

Metaphysics

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PH2213

Mon 10-11:30am, AS4-0206, Fall 2025

Office hours: Mon 11:30am-12:30pm 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, AS3-0523.

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).
 - Due dates: at the start of each class, take a 5 minute reading comprehension quiz on the assigned article.
 - Your lowest quiz grade is dropped and replaced by a 10.
3. Midterm exam (100 points).
 - Due date: Sept 29 at 10am.
 - In-person exam, which consists of writing short papers about selections from readings.
 - A few weeks before Sept 29, a detailed description of this will be posted to the course website.
4. Final exam (100 points).

- Due date: Nov 10 at 10am.
- In-person exam, which consists of writing a single long paper about a selection from a reading.
- A few weeks before Nov 10, 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 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 Disability Support Office:

<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.

Week 1: Introduction, and Free Will

Aug 11

- Lecture.

Readings

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

Week 2: Free Will

Aug 18

- Lecture.

Readings

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

Week 3: Free Will

Aug 25

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Causation, Free Will, and Naturalism” (Ismael).

Week 4: Ontology and God

Sept 1

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Proslogion,” Sections 2 and 3 (Anselm).
- “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments” (Malcolm).

Week 5: Ontology and God

Sept 8

- Lecture.

Readings

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

Week 6: Ontology and God

Sept 15

- Lecture.

Readings

- “On What There Is” (Quine).

Week 7: Midterm Exam

Sept 29

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

Readings

- None.

Week 8: Personal Identity

Oct 6

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Survival and Identity” (Lewis).

Week 9: Personal Identity

Oct 13

- Lecture.

Readings

- “‘Personal identity’ minus the persons” (Miller).

Week 10: Social Metaphysics

Oct 27

- Lecture.

Readings

- “‘Gender and Race’ (Haslanger).

Week 11: Social Metaphysics

Nov 3

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Pluralities, Counterparts, and Groups” (Wilhelm).

Week 12: Final Exam

Nov 10

- *Final exam.*
- This exam is 1.5 hours long. 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 that selection.