Syllabus, Philosophy 181: Metaphysics, CSU-Sacramento, Fall 2020 (section 1, catalog # 80836, Monday/Wednesday 1:30 – 2:45pm, Douglas Hall 208).

Instructor: Russell DiSilvestro. Best contact option: Canvas “Conversations”—expect a quick response within 24 hours or by the next business day. Expect grading/feedback within 3 business days. Virtual and in-person office hours Monday to Thursday 12 to 1pm. Other contact options: email (rdisilv@csus.edu), phone (916.278.6766) or office appointment (3000 Mendocino Hall).

Catalog Description: “Examines arguments concerning the nature of reality. Representative topics include: substance, space, time, God, free will, determinism, identity, universals. Emphasis is on contemporary formulations. Prerequisite: 6 units in philosophy or instructor permission.”


Technology Requirements: Students must be able to access Canvas on a stable internet connection.

Learning Objectives: The course is designed to give a systematic introduction to philosophical problems that are metaphysical; to show what distinguishes metaphysical problems from other philosophical problems; to investigate a restricted sampling of metaphysical problems under active investigation in the present; such investigation will involve study of solutions by contemporary philosophers; to require some metaphysical investigation by the student, as well as some writing.

✓ By the end of the course, each student will be able to...
  1. Demonstrate a developed ability to read and understand contemporary philosophical texts.
  2. Evaluate critically the concepts and arguments contained in the texts;
  3. Write journal entries and analytical essays applying philosophical concepts and reasoning to issues in metaphysics;

✓ Students will demonstrate their achievement of the course objectives and expectations through:
  1. Reading comprehension quizzes on each reading assignment;
  2. Exams which test for a deeper understanding of metaphysical issues, as well as of the arguments for or against the different sides; students will show their understanding via essay answers;
  3. Participation in discussion;
  4. Composition of journal entries and analytic critical essays on contemporary works in metaphysics.
Accessibility: Let me know me before 9/7/2020 if you have a disability requiring accommodation (documentation to Students for Services with Disabilities, Lassen Hall 1008, 916-278-6955, if you must miss something for some reason.

Academic Honesty: Know the policy: http://www.csus.edu/umanual/student/STU-0100.htm. We also use http://turnitin.com.

Policy Regarding Exceptions: Late work will only be accepted, and missed assignments or assessments will only be excused, if there is a documented serious excuse (for example, a system-wide Canvas crash).

Grading: Your final grade is determined by how many points you earn out of 1000, with these grade floors: 930=A, 900=A-, 870=B+, 830=B, 800=B-, 770=C+, 730=C, 700=C-, 670=D+, 630=D, 600=D-. Your total points are calculated as follows (but a small amount of extra credit may be earned for additional activities announced in advance), using the “Definition of Grade Symbols” at the University's Academic Policies page (http://catalog.csus.edu/academic-policies/#text).

✓ Quizzes (30 points per week x 15 weeks = 450 points): For each week, after reading the texts and reviewing your lecture notes, take a timed (60 minute) online quiz before 11:59pm each Saturday (30 points). The questions come directly from that week’s readings and lectures. Unless announced otherwise, each quiz can only be taken once.

✓ Discussions (30 points per week x 15 weeks = 450 points): For each week, use the discussions to make your own long reply to the target question by 11:59pm each Wednesday (10 points), your own medium replies to three long replies of other students in your small group by 11:59pm each Saturday (15 points), and your own short replies to the remaining long replies of other students in your small group by 11:59pm each Saturday (5 points). See details in the ‘Discussions’ PDF and each module.

You should do at least one of the following two options, but if you do both, then only the higher scoring option will count towards your final grade:

✓ Midterm and Final Exams (50 points per exam x 2 exams = 100 points): The online final exam windows will open a week before their deadlines (11:59pm Saturday October 24; 11:59pm Saturday December 19. Each exam will be scored (50 points), timed (120 minutes), and over the seven weeks of material (made of questions drawn from quiz question pools and a pool of questions circulated in advance). Each exam can only be taken once.

✓ Midterm and Final Papers (50 points per paper x 2 papers = 100 points): You can expand two of your discussions into full philosophical analysis papers by their deadlines (11:59pm Saturday October 24; 11:59pm Saturday December 19). See details in the ‘Philosophical Analysis’ PDF. We will use http://turnitin.com for this paper.