

# PHIL 375: Metaphysics

Fall 2019

James Blair Hall, room 201  
MWF 1-1:50pm

## Syllabus

### Instructor

Chad Vance  
[cvance@wm.edu](mailto:cvance@wm.edu)

Office Hours: WF 11am-12:30pm  
(and by appointment)  
James Blair Hall, room 124

### What Is This Class About?

Think of any claim you've ever made, no matter how simple or obvious. Underlying that claim is a host of metaphysical assumptions. 'Fred is older than the last time I saw him', you say. But, this assumes that there is such a thing as *Fred*, and that he existed both in the past (when you last saw him) as well as the present. It assumes that there ARE such things as past and present, that there is a relation of *older than*, that the Fred in front of you bears this relation to that Fred of the past. Wow, you sure did take a lot for granted!

Metaphysics is the study of what exists. Our subject matter in this course will be restricted to the whole of reality. This semester, we will ask some of the broadest and most fundamental questions that can possibly be asked. For instance:

- Are there tables? Or circles? Or numbers?
- Is nothingness something?
- Am I spread out over time as well as space?
- How do things continue to exist over time?
- What is time, anyway? Does it even exist?
- What is a cause? Are there causal laws?
- Why is there something, rather than nothing?
- What sorts of things are possible? Or impossible?
- Could I have been an alligator? Or a roller skate?
- What is the nature of consciousness?
- Do I have free will?
- What is the nature of race? And gender?

'As Bertrand Russell once said, "the point of philosophy is to start with something so simple as not to seem worth stating, and to end with something so paradoxical that no one will believe it". But mere shock value is not the aim. Philosophers grapple with arguments that have counter-intuitive conclusions because these arguments reveal hidden complexity in the world, even at the mundane level of ice cubes, soda cans, and statues.' – Ted Sider

It is quite likely that you will leave this course with more unanswered questions than you arrived with. Though, this will only be because you'd never thought to ask them. But, fear not. You will also leave this course with the necessary tools with which you will be able to continue to carefully explore these questions for the rest of your lives, on your quest to find their answers for yourselves.

### Required Text

Stephen Mumford, *Metaphysics: A Very Short Introduction* ; ISBN: 9780199657124

Assigned readings not found in our textbook will be provided as pdf files, accessible under "Assigned Readings" on our course website, here:

<https://rintintin.colorado.edu/~vancecd/phil375/phil375.html>

## Course Requirements

1. *Exams (40%)*. You will take a mid-term exam (20%) and a final exam (20%).
2. *Papers (40%)*. You will write two papers. The first (15%) will be a short diagnostic paper, 900-1200 words (i.e., 3 - 4 pages), and the second (25%) will be a longer paper, 1500-2100 words in length (i.e., 5 - 7 pages). *More info: TBA.*
3. *Quizzes (10%)*. You will take a total of 11 short reading quizzes. Your lowest quiz score will be dropped; i.e., your 10 best scores will constitute your quiz grade (1% each).
4. *Participation (10%)*. A portion of your grade will depend on your ability to come to class (on time and prepared), participate in class discussion, and refrain from being disruptive or disengaged, or falling asleep, texting, using the internet, etc.

## Course Policies

### Frequently Asked Questions

Answers to frequently asked questions can be found here: <https://rinitin.colorado.edu/~vancecd/faq.pdf>

Two notes: (1) You are responsible for reading the FAQ by the end of the first week of class. (2) Please consult this syllabus and the FAQ first, whenever you have a question about the course.

### Academic Integrity

All students of the College of William & Mary are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity honor code policy of this institution. Violations of this policy include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, and stealing. More information about the honor code can be found at:

[https://www.wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/communityvalues/studenthandbook/honor\\_system/](https://www.wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/communityvalues/studenthandbook/honor_system/)

NOTE: *Students who are found to be in violation of the honor code will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member (i.e., you will automatically receive an F for the course) as well as non-academic sanctions (which include reporting to the Honor Council, academic probation, suspension, or expulsion).*

### Student Conduct

Students and faculty each have a responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to the code of conduct may be subject to discipline. More information at:

[wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/studenthandbook/student\\_code\\_of\\_conduct/index.php](http://wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/studenthandbook/student_code_of_conduct/index.php)

### Disability & Accessibility Services

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability or any issue affecting accessibility, please submit to me a letter from Student Accessibility Services in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. More information can be found in the Campus Center (room 109), 757-221-2510, or at:

[wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentaccessibilityservices/](http://wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentaccessibilityservices/).

### Religious Observances

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to reasonably and fairly deal with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments, or required attendance. Please let me know by the end of the drop/add period about any such conflicts, so that we can resolve them. More information at: [wm.edu/about/administration/provost/forfacstaff/holidays/religiousguidelines/index.php](http://wm.edu/about/administration/provost/forfacstaff/holidays/religiousguidelines/index.php).

### Discrimination and Harassment

The College of William & Mary policies on Discrimination and Sexual Harassment apply to all students, staff, and faculty. Any student, staff, or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of sexual harassment and/or discrimination based upon race, sex, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, religious belief, political belief, disability, veteran status, age, or any other category protected by the Commonwealth or by federal law should contact the Office of Compliance and Equity on the first floor of James Blair Hall. More information about discrimination and harassment can be found at: [wm.edu/offices/compliance/policies/student\\_discrim\\_policies/index.php](http://wm.edu/offices/compliance/policies/student_discrim_policies/index.php)

## Course Schedule

Below is a schedule of which topics we will cover in this course, along with list of the reading(s) which you should complete before each class meeting. Please note the **exam dates** and **paper due dates** in bold.

<b>Unit One</b>	<b>On What There Is</b>	
<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	
Wed 8/28	Intro/Syllabus/Arguments	No readings
Fri 8/30	Things	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mumford, "Introduction" &amp; "1: What is a Table?"</li> <li>• Descartes, "The Wax Example"</li> </ul>
<b>Week 2</b>	<b>What Exists?</b>	
Mon 9/2	Properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mumford, "2: What is a Circle?"</li> <li>• Russell, "Universals"</li> </ul>
Wed 9/4	Abstract Objects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dupré, "The King of France is Bald"</li> <li>• Quine, "On What There Is"</li> </ul>
Fri 9/6	<b>CLASS CANCELLED</b>	<b>HURRICANE DAY</b>
<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Truthmaking &amp; Time</b>	
Mon 9/9	Absences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mumford, "9: Is Nothing Something?"</li> <li>• Lewis &amp; Lewis, "Holes"</li> </ul>
Wed 9/11	Truthmaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Merricks, "Truthmakers"</li> </ul>
Fri 9/13	The Existence of Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mumford, "6: How Does Time Pass?"</li> </ul>
<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Time &amp; Fate</b>	
Mon 9/16	Problems for Presentism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ney, "The Truthmaker Objection"</li> <li>• Griffith, "Intergenerational Rights and the Problem of Cross-Temporal Relations" (§§1-2 &amp; 4; §3 optional)</li> </ul>
Wed 9/18	Time Travel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lewis, "Paradoxes of Time Travel"</li> </ul>
Fri 9/20	Fatalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conee, "Fatalism" (read only pgs. 22-28)</li> <li>• Taylor, "Fate"</li> </ul>
<b>Week 5</b>	<b>God, Possibility, &amp; Necessity</b>	
Mon 9/23	Introduction to Modality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mumford, "8: What is Possible?"</li> <li>• <a href="#">Listen: Helen Beebee: Possible Worlds</a> (start at 0:53)</li> <li>• Lewis, "Concrete Possible Worlds"</li> <li>• Plantinga, "Abstract Possible Worlds"</li> </ul>
Wed 9/25	The Modal Ontological Argument for God's Existence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Van Inwagen, "Necessary Being: The Ontological Argument"</li> </ul>
Fri 9/27	The Cosmological Argument for God's Existence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rowe, "An Examination of the Cosmological Argument"</li> </ul>
<b>Week 6</b>	<b>Laws &amp; Causation</b>	
Mon 9/30	The Problem of Induction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hume, "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding" (excerpt)</li> </ul>
Wed 10/2	Humeanism & Natural Laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mumford, "5: What is a Cause?"</li> <li>• Listen: "<a href="#">Kit Fine: What is Metaphysics?</a>" (stop at 6:35)</li> <li>• Listen: "<a href="#">Helen Beebee: The Laws of Nature</a>"</li> </ul>
Fri 10/4	Causation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carroll, "Causation" (read §§1-5 only; §§6-7 optional)</li> </ul>
<b>Week 7</b>	<b>Harm</b>	
Mon 10/7	Harming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Norcross, "Harming in Context"</li> </ul>
Wed 10/9	Review: Mid-Term Exam	No readings
Fri 10/11	<b>Mid-Term Exam</b>	No readings

<b>Unit Two</b>	<b>On Human Beings</b>	
<b>Week 8</b>	<b>Material Identity &amp; Constitution</b>	
Wed 10/16	Material Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dupré, "The Ship of Theseus"</li> </ul>
Fri 10/18	Material Constitution <b>DUE: Paper 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sider, "Constitution" (note: skip the final section, 'Four-Dimensionalism')</li> </ul>
<b>Week 9</b>	<b>Composition &amp; Change</b>	
Mon 10/21	Material Composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ney, "The Special Composition Question"</li> <li>• van Inwagen, "When Are Objects Parts?"</li> </ul>
Wed 10/23	Identity and Indiscernibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black, "The Identity of Indiscernibles"</li> </ul>
Fri 10/25	Temporary Intrinsic (Change)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mumford, "4: What is Change?"</li> <li>• Lewis, "The Problem of Temporary Intrinsic"</li> <li>• Sider, "7: Constitution" (note: now read the final section, 'Four-Dimensionalism')</li> </ul>
<b>Week 10</b>	<b>Personal Identity</b>	
Mon 10/28	Personal Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mumford, "7: What is a Person?"</li> <li>• Perry, "Dialogue on Personal Identity &amp; Immortality"</li> </ul>
Wed 10/30	No new topics	No new readings
Fri 11/1	Split-Brain Cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parfit, "Divided Minds &amp; the Nature of Persons"</li> </ul>
<b>Week 11</b>	<b>Essentialism &amp; Dualism</b>	
Mon 11/4	Origin Essentialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vance, "Origin Essentialism" (and footnotes)</li> <li>• Kripke, "On the Necessity of Origin" (and footnotes)</li> <li>• Mackie, "Origin Properties and Individual Essences" (skip §§3.6-3.7)</li> </ul>
Wed 11/6	Substance Dualism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review: Mumford, "What is a Person?" (pgs. 67-71)</li> <li>• Descartes, "Meditations 1 &amp; 2"</li> </ul>
Fri 11/8	A Posteriori Necessities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kripke, "A Posteriori Necessities"</li> </ul>
<b>Week 12</b>	<b>The Conscious Mind</b>	
Mon 11/11	A Modal Argument for Dualism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kripke, "The Conceivability Argument for Dualism"</li> <li>• Chalmers, "Zombies and the Explanatory Gap"</li> </ul>
Wed 11/13	Physicalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Searle, "The Chinese Room"</li> <li>• Block, "The China Brain"</li> </ul>
Fri 11/15	Property Dualism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jackson, "The Qualia Problem"</li> <li>• Churchland, "Knowing Our Sensations"</li> <li>• Chalmers, "Nonreductive Explanation"</li> </ul>
<b>Week 13</b>	<b>Free Will, part 1</b>	
Mon 11/18	Hard Determinism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sider, "Free Will &amp; Determinism" (excerpt)</li> <li>• Holbach, "The Illusion of Free Will"</li> </ul>
Wed 11/20	Compatibilism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility"</li> </ul>
Fri 11/22	Incompatibilism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ekstrom, "Protecting Incompatibilist Freedom"</li> <li>• Beebe, "Pereboom's Four Case Argument"</li> </ul>
<b>Week 14</b>	<b>Free Will, part 2</b>	
Mon 11/25	Libertarianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Van Inwagen, "Freedom of the Will"</li> </ul>
<b>Week 15</b>	<b>Race &amp; Gender</b>	
Mon 12/2	Race <b>DUE: Paper 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ney &amp; Hazlett, "The Metaphysics of Race"</li> </ul>
Wed 12/4	Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Barnes, "The Metaphysics of Gender"</li> </ul>
Fri 12/6	Review: Final Exam	No new readings
Thurs 12/12	<b>Final Exam: 2pm – 5pm</b>	No new readings