

PHI 377—Metaphysics

Wake Forest University

MW 3:30pm—4:15pm

Tribble A304

Fall 2021

Prof. Jonathan Barker

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Course Description

This course is a survey of contemporary analytic metaphysics. We shall discuss God, properties, material objects, human persons, time, modality, and the metaphysics of social categories. As we go, we will also keep an eye on meta-metaphysical questions about the appropriate methodology for metaphysics and the unity of metaphysics as a philosophical subdiscipline. We will read work by Peter van Inwagen, David Armstrong, David Lewis, Lynne Baker, Trenton Merricks, Katherine Hawley, and Theodore Sider, among others.

Assessment

Participation (10%)

Active participation is essential. High-volume and/or high-quality participation may result in a small boost in your final course grade, especially if your average is borderline between two letter grades (ex. an average of 89.3 may receive a boost to an A-). Conversely, low volume or particularly low-effort participation may slightly hurt your final course grade, especially in borderline cases (ex. an average of 83.1 may be demoted to a B-).

3 Argument Analysis Papers (40% total)

You will write three very short argument analysis papers. I will post a prompt, a writing guide, and a sample argument analysis paper roughly two weeks before the relevant due dates. Note: although these papers are very short, they are more difficult than you might think—so plan to start writing well in advance of the due date, as you would with a longer paper.

	Topic	Maximum Length	Percentage	Due Date
Analysis #1	The Resemblance Argument	~1.5 page, double-spaced	5%	9/24
Analysis #2	The Overdetermination Argument	~3 pages, double-spaced	15%	10/22
Analysis #3	Option A—Material Constitution	~5 pages, double-spaced	20%	11/12
	Option B—Thinking Animals			
	Option C—McTaggart's Paradox			

1 Exam (20%)

An in-class exam on the following topics—basic logic, God, properties, material constitution, composition, personal identity, and time. I anticipate structuring the exam as follows: two written essays on your choice out of three possible prompts, and ten or so multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank questions on validity and soundness. The exam is tentatively scheduled for Monday, Nov 22nd

Term Paper (30%)

An 8—10 pp. term paper on a topic of your choice. Due via email on Friday, December 10th at 11:59pm. I strongly encourage you to approve your topic with me before you begin, preferably before Thanksgiving break.

Course Policies

Attendance

No more than **two** unexcused absences. Every unexcused absence thereafter will negatively impact your final grade in the following way: the third unexcused absence will result in a deduction of one-third of a letter grade (ex. a final grade of A becomes A), the fourth unexcused absence will result in a deduction of two-thirds of a letter grade (ex. a final grade of A becomes B+), and so on.

Disabilities

I am committed to providing accommodations to students with disabilities. If you are eligible for accommodations, please contact me and/or the Learning Assistance Center & Disability Services (phone: 336.758.5929, email: lacds@wfu.edu).

Office Hours

(1) In-Person

Time: W 5pm—6pm

Location: Tribble B310

(2) Virtual

Time: F 1pm—2pm

Link: [https://wakeforest-](https://wakeforest-university.zoom.us/j/98405077153?pwd=Yk1YZ0J4WHQrWEo1V2htUDRuWkxwZz09)

[university.zoom.us/j/98405077153?pwd=Yk1YZ0J4WHQrWEo1V2htUDRuWkxwZz09](https://wakeforest-university.zoom.us/j/98405077153?pwd=Yk1YZ0J4WHQrWEo1V2htUDRuWkxwZz09)

Passcode: officehour

(3) Or by appointment (email me at barkerjr@wfu.edu)

Texts

All readings are available for download on Canvas.

Schedule of Readings¹

Week 1: God

	Monday 8/23	Wednesday 8/25
Topic	Course Overview	Ontological Argument I
Reading	N/A	van Inwagen, “Why the World Is” (pp. 109—113) van Inwagen, “The Ontological Argument” (pp. 115—123)
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	N/A	N/A

Week 2: God

	Monday 8/30	Wednesday 9/1
Topic	Ontological Argument II	Ontological Argument III
Reading	van Inwagen, “The Ontological Argument” (pp. 123—134)	van Inwagen, “The Ontological Argument” (pp. 134—143)
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	N/A	N/A

Week 3: Properties

	Monday 9/6	Wednesday 9/8
Topic	Ontological Argument III	Realism about Properties I
Reading	van Inwagen, “The Ontological Argument” (pp. 134—143)	Plato, <i>Euthyphro</i> Loux, Ch. 1 pp. 17—29
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	Ontological Argument III	N/A

¹ Note: this schedule is **tentative**. It is subject to change based on student needs, instructor illness, and/or COVID-19 related disruptions. I will distribute an updated schedule if and when such scheduling changes occur.

Week 4: Properties

	Monday 9/13	Wednesday 9/15
Topic	Realism about Properties II	Realism about Properties III
Reading	Russell, “Universals” Armstrong, “Universals as Attributes,” pp. 59—62	Armstrong, “Universals as Attributes” pp. 62—67 Loux, Ch. 1 pp. 29—42
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	N/A	N/A

Week 5: Material Constitution

	Monday 9/20	Wednesday 9/22
Topic	Nominalism	The Problem of Material Constitution
Reading	Loux, Ch. 2, pp. 45—69	Wiggins, “On Being in the Same Place at the Same Time” Olson, <i>What Are We?</i> Ch. 3.2
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	N/A	Paper #1—Objective Resemblance Argument

Week 6: Material Constitution

	Monday 9/27	Wednesday 9/29
Topic	Constitutionalism	Constitutionalism
Reading	Baker, “Why Constitution is Not Identity” §1 and §2 Baker, “On Making Things Up” (pp. 31—34)	Olson, “Material Coincidence and the Indiscernibility Problem” §1, §2, §4, §6, and §9
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	N/A	N/A

Week 7: Material Constitution

	Monday 10/4	Wednesday 10/6
Topic	Four-Dimensionalism	Eliminativism
Reading	Hawley, “Temporal Parts” §1 and §4.1	Merricks, <i>Objects and Persons</i> Ch. 3 <u>Optional</u> Merricks, “Do Ordinary Objects Exist? No”
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	N/A	N/A

Week 8: Persons

	Monday 10/11	Wednesday 10/13
Topic	Thinking Animals Problem	The Biological View
Reading	Olson, “Self: Personal Identity”, pp. 1—7 and pp. 21—24	Olson, “An Argument for Animalism” Parfit, <i>Reasons and Persons</i> Ch. 10, pp. 199—202
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	N/A	N/A

Week 9: Persons

	Monday 10/18	Wednesday 10/20
Topic	The Biological View	The Psychological View
Reading	Olson, “An Argument for Animalism” Parfit, <i>Reasons and Persons</i> Ch. 10, pp. 199—202	Shoemaker, “A Materialist Account”
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	N/A	N/A

* Paper #2 due via email by 11:59pm on Friday, 10/22

Week 10: Persons

	Monday 10/25	Wednesday 10/27
Topic	The Psychological View	Substance Dualism
Reading	Shoemaker, "A Materialist Account" <u>Optional</u> Williams, "Personal Identity and Individuation"	Swinburne, "The Dualist Theory"
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	N/A	N/A

Week 11: Time

	Monday 11/1	Wednesday 11/3
Topic	McTaggart's Paradox	B-Theory
Reading	McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time" (excerpt)	Lewis, "The Problem of Temporary Intrinsic" Hawley, "Temporal Parts"
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	N/A	N/A

Week 12: Time

	Monday 11/8	Wednesday 11/10
Topic	B-Theory	A-Theory
Reading	Lewis, "The Problem of Temporary Intrinsic" Hawley, "Temporal Parts"	Zimmerman, "Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism"
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	N/A	N/A

*Paper #3 due via email by 11:59pm on Friday, November 12th

Week 13: Social Ontology

	Monday 11/15	Wednesday 11/17
Topic	A-Theory	Social Establishments
Reading	Zimmerman, “Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism”	Korman, “The Metaphysics of Social Establishments”
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	N/A	N/A

Week 14: Social Ontology

	Monday 11/22	Wednesday 11/24
Topic	Social Construction	Thanksgiving Break
Reading	Haslanger, “Social Construction: The Debunking Project”	Thanksgiving Break
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm ***** Zoom Meeting*****	Thanksgiving Break
Assignment Due	Pre-break exam due at 11:59pm	N/A

Week 15: Social Ontology

	Monday 11/29	Wednesday 12/1
Topic	Social Construction	Gender and Race—Constructionism
Reading	Haslanger, “Social Construction: The Debunking Project”	Haslanger, “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?”
Meeting Time	3:30pm—4:45pm	3:30pm—4:45pm
Assignment Due	Post-break exam due at 11:59pm	N/A

Week 16: Exam Week

	Friday 12/10
Topic	N/A
Reading	N/A
Meeting Time	N/A
Assignment Due	Term paper due via email by 11:59am EST