# PHIL 399: Metaphysics (independent study)

Fall 2015, Coastal Carolina University  
Meeting times TBA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professor</th>
<th>Dennis Earl</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email, phone</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dearl@coastal.edu">dearl@coastal.edu</a>, (843-349-4094)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office hours</td>
<td>Edwards 278: MWF 11 a.m.-1:00 p.m.; Tu 11-1:00; also by appointment</td>
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<td>Moodle</td>
<td>Moodle login page: <a href="https://moodle.coastal.edu/login/index.php">https://moodle.coastal.edu/login/index.php</a></td>
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| Catalog description (PHIL 399) | For more information, see the Non-Traditional Coursework in the Academic Regulations section in this catalog. May be repeated for credit under different topics. |

| Course objectives (general things you should learn) | In general, upon successful completion of this course, you can expect to:  
1) understand what metaphysics is, and how properly to approach metaphysical issues in a rational way  
2) understand what some of the main issues in metaphysics are, especially as studied in contemporary philosophy, and what some of the different views are with respect to those issues  
3) be able to critique such views  
4) be better able to defend your own philosophical views |

| Student learning outcomes (more specific things you should learn, and on which you'll be evaluated) | By the end of this course, you will be able to:  
1) describe some of the central metaphysical issues involved in the following topics of interest:  
   a. universals  
   b. particulars  
   c. modality  
   d. time  
   e. identity and persistence through time  
2) state the main views with respect to the issues listed in (1)  
3) state some of the main arguments in favor of such views  
4) critically analyze such views and arguments |

| Course requirements | Bi-weekly writing assignments (8 total) 70%  
|                    | Final paper 30%  
|                    | Total 100% |

I reserve the right to make adjustments to the grading scheme, the number of assignments, due dates, and the overall course plan as necessary.

| Grading scale | A≥90%; 85%≥B+>90%; 80%≥B>85%; 75%≥C+>80%; 70%≥C>75%; 65%≥D+>70%; 60%≥D>65%; F<60% |

| Attendance policy | Attendance is not formally part of the course grade. However, our individual meetings are obviously immensely important for your success in the course. I doubt we’ll have any trouble here.  
Since we have four students registered for the independent study, I’m going to try to arrange a time we can all meet together. Those will be our “class
meetings.” Definitely come see me at other times—that’s going to be necessary for success—but having some group discussion too will be best for all of us. (If missing meetings and appointments becomes a habit, I’ll have to institute an attendance policy mirroring the CCU Catalog’s standard: The grade may be lowered to the point of failure upon missing 25% or more of the meetings.)

| Course description | This is a course on the fundamental nature of reality. We live in a world containing various things that exist. Yet it is far from clear, philosophically speaking, what the nature of that world really is, what things really exist, what the different categories of existing things really are, and what relations exist between those things. Such very basic issues constitute the subject matter of metaphysics. For instance, tables and chairs really exist, and so do you and I. Those things exist through time. But what does it really mean for something to exist through time? What is it for me or you to exist through time, for that matter? Also, it seems pretty clear that things we can perceive exist somehow. But what about things like numbers? Is the number 2 real, and if so, how? What about justice? Or goodness? Or yellowness? Finally, there are lots of things that are merely possible—the world isn’t actually that way, but it might have been. For instance, you might not have chosen to study philosophy. You might have been born in a different country, or maybe of different parents (or so it seems). What grounds such claims—what makes them true? Philosophy is a discipline that seeks answers to fundamental questions, and metaphysics is perhaps the most fundamental discipline within philosophy itself. Our course will be challenging, but the rewards can be substantial: Success here would mean having knowledge about the basics of everything. |

• Other readings posted on Moodle or added as necessary |

| Descriptions of course requirements |  |
| Short papers | You’ll do eight of these, with due dates roughly every other week. Topics will vary: Some may ask you to summarize a particular philosophical position or argument. Most will call for you to defend a thesis. Some will require that you consider an objection to your thesis. Expect to write brief (1-2 pp.) but sharply focused essays here. You’ll turn these in on Moodle. |
| Final paper | I’ll give out detailed requirements separately, but the final paper for the course should be an 8-10 pp. essay structured around an extended defense of a thesis pertaining to a particular topic from the course. This will require some expository work and considerable critical discussion on your part. The short papers will give you practice at the components of this longer paper. You might even think of the final paper as a sequence of short papers accomplishing those different tasks, all arranged around defending the same thesis. |
### Course policies

| Excused absences and extensions | The Catalog states that “Absences will be excused for documented cases of:
   a) incapacitating illness,
   b) official representation of the University (excuses for official representation of the University should be obtained from the official supervising the activity),
   c) death of a close relative, and
   d) religious holidays.”
   I’ll decide on other types of circumstances as they might arise, but please don’t expect me to be accommodating concerning what goes much beyond those given in the Catalog. If absences of any kind coincide with a due date for a paper, you’ll need to let me know what’s going on, most preferably before the due date. Extensions are possible within the guidelines for absences given above. |
| Late assignments | Late papers suffer a 10-point penalty per calendar day, starting at the deadline and losing an additional 10 points each 24 hours thereafter. You can expect some leniency for documented excuses of the types given above, and perhaps others, the leniency being at my discretion. You can still resubmit late papers (see the resubmission policy above), but the late penalty still applies for the resubmitted item’s grade. |
| Academic misconduct | The CCU Student Code of Conduct [URL: http://www.coastal.edu/conduct/documents/codeofconduct.pdf] includes a statement of community standards for academic integrity, which reads as follows:
   Coastal Carolina University is an academic community that expects the highest standards of honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility. Members of this community are accountable for their actions and are committed to creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust.
   I’m obligated to report all cases of academic misconduct to the CCU Office of Academic Integrity. For such cases I’ll almost always apply my standard sanction: an FX grade for the course. See the Code of Conduct for examples of plagiarism and cheating, as well as procedures and your rights as a student regarding charges of misconduct. |
| Class atmosphere, civility | Our meetings need to be focused on our material, with very few distractions. Important maxims to keep in mind are these:
   • **Electronics policy:** Please keep your phone away during our meetings and with the notifications set to ‘off’, ideally with your phone powered down altogether. This is about avoiding distractions: Academics requires your sole attention, and even with your phone on the ‘vibrate’ setting, that will distract you (and us).
   • Don’t arrive late or leave early, unless you’ve cleared it with me beforehand.
   • Be ready to discuss our material actively. Bring questions to ask, both about the reading and anything else that concerns our course material.
   • I’ve never actually had to do this, especially for an independent study, but I |
would handle excessive cases of incivility as a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

Communications
If I need to contact you, I’ll use your coastal.edu address unless I’m replying to a message you’ve sent me using another address. Use your coastal.edu account or have its email forwarded to an account you check regularly. (“Regularly” means “daily at least.”) Email I send to everyone in the course will go to your coastal.edu address.

As for contacting me, emailing me at dearl@coastal.edu is the best option. I’ll usually respond to messages requiring a reply within twenty-four hours, often much less. In emailing me, please observe the standards of professional writing—be sure it’s clear what course you’re in, include your name, etc.

Special needs
If you have a physical or documented mental disability and need accommodations, see me to make the appropriate arrangements. Note that in order to receive such compensation, you need to register with the Office of Accessibility and Disability Services, phone 349-2503, URL http://www.coastal.edu/disabilityservices/. The office is in 106 Kearns Hall.

Course outline with readings

We’ll decide on the rate at which we’ll proceed through the following. Figure on most weeks with one article to study intensively, perhaps with a chapter introduction included if it’s the beginning of one of the main topics listed below. We might add or remove readings as necessary for time or interest, and I’m open to adding readings on related topics as they may arise.

(The abbreviation ‘MCR’ is short for our textbook by Loux, Metaphysics: Contemporary readings.)

1. Preliminaries, introduction to metaphysics
   1.1. Introduction, course outline and policies, what metaphysics is (and what it isn’t), identifying metaphysical questions
       Reading: Michael Loux, Preface to MCR (pp. x-xi).
   1.2. Methodology in metaphysics—how metaphysical questions might be answered
       Reading: Michael Jubien, “Metaphysics,” Ch. 1. of Contemporary Metaphysics (Blackwell, 1998) (pdf on Moodle)
   1.3. A very general issue: truth and objectivity

2. Universals
   2.1. Overview: the problem of universals, types of universals, theories of universals
   2.2. Ante rem realism
   2.3. In re realism, conceptualism
       Reading: David Armstrong, “Universals as Attributes,” MCR pp. 65-91.
   2.4. Nominalism
3. **Particulars**

3.1. Overview; substance and concrete particulars  
Reading: Michael Loux, “The Ontological Structure of Concrete Particulars,” *MCR* pp. 95-103.

3.2. Concrete particulars I: Substratum theories  
Reading: Max Black, “The identity of indiscernibles,” *MCR* pp. 104-113  
Reading: Edwin Allaire, “Bare Particulars,” *MCR* pp. 114-120

3.3. Concrete particulars II: Bundle theories  
Reading: James Van Cleve, “Three Versions of the Bundle Theory,” *MCR* pp. 121-133.

3.4. Abstract particulars; numbers and geometric objects  
Reading: Michael Jubien, “Numbers,” Ch. 2 of *Contemporary Metaphysics* (Blackwell, 1998) (pdf on Moodle)

3.5. Tropes  
Reading: Keith Campbell, “The Metaphysic of Abstract Particulars,” (pdf on Moodle)

3.6. Absences  
Reading: David Lewis, “Holes” (pdf on Moodle)  
Reading: Roy Sorensen, Ch. 1 of *Seeing Dark Things* (pdf on Moodle)

4. **Modality**

4.1. Overview; some modal logic; actuality, possibility, necessity  
Reading: Michael Loux, “Modality and Possible Worlds,” *MCR* pp. 151-159.

4.2. Possibilism  

4.3. Actualism  

5. **Time**

5.1. Overview; general philosophical issues concerning the nature of time  

5.2. McTaggart’s argument  

5.3. Static vs. dynamic accounts of time; tensed vs. non-tensed accounts of time  

6. **Identity and persistence through time**

6.1. Overview; identity, the identity of indiscernibles, the indiscernibility of identicals  
Reading: Max Black, “The Identity of Indiscernibles,” *MCR* pp. 104-113  

6.2. Perdurantism  
Reading: Mark Heller, “Temporal Parts of Four-Dimensional Objects,” *MCR* pp. 418-442.

6.3. Endurantism  
Reading: Trenton Merricks, “Endurance and Indiscernibility,” *MCR* pp. 443-463.

6.4. Absences and change  
Reading: Roy Sorensen, “Spinning Shadows” (pdf on Moodle)