Metaphysics

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PH2213
Fri 10-11:30am, AS1-0205, Fall 2026
Office hours: Fri 9-10am and by appt, AS3-0504

Course Description

Are our actions predetermined? Do we have free will? Does God exist? What else might there be? What are persons? How do I persist through time? What is gender? What are groups?

This course will focus on metaphysical questions like these. By discussing various possible responses to these questions, students will be introduced to a distinctive way of thinking about, presenting, and criticizing arguments and ideas. We will study the philosophical ideas in the readings, determine how the arguments work, and ultimately, see what we think about metaphysical issues surrounding free will, ontology, personhood, and more.

Here is a list of the tutorials, along with their meeting times and locations. Note that these tutorials meet on odd-numbered weeks, starting week 3.

- TD1: Tues 2-3:30pm, AS3-0302.
- TD2: Thurs 2-3:30pm, AS3-0215.

Course Requirements

1. Participation (100 points).
    - Students are expected to ask questions, attend all lectures, and occasionally work together in small groups.
    - See the course website for the rubric which I use to grade participation.
2. Reading comprehension quizzes (10 points each, 100 points total).
    - Dates: at the start of each class, students take a 5-minute reading comprehension quiz on the assigned article.
    - Your lowest quiz grade will be replaced with a 10 out of 10.
    - Everyone will also get a 10 out of 10 for an additional quiz which, due to the visiting speaker, will not be given.
3. Midterm exam (100 points).
    - Date: Oct 2 at 10am.
    - This is an in-person exam, which consists of writing short answers about selections from readings.

    - A few weeks before Oct 2, a detailed description of this will be posted to the course website.
4. Final exam (100 points).
    - Date: Nov 13 at 10am.
    - This is an in-person exam, which consists of writing a single long paper about a selection from a reading.
    - A few weeks before Nov 13, a detailed description of this—including instructions for exactly what your paper should do—will be posted to the course website.

For information about various course policies—for instance, the late assignment policy, the grade appeals policy, and the make-up work policy—see the following course websites.

1. Canvas course website: https://canvas.nus.edu.sg/courses/80185
2. My course website: isaacwilhelm.com/teaching.htm

Learning outcomes

By this course's conclusion, you should be able to

- explain a variety of metaphysical views,
- extract arguments from readings,
- present views in a fair and charitable manner,
- write clearly, and
- discuss complex philosophical ideas respectfully.

Plagiarism and Academic Integrity

Please adhere to the NUS policies on plagiarism and academic integrity. Penalties for violations of these policies can be severe: they include an automatic failing grade for the course, and possibly worse. A comprehensive overview of these policies can be found here:

https://www.nus.edu.sg/celc/programmes/plagiarism.html

Accessibility

This class should be a great, fun, and educational experience for everyone. And of course, everyone deserves equal access to all educational opportunities at NUS. Those with disabilities are encouraged to speak with me if that would be helpful, and to avail themselves of the services provided by the Student Accessibility Unit:

https://nus.edu.sg/osa/student-services/student-accessibility-unit

Schedule

The readings are drawn from several sources: articles, websites, and selections from books. All readings are required. And all are posted on the course's Canvas website.

In the schedule below, I list the requirements for each week. The requirements include attending lectures, doing some reading, taking reading comprehension quizzes, and occasionally taking exams. Note that the readings, for any given week, should be completed before the lecture in that week.

Announcements about changes in the readings—if they occur—will be made in class, and only later added to the syllabus. You are responsible for knowing about those changes.

Aug 14: Introduction and Free Will

Readings

- "Free Will and Determinism" (Sider).
- "Logic for Justice," Chapters 1 and 2 (Wilhelm).

Aug 21: Free Will

Readings

- "The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism" (van Inwagen).

Aug 28: Free Will

Readings

- "Causation, Free Will, and Naturalism" (Ismael).

Sept 4: Ontology and God

Readings

- "Introduction" (Manson).

Sept 11: Ontology and God

Readings

- "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism" (Rowe).
- "Metaphysics" selection (Ibn Sina).

Sept 18: Ontology and God

Readings

- "On What There Is" (Quine).

Oct 2: Midterm (no readings)

- This is a 1.5-hour exam. You will write short answers—at least three paragraphs each—on questions concerning the course readings.

Oct 16: Lewisian Metaphysics

- Jeremy Butterfield (Cambridge) will visit our class this week. Apart from a short handout which he will distribute before class, there are no required readings for this week, and no quiz either.

Oct 23: Lewisian Metaphysics

Readings

- Survival and Identity (Lewis).

Oct 30: Social Metaphysics

Readings

- "Gender and Race" (Haslanger).

Nov 6: Social Metaphysics

Readings

- "Pluralities, Counterparts, and Groups" (Wilhelm).

Nov 13: Final Exam (no readings)

- This is a 1.5-hour exam. You will be presented with three selections from the course readings. Then you will be asked to write a single paper—at least ten paragraphs long—on one of those selections.