic Integrity
1. Each student in this course is required to adhere to Cornell’s Academic Integrity Code: http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm
   It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the Code, and what constitutes a violation of it. All work submitted must be the student’s own, and all sources must be properly cited.
2. All papers will be submitted to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. Further, all papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of Turnitin.com service is subject to the usage policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.
3. Students are not permitted to buy or sell any course materials, online or otherwise. This includes handouts, paper topics, homework questions, etc. Such behavior constitutes academic misconduct.
Tentative Schedule of Readings:

0. Introduction
   8/24 no reading assigned

I. The Persistence of Persons
   8/29 Perry, excerpt from “The Problem of Personal Identity,” 2-7
   9/5 no class (Labor Day)
   9/7 Parfit, “Personal Identity,” 25 (click through)
   9/12 Swinburne, “Personal Identity: The Dualist Theory,” 26-42

II. The Persistence of Objects
   9/14 Paper #1 prewrite due at 5 PM
      no reading assigned
      Optional: Chisholm, “Identity Through Time,” 43-52
   9/19 Quine, from “Identity, Ostension, and Hypostasis,” §1 only, p. 53 (click through)
      Optional: the rest of the article
   9/21 Thomson, §5 only of “Parthood and Identity Across Time,” p. 53 (click through)
      Heller, “Temporal Parts of Four Dimensional Objects,” p. 53 (click through)
      Optional: the rest of the Thomson article; van Inwagen, “The Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Parts,” 54-61
   9/26 Paper #1 due
      continued

III. Time
   9/28 no reading assigned
      Broad, “McTaggart’s Arguments Against the Reality of Time”, 63-68
      Optional: the rest of the McTaggart article
   10/5 Williams, “The Myth of Passage,” 69 (click through)
   10/10 no class (fall break)
   10/12 no class (extra fall break—I’m away giving talks)
   10/17 Markosian, “How Fast Does Time Pass?” 69 (click through)
      Optional: Maudlin, “Remarks on the Passing of Time,” 69 (click through)
   10/19 Prior, “Some Free Thinking About Time,” 70-73
      Paul, “Temporal Experience,” 74 (click through)
   10/21 Paper #2 prewrite due at 5 PM—note that this is a Friday

IV. Issues Arising: Is Time Travel Possible?
   10/24 Heinlein, “All You Zombies,” 75-81
   10/26 Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel,” 82 (click through)
   10/31 continued and catch-up
      Optional: Ehring, “Personal Identity and Time Travel,” 82 (click through)

V. Issues Arising: Freedom of the Will
   11/2 Paper #2 due
Taylor, “Fatalism,” 82 (click through)

11/7 continued

11/9 van Inwagen, “The Consequence Argument,” 89-96


11/16 Stace, “The Problem of Free Will,” 106-111
Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” 112 (click through)

11/18 Paper #3 prewrite due—note that this is a Friday

11/21 Dennett, “Possible Worlds,” from Freedom Evolves, 113-120
Lewis, “Are We Free to Break the Laws?” 121-124

11/23 no class (Thanksgiving)

VI. Possible Worlds

11/28 Lewis, “A Philosopher’s Paradise,” an excerpt from On the Plurality of Worlds, 126-128
Lewis, “Possible Worlds,” 129-132

11/30 Paper #3 due
Stalnaker, “Possible Worlds,” 133 (click through)

Final exam: during the slot scheduled by the registrar