

Course Syllabus

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Office hrs: MWF 10:40-11:50, and by appointment – or try me anytime I am in (sometimes in the Logic Lab, UH 052, x12667).

Brief Description:

The central portion of this course addresses the question *how* to do metaphysics, and so *what* metaphysics is. After a general introduction, we will critically consider W.V. Quine's method for metaphysics, and especially his classic article, "On What There Is." In the process, we will introduce metaphysical questions about reality, truth, possibility, necessity, abstract objects, and the like. This discussion should provide a foothold from which to explore philosophical questions in metaphysics, and philosophy more generally. Though we will be in a position only to introduce such questions, there is the opportunity (but not a requirement) to explore some topic in depth with a term paper.

Course Expectations:

The official prerequisite is satisfaction of the GE critical thinking and philosophy requirements. As such, the assumption is of a certain background maturity and skill. Though 380 is reputed to be among the more difficult 300-level philosophy courses, and not generally a good choice for a first or second upper-division, no particular content, logical or otherwise, is assumed. We will set up background to make material accessible. This assumes a partnership: Your professor is obligated to be clear, to be responsive to questions, to provide helpful feedback on work, and so forth. Students cannot expect to succeed without regular class attendance, class participation, appearance at office hours, and faithful, on-time completion of assignments. We need also to respect one another by observing basic rules of course etiquette: Apart from special arrangements, arrive on time, do not leave early, or come and go during class. If you are in the room, be engaged in class activities (not surfing the web, reading for other classes, or the like). Apart from special arrangement, phones should remain *off* during class; do not answer a ring; if your phone does ring, the "penalty" is to bring cookies for all at the next class meeting.

Texts:

The readings for this course are chapters from Roy, *About What There Is: An Introduction to Contemporary Metaphysics* and, separately bound, *Essential Readings for About What There Is*, both available in reader form at the Bookstore.

Grading:

Grading is based on homework (15%), midterm exam (20%), final exam (25%), and paper project (40%); there is also some opportunity for extra credit.

a) Homework (15% of the grade) will be regularly assigned in class and due at the following class meeting. Approximately ten assignments will be collected randomly over the term and marked on a scale of 0 - 3 as follows: 3 is for homework that is complete, crisp, clear and to the point. 2 is for homework that is basically on track, though “wobbly” in some respect. 1 is for homework that makes progress toward the assignment, but goes off-track in some serious way. 0 is for homework that is not received, or so flawed that the assignment is not significantly addressed. Note that flaws of grammar or presentation may result in failure to address an assignment. An average of 2 is sufficient for an overall homework score of 100%. Thus solid homework represents a way to earn extra credit. There is no makeup for this component of the grade apart from compelling, continuing, and documented reasons. Thus the homework component of the grade samples regular effort and attendance. Unless otherwise noted, all homework is to be typed.

(b) The midterm (20% of the total grade) and final (25% of the total grade) are comprehensive take-home examinations of material from lectures and reading. The final will be due at the regular exam period (F 12/11). The midterm will be given according to the attached schedule. You may expect exam questions to correspond very closely to homework problems and/or questions on the A21 review list on pp. 171-173 of the text. It will be wise to keep this list in mind as we go through the quarter.

(c) There are two options for the paper project.

(i) You may choose to do two short (5-6 page) papers on topics to be assigned in class. These topics will be closely related to lecture and reading; no outside reading will be required. Each paper will be worth 20% of the total grade. For each there will be the opportunity to rewrite; if this option is chosen, the first draft will count for 5% of the total grade, and the second 15%.

(ii) You may choose to write a single (10-12 page) paper. Any such paper should have as its focus some reading(s) and topic from “further readings” in your text (extended to include the supplement below) or otherwise be approved by the instructor. The paper is due in four installments – to coincide with the 4 due dates of option (i): first, a brief (1-2 page) statement of the topic you will consider, along with a projected thesis statement and a projected bibliography; second, a 5 page start to your paper, in which you set up the issues to be discussed; third, a version of your complete paper; and fourth, the final version. The first part must be approved before other drafts will be accepted. After that, the drafts count 5%, 5% and 30% of the total grade.

Late papers will be accepted up to the last day of instruction with a 5% deduction and up to the final exam with a 10% deduction. Nothing will be accepted after the final exam. Exceptions require some exceptional circumstance (not “I have had a lot to do”) and prior approval.

(d) In addition to the opportunity to earn extra credit with “extra-good” homework, each chapter of the text is associated with an “extra” short-paper assignment. These papers will be graded on the same scale as homework, and will count as on time if turned in within one week of the last homework assignment for that chapter. A student who gets full credit (2 points each) for these extra assignments will increase his or her total grade by 5%. Also, the text is a work in progress.

Thoughtful written comments about clarity or content will also contribute to these extra-credit points. Comments about spelling or grammar are appreciated, but don't gain course credit.

Grading Notes: All grading is numerical. So work not turned in is *much* worse than late work: it is important not to miss assignments. Also, final grades are not curved; given your weighted total score, you may expect to receive at least the grade associated with the usual scale: ≥ 90 for an 'A', ≥ 80 for a 'B', etc.

You are encouraged to discuss anything, especially reading and homework with other students, the instructor, and/or assistants in the Logic Lab. With this said, all written work, especially papers and exams, is to be your own. Academic honesty is always essential, and particularly so in the give-and-take of philosophy, where the *project* is to work through and clarify your own views. Plagiarism will result in an automatic F for the course, and standard University discipline. If you have any questions or concerns about plagiarism, feel free to talk things over with me. See also "What is Plagiarism" linked from <http://philosophy.csusb.edu/~troy/courses.htm> and the policy document at <http://academic-affairs.csusb.edu/personnel/fam/fam820.htm>.

Schedule of Instruction:

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| 1. An overall picture | Roy, chapter 1 |
| – first paper | |
| 2. A problem about method | Roy, chapter 2 Quine, "On What There Is," through p. e5 |
| 3. Russell's way out | Roy, chapter 3 Quine, "On What There Is," through p. e8 |
| – midterm exam | |
| 4. Quine's first thesis | Roy, chapter 4 Quine, "On What There Is," through the end Russell, "The World of Universals" |
| – second paper | |
| 5. Quine's second thesis | Roy, chapter 5 Quine, "Reference and Modality" |
| 6. Putnam's anti-realism (very tentative) | Roy, chapter 6 Putnam, "Is There Still Anything To Say About..." Putnam, "A Problem About Reference" Putnam, "Two Philosophical Perspectives" |
| – final exam | |

The Payoff:

Anyone in this class already has some commitment to philosophy – to the problems of philosophy, to its value as mental discipline. This course fulfills a requirement in the philosophy major, so some may not be here because of a commitment to metaphysics as such. Naturally, I hope that you will find the metaphysical questions incredibly interesting for their own sake. In addition, however, our focus on method will be illuminating not only for metaphysics, but for philosophy more generally. And metaphysics is very much like logic: it underlies almost any philosophical discussion one can have (indeed, as we see in *Alternative Logics*, metaphysical decisions about “possible worlds” and the like underlie logic itself). Thus, for whatever philosophical questions one cares to ask, it is worthwhile to have an understanding of what is presupposed as metaphysical background. These factors help explain the place of metaphysics, alongside philosophy of language, in the philosophy major.

Details:

Please note that W 11/30 (the Monday after Thanksgiving) is a State Budget Closure day. Also M 12/7 (the Monday of Finals week) will be a Faculty Furlough day. There are no adds after the census date. Role is required to be taken at the end of the 6th week and recorded for financial aid purposes; if you will be absent on that day, please make prior arrangements with the instructor. If you are in need of an accommodation for a disability in order to participate in this class, please let me know ASAP and also contact Services to Students with Disabilities at UH-183, (909) 537-5238. As a matter of principle, everyone should receive messages from their CSUSB e-mail. An easy way to do this is to set it up to forward to your regular address.

Supplement to “Further Readings”

In the back of the text are assignments for each chapter, as well as further readings for different topics. That list should be supplemented with,

(H) *Moral realism*. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, *Essays on Moral Realism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ Press, 1988) is a nice collection from different perspectives. Against moral realism is, J.L. Mackie, “The Subjectivity of Value,” chapter 1 of *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), this chapter is included also in Sayer-McCord. David Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Press, 1989) is a sustained defense of moral realism. A short paper of my own, “Objective Moral Values and Metaphysical Queerness,” <http://philosophy.csusb.edu/~troy/obj-val6.pdf> interacts especially with Mackie.

As mentioned in the text, further resources for all the topics are available especially by searching the “Philosopher’s Index,” available through the Library, from the Philosophy Department webpage, and through Prof Roy’s page.