

# TOPICS IN METAPHYSICS

(6AANB051, 7AAN2047/7AAN6019)

AUTUMN 2023

---

<b>Instructor:</b>	Dr. Zita Toth	<b>Office:</b>	Philosophy building, 709
<b>E-mail:</b>	<a href="mailto:zita.v.toth@kcl.ac.uk">zita.v.toth@kcl.ac.uk</a>	<b>Office hrs:</b>	Thursdays 16:00–17:00 & <b>by appt.</b>

---

**Course Description.** In this course, we will look at some metaphysical problems connected to the so-called theory of *hylomorphism*. According to hylomorphism, as originally proposed by Aristotle, things in the world consist of matter and form. While the main claims of this theory are decently clear, its details are murky. What do we mean by ‘matter’, exactly? How many substantial forms are there in a thing? What ontological status do accidents have, on this picture? How does it all apply to human beings? We will look at these and similar questions especially as they arose for the most elaborate Aristotelian accounts, that is, those developed in the Middle Ages, while also considering criticisms of the theory and some contemporary issues.

## Expectations and Assignments.

**Attendance and in-class participation:** Conversation is essential to philosophy. Everyone will be expected to come to class having done the assigned mandatory readings, *and* having written down at least two questions concerning those readings. These questions may be clarificatory, or put forward objections, or engage with any part of the reading in an incisive manner.

**Formative assessment:** A written paper on one of the first few topics of the class. Details will follow. **Deadline: 7 November.**

**Summative assessment:** The format of the summative assessment will be a short video, which records your presentation. Details will follow.

**Electronic devices:** While you may use your computer to have the readings at hand, you should be aware that according to plenty of research, electronic note-taking and reading on screen adversely affects deep understanding.<sup>1</sup> Thus, students are strongly encouraged to use analog means instead.

**Plagiarism:** If you use or copy a source without properly citing it, whether this act is intentional or not, you commit plagiarism. Please refer to the Student Handbook for more details.

**Lateness:** For the department’s policy on late summative assessment, please see the Student Handbook. If you have any concerns regarding the formative assessment, please ask me directly and as soon as possible.

**Special Accommodations:** Students with special needs requiring accommodations should please get in touch with Student Services Disability Support ([disability@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:disability@kcl.ac.uk)) as soon as possible.

---

1. See, e.g., Mueller and Oppenheimer, “The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard,” *Psychological Science*, 2014; Alexander and Singer, “A new study,” *Business Insider*, October 15, 2017.

**Tentative Schedule of Readings.** The schedule is tentative, but we will make every reasonable effort to stick to it unless major forces dictate otherwise. All the readings will be made accessible to students once enrolled. ★ denotes optional readings, which may help you to understand the issue at hand better, but are not required for the seminar.

**Week 1, 26-9:** Introduction; The problem of change

- C.S. Lewis, “On the reading of old books”.
- Parmenides, fragment VI.
- ★ Thomas Ainsworth, “Form vs. Matter” (from the SEP).

**Week 2, 3-10:** The starting point: Aristotle on change and the composite

- Aristotle, selections from *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *De anima*.
- ★ Mary Louise Gill, “Aristotle’s Metaphysics Reconsidered”, esp. sections 2–5.

**Week 3, 10-10:** Prime Matter: Stuff without extension?

- Francisco Suárez, *Metaphysical Disputations* XIII.5.
- ★ Robert Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes 1274–1650*, ch. 3.

**Week 4, 17-10:** Substantial Form: How many?

- Thomas Aquinas, “On the mixture of elements”.
- William of Ockham, Quodlibet II.11.
- ★ Rega Wood & Michael Weisberg, “Interpreting Aristotle on Mixture”.

**Week 5, 24-10: NO CLASS**

**31-10:** Reading week (no class)

**Week 6, 7-11:** Accidents: Real or not?

- Duns Scotus, *Reportatio*, IV.12.1.
- ★ Giorgio Pini, “John Duns Scotus on Homeless Accidents”.

**Week 7, 14-11:** Application: Body and soul

- Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones de anima*, sel.
- ★ Robert Pasnau, *Aquinas on Human Nature*, esp. chs. 2 & 12.

**Week 8, 21-11:** Hylomorphic composites – but everything?

- Peter Auriol, selected questions from his *Sentences* commentary
- ★ Zita Toth, “Heavenly Stuff”.

**Week 9, 28-11:** Criticism and alternatives: The early days

- Gregory of Nyssa, *In Hexaemeron*, sel.
- Nicholas of Autrecourt, *The Universal Treatise*, sel.
- ★ Richard Sorabji, “Bodies as Bundles of Properties”.
- ★ Christophe Grellard, “Nicholas of Autrecourt’s Atomistic Physics”.

**Week 10, 5-12:** Criticism and alternatives: After the Scientific Revolution

- René Descartes, *The World (Treatise on Light)*, ch. 6.
- John Locke, *Essay*, II.23.
- Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*, X–XII.
- ★ Roger Ariew & Marjorie Grene, “The Cartesian Destiny of Form and Matter”.
- ★ Daniel Garber, *Leibniz*, ch. 2.

**Catch up, 12-12:** Contemporary revival

- Karen Bennett, “Koslicki on Formal Proper Parts”.