

# Metaphysics

## I Instructor Information

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**Name:** Dr. Bradley Rettler

**Office:** Ross Hall 128

**Office Hours:** Tuesday 2:30ish-3:30, Wednesday 11-12, Friday 2-3, and by appointment

**E-mail:** brettler@uwyo.edu

**Course Website:** <http://metaphysics.bradleyrettler.com>

## II Course Description

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Metaphysics is the attempt to give a description of the world, in the most general (yet interesting) terms possible. Some of the questions metaphysics tries to answer that we'll be discussing this semester are:

1. What is there?
2. What do we mean when we ask, "What is there?"
3. What does it take to be necessary? Contingent? Possible?
4. How do objects exist at different times?
5. What is time?
6. What are we?
7. Are we free?

We will then apply the insights, methods, and tools of metaphysics to issues you choose.

## III Required Readings

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You are required to purchase one book: *Metaphysics: An Anthology, 2nd edition*, edited by Jaegwon Kim, Daniel Korman, and Ernest Sosa. Other readings will be available on the course website.

## IV Evaluation

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1) Five times during the semester, and on at least three different sections (e.g., ontology, modality) you will write a one-page critical response paper and upload it through WyoCourses by 11:59pm the night before class. The paper can include questions (phrased as precisely as possible) and/or objections. Each will be 5% of your grade, so 25% total. Late papers are 10% off per day late.

2) You will write one 2,000 word paper on a topic related to the course. You will meet with me around the halfway point of the semester (October 19) to talk through potential

topics. This will be 35% of your grade. I will read one-page outlines if and only if they are submitted by November 20. Late papers will be 10% off per day late.

3) You will have a final exam comprised of a half dozen or so short essay questions on the readings. This will be 30% of your grade.

4) You will come to each class having done the reading and prepared a few thoughts or questions in order to participate. This will be 10% of your grade. You are allowed three unexcused absences without penalty; after that each unexcused absence will lower your final grade by 5%. To have an absence excused, ask the Dean's Office (for participation in a University-sponsored activity or for unusual circumstances such as a personal hardship) or the Student Health Service (for absences for medical reasons).

## V Grading Scale

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A: 92-100  
A-: 90-92  
B+: 88-90  
B: 82-88  
B-: 80-82  
C+: 78-80  
C: 72-78  
C-: 70-72  
D: 60-70  
F: Below 60

## VI Honor Code

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All students are expected to abide by the Academic Honor Code. Students are not allowed to write papers together, although verbal discussion of one's papers (with anyone) is not only permitted but encouraged. Any use of outside sources for specific ideas or arguments must be properly cited. Plagiarism is easily detectable and will absolutely not be tolerated. The University provides guidelines on what constitutes plagiarism here: [http://www.uwyo.edu/generalcounsel/\\_files/docs/uw-reg-6-802.pdf](http://www.uwyo.edu/generalcounsel/_files/docs/uw-reg-6-802.pdf). You are **strongly encouraged** to read that document. If you have any doubt about the appropriateness of any action, please check with me.

## VII Students with Disabilities

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I am happy to accommodate students with disabilities. Students desiring accommodations on the basis of physical, learning, or psychological disability for this class should view their options at <http://www.uwyo.edu/udss/> and contact Disability Support Services. They are located at 128 Knight Hall, and can be reached by email at [udss@uwyo.edu](mailto:udss@uwyo.edu) or by phone at 307.766.3073.

## VIII Title IX Office

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If you or someone you know would like help related to an experience of sexual violence including sexual assault, harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking or other type of non-consensual sexual conduct, please contact Jim Osborn by phone at 307.766.5200 or by email at [report-it@uwyo.edu](mailto:report-it@uwyo.edu) . I am (along with nearly all faculty and staff members) a mandatory reporter; if I learn of any incident of sexual violence or misconduct, I am legally required to report it.

## IX Support

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There are a variety of ways to get extra academic help at UW. You can drop-in to the STEP Tutoring Center at Coe Library, get e-tutoring on your writing, and visit the Writing Center in Coe Library.

## X Classroom Conduct

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Respect one another! Pay attention when people are speaking, listen carefully before jumping in, and speak in a respectful tone. You will almost certainly disagree with people. In this course, we will explore our disagreement *together* in a structured, collaborative atmosphere. Keep this in mind.

A note on phone/laptop usage. One way to disrespect people is to distract them from what's important. So, put your phones on silent or vibrate—texting or answering your phone in class is not acceptable. Keep your mobile devices out of sight – including your own sight! If you want to take notes on a laptop, you must approve it with me at the beginning of the semester.

Both the University of Wyoming and I value an educational environment that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. The diversity that students and faculty bring to class including age, country of origin, culture, disability, economic class, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, linguistic capacity, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, veteran status, worldview, and other social and cultural diversity is valued, respected, and considered a resource for learning.

## XI Expected Schedule

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The readings are to be done **by the day** for which they are scheduled. Late reaction papers will not be accepted. Late final papers will receive 10% off per day late.

Aug 30: Introduction: What is Metaphysics?

### Ontology

Sept 4: Quine - "On What There Is"

Sept 6: Lewis and Lewis- "Holes"

Sept 11: van Inwagen - "Meta-ontology"  
Sept 13: Schaffer - "On What Grounds What"

Sept 18: Ontology, Review

**Modality**

Sept 20: Lewis - "A Philosopher's Paradise"  
Sept 25: An alternative to Lewis

**Persistence**

Sept 27: Lewis - "The Problem of Temporary Intrinsic"

Oct 2: Thomson - "Parthood and Identity Across Time"  
Oct 4: Haslanger - "Endurance and Temporary Intrinsic"

**Time**

Oct 9: McTaggart - "The Unreality of Time"  
Oct 11: Sider - "Against Presentism"

**Free will**

Oct 16: Richard Taylor - "Fatalism"  
Oct 18: van Inwagen - The Consequence Argument

**Composition**

Oct 23: Sider - "The Argument from Vagueness"  
Oct 25: Vagueness, Continued

Oct 30: van Inwagen - *Material Beings*, Chapter 2  
Nov 1: van Inwagen - *Material Beings*, Chapter 9

**Human Persons**

Nov 6: Olson - "An Argument for Animalism"  
Nov 8: Lynne Rudder Baker - "The Ontological Status of Persons"

**To Be Determined by Poll\***

Nov 13: TBD  
Nov 15: TBD

Nov 20: TBD  
Nov 22: NO CLASS (Thanksgiving)

Nov 27: TBD  
Nov 29: TBD

Dec 4: TBD

Dec 6: TBD

Dec 13: Final Exam, 1:15-3:15pm

\*About halfway through the semester I will have you vote on what topics we should spend the last four weeks of class discussing. Potential topics include the following; feel free to email me any you'd like to add:

- Causation
- Metaphysics of Artworks
- Metaphysics of Disability
- Metaphysics of Fictional Characters
- Metaphysics of Gender
- Metaphysics of Race
- Metaphysics of Sexual Orientation
- Theories of Objects
- Theories of Properties