

Reality: The Big Questions

Sara Bernstein

MW 2-3:15, DeBartolo 225

Metaphysics is the study of what reality is and how it is constructed. Metaphysical questions include: what is time? Is time like space? Is time travel possible? Could there be infinitely many objects located in a single spot? What is causation? Do humans have free will? This course will explore these and other mind bend-y problems of metaphysics.

Assessment:

- 30% class participation*
- 30% paper, due October 12
- 40% cumulative final exam

There will be a few extra credit opportunities.

Schedule:

Space, Time, and Time Travel

August 24: **Beginner's Guide to Reality**

August 29: **Analogies between Space and Time**

- "Spatial and Temporal Analogies and the Concept of Identity", Richard Taylor
- "26 April 1905" and "14 May 1905" in *Einstein's Dreams*

August 31: **Introduction to Theories of Time**

- "Presentism, Eternalism, and Growing Block", Kristie Miller
- Fiction Excerpt: *Slaughterhouse Five*, Kurt Vonnegut
- "22 June 1905" in *Einstein's Dreams*

September 5: **Eternalism vs. Presentism**

- *Four Dimensionalism* (excerpt), Ted Sider
- The Privileged Present (sections 1-3), Dean Zimmerman

September 7: **Growing Block**

- "Goodbye Growing Block", Trenton Merricks
- "10 May 1905" in *Einstein's Dreams*

September 12: **Introduction to Time Travel**

- "The Paradoxes of Time Travel", David Lewis
- "24 April 1905" in *Einstein's Dreams*

September 14: **Time Travel and the Principle of Sufficient Reason**

- Reading TBA

September 19: **Time Travel and Objects**

- "A Mereological Challenge to Endurantism", Nikk Effingham

September 21: **Practical Problems with Time Travel**

- "Nowhere Man: Time Travel and Spatial Location", Sara Bernstein

Metaphysics of Ordinary Objects

September 26: **Composition**

- *Material Beings* (Chapter 3), Peter van Inwagen
- *Metaphysics* (pp. 105-109), Alyssa Ney

September 28: **The Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Parts**

- The Doctrine of Ordinary Undetached Parts, Peter van Inwagen

October 3: **Constitution**

- "Material Constitution" (SEP article), sections 1-3, Ryan Wasserman

October 5: **The Metaphysics of Groups**

- "What are Groups?", Katherine Ritchie
- "The Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Justices: a Metaphysical Puzzle", Gabriel Uzquiano

October 10: **Ontological Pluralism**

- "Ontological Pluralism", Jason Turner

October 12: **Degrees of Being** (Paper due)

- "Being and Almost Nothingness", Kris McDaniel

October 24: **Holes**

- "Holes", David and Steffi Lewis
- "Holes" (SEP entry), Roberto Casati and Achille Varzi

Metaphysics of Aesthetic Objects

October 26: **The Metaphysics of Art**

- "The Ontology of Art", Amie Thomasson

October 31: **Failed Art**

- "Failed Art and Failed Art Theory", Christy Mag Uidhir,

November 2: **Metaphysics of Music**

- "Philosophy of Music" (SEP article), Peter Kivy

November 7: **Metaphysics of Performances**

- "Recordings as Performance", Christy Mag Uidhir

Causation, Free Will, and Metaphysics of Persons

November 9: **Introduction to Causation**

- *Metaphysics* (pp. 217-235), Alyssa Ney

November 14: **Causal *relata***

- "Aspect Causation" (pp. 1-15), L.A. Paul
- "On Causing Something to Happen in a Certain Way without Causing it to Happen", Carolina Sartorio

November 16: **Causation by Absences**

- "Omissions as Possibilities", Sara Bernstein

November 21: **Free Will**

- *Metaphysics* (pp. 239- 251), Alyssa Ney

November 28: **Free Will and Divine Foreknowledge**

- "Free Will and Divine Foreknowledge", Linda Zabzebski
- Short story: "What's Expected of Us", Ted Chiang

November 30: **Location of the Self**

- "Where am I?", Daniel Dennett

December 5: **Personal Identity**

- "The Unimportance of Identity", Derek Parfit

December 7: Review.

A few notes concerning...

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is representing another person's work as one's own. Outside works must be clearly cited or placed in quotes. Any cheating will be handled according to the university's policy on academic dishonesty. Please see the Honor Code for more information.

Extensions

Everyone is permitted one 24-hour paper extension. Extensions must be requested three days in advance.

*Class Participation

Philosophical skill is best acquired by *doing philosophy* rather than passively learning about it. Active participation in class, which includes asking questions, coming up with cool and/ or silly examples, asking for clarification on confusing concepts, and/ or presenting an informed opinion about the reading, is central to learning to do philosophy. Talking once a week in class will be enough to do well in class participation.

Extra Credit

There will be several extra credit assignments involving outside reading and movies related to the topics discussed in class.

Extra credit will be due at the midpoint of the course (to be announced), and at the end of the course. Up to five percentage points may be earned on the extra credit.

Syllabus Changes

It is possible that topics will be added, removed, or changed on the syllabus. If this happens, it will be announced in class and over email.

Ways to Reach Sara, or her Indistinguishable Robot Clone

Email: sbernste@nd.edu

Office Hours: 202 Malloy Hall, Monday 11am-12pm, Wednesday 11am-12pm, or by appointment.