

Metaphysics for Ethics (Spring 2015)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Metaphysics often has significance for what initially seems to be a purely moral issue. We can also test our metaphysical theories on the basis of their moral implications. We will explore cases where metaphysics and ethics interact in unexpected ways. Topics include:

- the metaphysics of time, and what attitudes towards time (future and past pains and pleasures, one's own future or past desires) are rational;
- the metaphysics of death and whether death can be bad for a person at any time;
- the origin essentialism thesis and whether the circumstances of our coming into existence are essential for our identity;
- personal identity over time, and whether sameness of person can reasonably guide one's desires and expectations;
- framework relativism about ontology;
- the making/allowing distinction, and whether it matters morally.

REQUIRED READING

All readings can be found as PDF files on the course website. To access the readings go to the course page on wyocourses, click on “Modules,” and then click on the “PDF Readings” tab.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Tuesday, January 27th: *Course Intro: Metaphysics, Meta-ethics, and Metaphysics for Ethics*

Unit 1 Origins Essentialism and Personal identity

Tuesday, February 3: *Are individuals essentially related to the entities from which they develop or to the substance of which they are composed?*

Kripke, Saul. *Naming and Necessity*-pp. 112—115 (esp. fn 56 and 57)

Forbes, Graeme. “Origin and Identity”

Mackie, Penelope, *How Things Might Have Been*, chapter 3 and chapter 6

Optional Background: Robertson, Teresa. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/essential-accidental/origin-essentialism.html>

Optional: Mackie, J. L. “De What re is de re Modality?”

Tuesday, February 10: *What is the moral importance of origins essentialism?*

Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*, “The Non-identity Problem”-pp. 351-355

Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*, “The Non-identity Problem”-pp. 356—361

Boonin, David. “How to Solve the Non-identity Problem”

Tuesday, February 17: *Physical and psychological criteria for personal identity: brain/body transplant cases and teletransportation cases.*

Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Chapter 10: What we believe ourselves to be
Shoemaker, David. "The Insignificance of Personal Identity for Bioethics"
Heathwood, Chris. "The Significance of Personal Identity for Abortion"

Tuesday, February 24: *Radical consequences of a time-neutral perspective, including the consequence that one should not fear death.*

Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Chapter 11: How we are not what we believe
Velleman, David. "So it Goes"
Optional background: van Inwagen, Peter. Four-dimensional objects

Tuesday, March 3: *Duplication and fission cases, and what to say about them.*

Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Chapter 12: Why our identity is not what matters, sections 87-89.
Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Chapter 12: Why our identity is not what matters, sections 90-94.

Unit 2 Desires and time

Tuesday, March 10: *Is it reasonable to prefer that bad experiences be in one's past?*

Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Chapter 8: Different attitudes to time Sections 62-65.
Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Chapter 8: Different attitudes to time Sections 66-70.

Tuesday, March 17

Spring Break

Tuesday, March 24: *Does time pass?*

McTaggart, J.M.E. "Time is Unreal"
Markosian, Ned. "How fast does time pass?"

Tuesday, March 31 *Can de-tensers make sense of the desire that painful events be over and done with?*

Prior, A. N. "Thank goodness that's over" Middle paragraph on p. 84.
Lewis, David. "Attitudes de dicto and de se." Sections III, IV, and the last 3 paragraphs of section IX.

Tuesday, April 7: *Can death harm us, and if so, when?*

Bradley, Ben. *Well-being and Death*, Chapter 3: "Existence and Time"
Johansson, Jens. "The Timing Problem"

Tuesday, April 14: *Metaphysics as choice-making rather than fact-finding.*

Sider, Theodore. "Criteria of Personal Identity and the Limits of Conceptual Analysis" sections 1-7.
Burgess, John. "Mathematics and bleak house" sections 6-7.
Carnap, Rudolph. "Empiricism, semantics, ontology"

Unit 3 Morality and making vs. allowing

Tuesday, April 21: *What is the difference between making something happen and merely allowing it to happen? Does that difference matter morally?*

Bennett, Jonathan. "Morality and Consequences." Lecture I.

Bennett, Jonathan. "Morality and Consequences." Lecture II.

Tuesday, April 28: Omissions

Bernstein, Sara. "Omissions as Possibilities"

Boorse, Christopher, and Roy Sorensen. "Ducking Harm"

Tuesday, May 5

End of semester conference

Optional background readings

Sider, T. Four-dimensionalism. Chapter 5

Johnston, Mark. "Relativism and the Self"

Johnston, Mark. "Human Beings"

Bennett, Jonathan. The Act Itself. Chapter 4: Making/allowing

Bennett, Jonathan. The Act Itself. Chapter 5: Moral significance

Bennett, Jonathan. The Act Itself. Chapter 6: Positive/negative