

# Phil 201: Metaphysics Big and Small

Fall 2019

Professor Kenneth Silver, [kmsilver@usc.edu](mailto:kmsilver@usc.edu)

Class # TBD Time: TBD Place: TBD

It seems like there are a lot of things in our universe. As a matter of fact, we often talk as if the universe itself is a thing. Those engaged in metaphysics and ontology have long been concerned with just what kinds of things there are and of how those things are related to each other. In this class, we are going to go on a tour from the microscopic to the macroscopic to as big as it gets, and we are going to investigate the issues that arise at each stage. Does the fact that physics postulates subatomic particles give us good reason to think those particles exist? Would you survive using the transporter from Star Trek? If the Supreme Court votes down a measure you care deeply about, is the Supreme Court something you can be angry at? And is the Universe a thing, or the *only* thing? Through asking these questions, we will see both the scope of the metaphysical puzzles that abound as well as the common themes that arise when trying to answer them.

## Units

Unit 1: The Smallest Things, Whatever They Are

Unit 2: The Macroscopic

Unit 3: Persons

Unit 4: Groups

Unit 4: As Big as it Gets

Unit 5: Order and Significance

## Course objectives

- 1) Learn about many interesting issues in metaphysics.
- 2) Develop analytical skills through critical reading and clear writing.
- 3) Cultivate speaking and listening skills through in-class discussion.

---

## Books needed for the course

None. We will primarily be reading articles that can be obtained from the university's online catalogue or else from the course reader.

---

## Schedule of readings and lectures

Make sure to do all of the readings listed for a day before that class.

### Week 1

Tues. Aug. 23<sup>rd</sup>

**Reading:** No reading

Lecture: Introduction to philosophical questions and methodology

Thurs. Aug. 25<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** No reading

Lecture: Arguments, and how they work

### Week 2

Tues. Aug. 30<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** SEP “Leucippus” and “Democritus” (sec.1-2)

Lecture: Atomism: The quest for the Parmenidean real

Thurs. Sept. 1<sup>st</sup>

**Reading:** Hudson, Hud (2007) “Simples and Gunk,” *Philosophy Compass*, 2(2): 291-302.

Lecture: Could things be gunky?

### Week 3

Tues. Sept. 6<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Bas van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image*, ch.2

Lecture: Should we think that the smallest things in our theories exist?

Thurs. Sept. 8<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings*, ch.2

Lecture: When do a collection of things compose a further thing?

### Week 4

Tues. Sept. 13<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Baker, L. (2002) “On Making Things Up: Constitution and Its Critics,” *Philosophical Topics*, 30(1):31-52. Only read through page 34.

Lecture: Is constitution a relation distinct from identity?

Thurs. Sept. 15<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Bennett, K. (2011) "Construction Area (No Hard Hats Required)," *Philosophical Studies*, 154(1): 79-104.

Lecture: Building relations in general

#### Week 5

Tues. Sept. 20<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Chisholm, R. (1973) "Parts as Essential to Their Wholes," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 26:4, pg. 581-603.

Lecture: The ship of Theseus

Thurs. Sept. 22<sup>nd</sup>

**Reading:** Sider, T. (2001) *Four-Dimensionalism*, ch.1

Lecture: To endure or to perdure, that is the question

#### Week 6

Tues. Sept. 27<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Haslanger, S. (2003) "Persistence Through Time" in *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, Eds. Loux, M. & Zimmerman, D., Oxford University Press: 315-354.

Lecture: Persisting with persistence

Thurs. Sept. 29<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** No reading

Lecture: Temporary Intrinsic – How can something change but remain the same thing?

#### Week 7

Tues. Oct. 4<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons*, ch.3

Lecture: What is there for everyday objects to do?

Thurs. Oct. 6<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** John Locke, "Of Identity and Diversity," Ch. XXVII of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1694.

Lecture: Personal Identity – Psychological continuity

Week 8

Tues. Oct. 11<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Parfit, D. (1971) "Personal Identity," *The Philosophical Review*, 80:1, pg. 3-27.

Lecture: Fission cases

Thurs. Oct. 13<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Thomson, J. J. (1997) "People and Their Bodies" in *Reading Parfit*, J. Dancy (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell.

Lecture: The body view

Week 9

Tues. Oct. 18<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Sveinsdóttir, A. (2011) "The Metaphysics of Sex and Gender" in *Feminist Metaphysics*, Ed. Witt, C., Springer.

Lecture: The metaphysics of gender

Thurs. Oct. 20<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Mallon, R. (2004) "Passing, Traveling, and Reality: Social Constructionism and the Metaphysics of Race," *Noûs*, 38(4): 644-673.

Lecture: The metaphysics of race

Week 10

Tues. Oct. 25<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Uzquiano, "The Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Justices: A Metaphysical Puzzle," *Noûs*, 38(1): 135-153.

Lecture: Can groups exist distinctly from their members?

Thurs. Oct. 27<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Bratman, M. (1992) "Shared Cooperative Activity," *The Philosophical Review*, 101: 327-341.

Section 5 of Roth, A. (2011) "Shared Agency," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (ed.) Zalta, E., URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/shared-agency/>>.

Lecture: Cooperative activity and groups. Can groups *deliberate* distinctly from their members?

### Week 11

Tues. Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>

**Reading:** Kaler, J. (2003) "What is a Business?" *Philosophy and Management*, 3(2):57-65.

Lecture: What is a corporation?

Thurs. Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup>

**Reading:** Margaret Moore (1999) "Beyond the Cultural Argument for Liberal Nationalism," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 2:3, 26-47. And

David Copp, "The Idea of a Legitimate State" *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Winter, 1999), pp. 3-45.

Lecture: What are the identity conditions for a nation? And what makes a state legitimate?

### Week 12

Tues. Nov. 8<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Horgan, T. and Potrc, M. (2000) "Blojectivism and Indirect Correspondence," *Facta Philosophica*, 2, pg. 249-270.

Lecture: Monism and Priority Monism

Thurs. Nov. 10<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Descartes, *Meditations I + II*

Lecture: Skepticism about the external world

### Week 13

Tues. Nov. 15<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** YouTube Video from Wireless Philosophy, "Epistemology: Three Responses to Skepticism," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xehTcQeqDWs&index=4&list=PLtKNX4SfKpzUxuye9OdaRfL5fbpGa3bH5>.

Lecture: Replies to external world skepticism

Thurs. Nov. 17<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Schaffer, J. (2003) "Is There a Fundamental Level?" *Noûs*, 37(3):498-517.

Lecture: Arguments for and against there being a fundamental level

### Week 14

Tues. Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup>

**Reading:** No reading

Lecture: Which level is fundamental?

Thurs. Nov. 24<sup>th</sup> – Thanksgiving

### Week 15

Tues. Nov. 29<sup>th</sup>

**Reading:** Eklund, M. (2006) “Metaontology,” *Philosophy Compass*, 1/3: 317-334.

Lecture: What do we mean when we say something exists?

Thurs. Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>

**Reading:** No reading.

Lecture: Review for exam

**Final Exam Wednesday December 7<sup>th</sup> 2pm-4pm in THH 118**

### **Course requirements**

1. Regular attendance and participation at lectures. This counts for 15% of the grade. Note: if there are more than three unexcused absences from discussion sections, the grade of 0 will be assigned for attendance and participation.
2. Unannounced in-class 10 minute quizzes on the reading assigned for that class session (beginning of class) or on material covered in lecture (end of class). I will set six such quizzes during the term, and the average of the best five of the six grades will count for 15% of the course grade.
3. Three or four short 4-5 page essays; the three papers earning the highest grade each counts for 15% of the course grade. You must submit at least three of these essays; submission of a fourth essay is optional.
4. An in-class essay final examination. The final exam counts for 25% of the course grade. Approximately two weeks before the final exam I will distribute a list of five or six questions for the final exam; on the day of the exam I will designate three of the questions from the list as candidates for answering, and you will choose two questions from this list of three to answer.

---

## **Course policies**

### **Students with disabilities**

Any student who has registered with the office of Disability Services and Programs (DSP) and who has been certified by DSP as needing specific accommodations will gladly be afforded those accommodations. Please meet with the instructor as early as possible in the semester to discuss the best ways of providing these accommodations. I am very glad to work with you to tailor the course requirements to your specific needs subject to considerations of general fairness for all students in the class.

---

### **Academic integrity**

Be sure to familiarize yourself with Section 11 of *SCampus* (<http://web-app.usc.edu/scampus/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>). If you are unsure about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, please see me about it. Any violation of academic integrity standards will be reported to Student Judicial Affairs, and the recommended sanctions will be applied. As regards papers or other written work prepared outside of class, you need to submit full bibliographic information and proper citation of the use of any sources in the preparation of the paper.

---

### **Paper submission, deadlines and format**

Please submit your papers through Blackboard. Please format your papers as follows: 12 point font, double-spaced, at least one inch margins all around, your name on the top right hand corner of the first page. All electronically submitted papers must have a filename of the format '<yourname> Phil160 paper topic <n>.doc' or where <yourname> is replaced by your name as it appears in the course roster and <n> is replaced by the number of the paper topic you have chosen. Do not include your student ID number or any other possibly sensitive identifying information on your papers or any other correspondence with instructors. Late papers, if accepted, will have their grade reduced by 1/2 of a grade for each day beyond the due date.

---

### **Classroom protocol**

During quizzes or examinations: All books, notes, and screened devices (including laptop computers, tablets, smartphones, and smartwatches) must be stowed away. If you do not have the means to stow these materials out of sight (e.g. in a backpack or other bag, or under a sweater, etc.) you may bring them to the front of the classroom and retrieve them at the end of the writing exercise. Additionally, no earphones may be worn during the period of the writing exercise. Violations of these prohibitions constitute an academic integrity violation.

---

**Communication**

I will strive to respond promptly to your e-mail inquiries, comments, etc. Given the volume of e-mail I receive, it will help us if you will begin the subject line of your messages with 'Metaphysics'. Examples: 'Metaphysics request for a meeting' or 'Metaphysics question'.