

COURSE INFORMATION

Instructor:	Dr. John Grey
Email:	greyjohn@msu.edu
Office:	536 South Kedzie Hall Department of Philosophy
Student Hours:	Wednesdays from 2:00-3:00pm, and Fridays from 11:00am-12:00pm <i>I set aside these hours to discuss class material, assignments, and pretty much anything else with students, and I encourage you to visit. Due to the pandemic, these are by appointment: just email me to schedule a meeting.</i>
Class Time:	Mondays and Wednesdays, 8:30-9:50am
Classroom:	107 Berkey Hall
Textbooks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McDaniel, K. <i>This Is Metaphysics: An Introduction</i>. [ISBN: 9781118400777] • Carter, J.A., and Littlejohn, C. <i>This is Epistemology: An Introduction</i>. [ISBN: 9781118336823]

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Epistemology (the study of *knowledge*) and metaphysics (the study of *reality*) are widely regarded as central subjects of philosophical inquiry. This is a survey course on these two subjects.

The first half of the semester will focus on questions in **metaphysics**, including:

- Are there objective **classifications** or ways of grouping things together? Are there natural kinds?
- How do **properties** work? Can one thing, *redness*, be multiply located—e.g., in the rose and in the wine?
- How are **parts and wholes** related? Does just any collection of items compose a whole?
- When is something **possible**, and when is it **necessary**? How are these related to what is **actual**?
- Does **time** genuinely pass, or does it merely feel that way to us? Are the past and future real?
- Do we have **free will**? What would such a capacity even consist in?

The second half of the semester will turn to questions in **epistemology**, including:

- What is **knowledge**? Does it differ from justified, true belief?
- Does **perception** give us direct or only indirect knowledge of the things we experience?
- Does anything we know (e.g., mathematics) have **a priori justification**, independent of experience?
- What roles do **inference, memory, and testimony** play in justifying our beliefs?
- In order for a belief to be justified, do we have to have **conscious access** to its justification?
- Do the **ethics of belief** require us only to believe what our best evidence supports?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will become familiar with central issues in metaphysics and epistemology, gain experience reading philosophical texts, and learn how to analyze and respond critically to the arguments in such texts. Students will have many opportunities to cultivate a *clear, concise* writing style.

CLASS POLICIES

- **Participation:** The participation grade for the course will be determined via your contributions to our weekly in-class discussions. (Note that although attendance is not required, it will be difficult to contribute to the class discussion if you do not attend class.)
- **Screens:** There's lots of experimental evidence that laptop, tablet, and phone screens distract students who are in line of sight of them. At the same time, many find them to be of great benefit. So: students using screens in class should sit near the back, where fewer will be distracted by them.
- **Late papers:** Papers have their grade demoted by 10 percentage points (e.g., 85% to 75%) for each 24-hour period after the due date. Better to turn in a later paper than not to turn in anything at all!
- **Academic Misconduct:** It should go without saying, but here it is: Violations of MSU's academic conduct code will result in immediate failure of the assignment, and in more serious cases, of the course. Don't cheat. See Student Regulation 1.00 for more information about what constitutes academic misconduct: <http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/regulations/general-student-regulations>

ASSIGNMENTS

There are three types of assignment you will undertake in this course:

1. **Reading Questions.** These are 150-300 word questions based on the reading for the coming week. Upload to D2L by Sunday evening, 11:59pm, each week.
2. **Short Papers.** These are 1000-1200 word papers on a prompt given a week in advance. Submit them through D2L *anonymously*, with no identifying information aside from your PID.
3. **Final Paper.** This is a longer 1800-2000 word paper on any topic from the course. In the paper, your task is to advance an argument and defend it against possible objections.

GRADING

Grade Component Weights	
Grade Component	Weight
Participation	10%
Reading Questions	20%
Short Papers	50%
Final Paper	20%
Total	100%

Grade Point Values	
Final Score	Grade Point
92-100%	4.0
86-91%	3.5
80-85%	3.0
74-79%	2.5
68-73%	2.0
63-67%	1.5
58-62%	1.0

CLASS SCHEDULE

Students should complete each reading assigned sometime before the week listed. Each week, you'll have to submit a **reading question** (150-300 words) based on the reading to be discussed in the coming week. This is to be submitted before the end of day on Sunday each week. For example, the reading question for Week 3 (Sep. 8 & 10) should be submitted sometime before 11:59pm, Sunday, Sep. 7.

Additionally, the due dates for the **three short argument analysis papers** and the **final paper** are given in this schedule. Prompts for the short papers will be posted one week in advance of the due date, and more information about the final paper will be posted before Thanksgiving Break.

Part 1: Metaphysics

Week 1 (Sep 1). What is Metaphysics?

- Read this document. Mark your calendar. Plan.

Week 2 (Sep 8). Natural Kinds

- McDaniel Ch. 1, "Classification"

Week 3 (Sep 13 & 15). Properties & Universals

- McDaniel Ch. 2, "Properties"

Week 4 (Sep 20 & 22). Mereology

- McDaniel Ch. 3, "Parts and Wholes"

[Paper 1 due Monday, Sep. 20]

Week 5 (Sep 27 & 29). Modality

- McDaniel Ch. 4, "Possibility and Necessity"

Week 6 (Oct 4 & 6). Time & Change

- McDaniel Ch. 5, "Time"

Week 7 (Oct 11 & 13). Freedom

- McDaniel Ch. 6, "Freedom"

[Paper 2 due Monday, Oct. 11]

Part 2: Epistemology

Week 8 (Oct 18 & 20). Epistemological Regress

- Carter & Littlejohn Ch. 1, "The Regress Problem"

Week 9 (Oct 27). Perception

- Carter & Littlejohn Ch. 2, "Perception"

Week 10 (Nov 1 & 3). *A Priori* Knowledge

- Carter & Littlejohn Ch. 3, "The A Priori"

Week 11 (Nov 8 & 10). Inference & Memory

- Carter & Littlejohn Ch. 4, "Inference"
- Carter & Littlejohn Ch. 6, "Memory"

[Paper 3 due Monday, Nov. 8]

Week 12 (Nov 15 & 17). Testimony

- Carter & Littlejohn Ch. 7, "Testimony"

Week 13. Thanksgiving Break (No class)

Week 14 (Nov 29 & Dec 1). Justification

- Carter & Littlejohn Ch. 9, "Internalism vs. Externalism"

[Paper topic proposal due Monday, Nov. 29]

Week 15 (Dec 6 & 8). The Ethics of Belief

- William Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief" (online)
- Carter & Littlejohn Ch. 10, "The Ethics of Belief"

[Paper outline due Monday, Dec. 6]

[Final Paper due Wednesday, Dec. 16]