

# Metaphysics

Isaac Wilhelm (iwilhelm@nus.edu.sg, isaacwilhelm.com)

PH2213

Tues 2pm, AS2-0413, Fall 2023

Office hours: Tues 11:30am-12:30pm and by appt, AS3 05-04

## Course Description

Are our actions predetermined? Do we have free will? What exists? How are entities made up of each other? What are persons? How do I persist through time? What are groups? And what are social groups?

This course will focus on metaphysical questions like these. By discussing various possible responses to these questions, students will be introduced to a distinctive way of thinking about, presenting, and criticizing arguments and ideas. We will study the philosophical ideas in the readings, determine how the arguments work, and ultimately, see what we think about metaphysical issues surrounding free will, ontology, personhood, and groups.

Here is a list of the tutorials, along with their meeting times and locations. Note that these tutorials meet on odd-numbered weeks, starting week 3.

- TD1: Thurs 2pm, AS1-0207.
- TD2: Thurs 12pm, AS3-0214.

## Course Requirements

1. Participation (100 points).
  - Students are expected to ask questions, and occasionally work together in small groups.
  - See the course websites for the rubric I will use to grade participation.
2. Midterm quiz (100 points).
  - Date: Oct 10 at 2pm, in class.
  - Answer seven questions—five true/false, two short answer—about the course material so far.
3. Final paper (100 points).
  - Due date: Dec 4 at 9am; submitted in the exam room.
  - Must be in the range 1000-1250 words.
  - Closer to the due date, a detailed description of this assignment will be posted to the course website.

For information about various course policies—for instance, the late assignment policy, the grade appeals policy, and the make-up work policy—see the course websites.

1. Canvas course website: <https://canvas.nus.edu.sg/courses/47403>
2. My course website: [isaacwilhelm.com/teaching.htm](http://isaacwilhelm.com/teaching.htm)

## **Learning outcomes**

By this course's conclusion, you should be able to

- explain a variety of metaphysical views,
- extract arguments from readings,
- present views in a fair and charitable manner,
- write clearly, and
- discuss complex philosophical ideas respectfully.

## **Plagiarism and Academic Integrity**

Please adhere to the NUS policies on plagiarism and academic integrity. Penalties for violations of these policies can be severe: they include an automatic failing grade for the course, and possibly worse. A comprehensive overview of these policies can be found here:

<https://www.nus.edu.sg/celc/programmes/plagiarism.html>

## **Accessibility**

This class should be a great, fun, and educational experience for everyone. And of course, everyone deserves equal access to all educational opportunities at NUS. Those with disabilities are encouraged to speak with me if that would be helpful, and to avail themselves of the services provided by the Disability Support Office:

<https://nus.edu.sg/osa/student-services/student-accessibility-unit>

## **Schedule**

The readings are drawn from several sources: articles, websites, and selections from books. All readings are required. And all are posted on the course's Canvas website.

In the schedule below, I list the requirements for each week. The requirements include attending lectures, doing some reading, and occasionally submitting a paper. Bolded text indicates something which will be graded, like a paper. Note that the readings, for any given week, should be completed before the lecture in that week.

Announcements about changes in the readings—if they occur—will be made in class, and only later added to the syllabus. You are responsible for knowing about those changes.

### **Week 1: Introduction to Metaphysics**

Aug 15

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Logic for Justice,” Chapters 1 and 2 (Wilhelm).

### **Week 2: Free Will**

Aug 22

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Human Freedom and the Self” (Chisholm).

### **Week 3: Free Will**

Aug 29

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Free Will and Determinism” (Sider).

### **Week 4: Free Will**

Sept 5

- Lecture.

Readings

- “The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism” (van Inwagen).

## **Week 5: Ontology**

Sept 12

- Lecture.

Readings

- “On What There Is” (Quine).

## **Week 6: Ontology**

Sept 19

- Lecture.

Readings

- “On What Grounds What” (Schaffer).

## **Week 7: Ontology**

Oct 3

- Lecture.

Readings

- “By Our Bootstraps” (Bennett).

## **Week 8: Midterm Quiz**

Oct 10

- Midterm quiz.

Readings

- None.

## **Week 9: Personal Identity**

Oct 17

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Survival and Identity” (Lewis).

## **Week 10: Personal Identity**

Oct 24

- Lecture.

Readings

- ““Personal identity’ minus the persons” (Miller).

## **Week 11: Groups**

Oct 31

- Lecture.

Readings

- “The Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Justices” (Uzquiano).

## **Week 12: Groups**

Nov 7

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Social Structures and the Ontology of Social Groups” (Ritchie).

## **Week 13: Groups**

Nov 14

- Lecture.

Readings

- “Pluralities, counterparts, and groups” (Wilhelm).

## **Final Paper**

Dec 4

- **Final paper due at 9am.**
- Note that the final paper will be submitted online, at the final exam.