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Class: Tuesdays 8:35am-11:20am

## Course Overview and Learning Outcomes

In this course we will look at five major intersecting topics in contemporary analytic metaphysics: Ontology and Ontological Commitment; Abstract Objects and Properties; Material Objects and Composition; the Metaphysics of Modality; and the Metaphysics of Meaning.

One aim of the course is to introduce you to these issues and to help you understand their shape and character. But a second aim, of equal importance, is to develop your general philosophical and critical abilities, especially the abilities to grasp and manipulate highly abstract ideas, to engage in reasoning that is both creative and logically disciplined, and to express yourself clearly and argue responsibly. The course aims involve, therefore, both *learning content* and *developing abilities*, and these aims complement one another.

## Course Structure

The course involves a single, extended session each week (8:30am-11:20am Tuesdays). In advance of class, you are required to read and annotate readings, and after each class, there is a worksheet assignment (details on annotation and worksheet assignments below). This work comprises 100% of your mark in the course. I suggest you think of it this way: Reading and annotating the material ahead of time puts you in a position to understand and engage with the class sessions. Understanding and engaging with the class sessions, in turn, puts you in a position to enjoy and do well on the worksheets.

It is difficult to emphasize enough how important engagement in class is. It is almost impossible to just listen and learn in philosophy, since you have to test and refine your understanding by asking questions and engaging in discussion. Moreover, part of what you will be doing in this course is improving your philosophical abilities, not just your understanding of content, and some of those abilities are only exercised through engaging with others. If you don't engage, you may as well try learning tennis just by watching it from the stands. I realize this is harder to do (for all of us) those weeks that the course is online, but in a sense it becomes even more important because it's so easy to disengage or tune-out online compared to in a small in-person classroom.

## Readings

The textbook for the course is Alyssa Ney's *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, published by Routledge in 2014. You will have to purchase this through Perusall, the online learning platform we will be using for annotations. The book is a lot cheaper through Perusall than in hardcopy through a bookstore. There are a number of additional required and optional readings, which I will post in Perusall. The

textbook is written for students, so although it is challenging in places, it should be relatively accessible. The other readings, in contrast, were written not for students but as cutting edge research intended to advance the discipline, with a target audience of other philosophers. This means that for the most part, they will be very challenging to understand, especially on first reading. I mention this just so you are aware; don't be discouraged by their difficulty and expect to have to read them slowly and multiple times.

## Assessment Information

Weekly Annotations in Perusall: 30% of your final mark

Weekly Worksheets: 70% of your final mark

*Weekly Annotations:* To work through the readings, you will be using Perusall, a collaborative e-reading platform that lets you tackle the readings together in small groups. There are 10 weeks that have readings for annotation; your mark will be based on the best 8 weeks. You can do the annotations any time before midnight the day before the class that corresponds to the reading (i.e., up to 8.5 hrs before the class).

See the Perusall Guide posted on the Brightspace page for more information about these assignments and how they will be marked.

*Weekly Worksheets:* There are 11 worksheet assignments in the course, each of which is due on the Sunday night after the relevant class. You are required to do 8 of them, and it's up to you which 8 you do.

Please Note: Because you only have to submit 8 of each assignment, late work will not be accepted except in exceptional circumstances. It would be prudent to plan to submit all of them and to treat the 2 or 3 as 'spares' allowing you to skip weeks that you just can't get the work done. If at all possible, though, do the readings even if there are weeks you skip the annotations, because nothing will make sense in class if you don't.

## Class Schedule

January 11      *An Introduction to Metaphysics and to this Course*

Read: This syllabus

Preparatory Chapter in Ney (read before or after class)

Do: Worksheet 0 (to be distributed and completed in class; not for marks)

Weeks 2 & 3      *Ontology and Ontological Commitment*

January 18:      Read: Ney, Ch. 1, An Introduction to Ontology

Peter van Inwagen, "Meta-Ontology", *Erkenntnis*, March 1998, 48: 2.

Do: Annotate the Readings in Perusall \*before\* class

Worksheet 1 \*after\* class (due January 23)

January 25      Read: Quine, "On What There Is"  
Alston, William P. "Ontological Commitments", *Philosophical Studies*. 1958;  
9:8-16

Do: Annotate the Readings in Perusall \*before\* class  
Worksheet 2 \*after\* class (due January 30)

*Weeks 4 & 5      Abstract Objects and Properties*

February 1      Read: Locke, "Of General Terms", Book III of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Sections 1-13.  
Russell, "The World of Universals".

Do: Annotate the Readings in Perusall \*before\* class  
Worksheet 3 \*after\* class (due February 6)

February 8      Read: Ney, Ch. 2, Abstract Objects  
E.J. Lowe, "The Abstract and the Concrete", in *A Survey of Metaphysics*,  
Oxford: OUP 2002. (optional)  
H.H. Price, "Universals and Resemblances", Ch. 1 in *Thinking and Experience*  
(London: Hutchinson, 1953), Reprinted in C. Landesman, ed., *The Problem of Universals* (London: Basic, 1971). (optional)

Do: Annotate the Readings in Perusall \*before\* class  
Worksheet 4 \*after\* class (due February 13)

*Weeks 6, 7 & 8      Material Objects and Composition*

February 15      Read: Ney, Ch. 3, Material Objects  
Peter van Inwagen, "When are Objects Parts?", *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol.  
1, Metaphysics (1987), pp. 21-47.

Do: Annotate the Readings in Perusall \*before\* class  
Worksheet 5 \*after\* class (due February 20)

March 1          Read: John Mackay, "van Inwagen on Causal Vagueness"

Do: Annotate the Reading in Perusall \*before\* class  
Worksheet 6 \*after\* class (due March 6)

March 8          Read: Rose and Schaffer, "Folk Mereology is Teleological", *Nous*, June 2017.

Do: Annotate the Reading in Perusall \*before\* class  
Worksheet 7 \*after\* class (due March 13)

