

# PHILOSOPHY 321: METAPHYSICS

Fall 2005

TTH 2:00-3:15

KACTR 118

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Office hours: MW 2:30-4:30, TH 3:30-4:30,  
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## COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

What is metaphysics? The question itself is one of the classic metaphysical questions, and this course will seek to answer it both systematically and historically. A survey of philosophical developments in Presocratic thinkers and Plato will be followed by a reading of most of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Then, after briefly considering the pagan Neoplatonic metaphysical heritage (in Plotinus and Proclus), we will turn to the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas. While properly a philosophical course, we will keep in mind the special motive for studying metaphysics insisted on by the Catholic theological tradition.

The primary general objective of the course is to *introduce the dominant metaphysical tradition in Western intellectual history*, that of Aristotle, especially as developed by St. Thomas. To this end, the course seeks:

- (1) *To narrate the historical origins and development of this tradition beginning with ancient Greek thought.*
- (2) *To practice thinking within this tradition's conceptual framework.* This includes establishing an understanding of its key *concepts and distinctions* (e.g. substance/accident, matter/form, potency/act, being/essence) as well as its key *metaphysical theses* (e.g. the unicity of substantial form, the real distinction of essence and existence, the analogy of being, the convertibility of the transcendentals). It also includes developing an appreciation for the application of these theses in the areas of philosophical anthropology (e.g. the relation of soul and body), ethics (e.g. the notion of happiness, contemplating God as the end of human life) and theology (e.g. the existence of God, divine simplicity).
- (3) *To communicate why Catholic theologians continue to invoke the importance of philosophical metaphysics, why "the Christian is called to be the guardian of metaphysics in our time" (Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 5), and especially why St. Thomas continues to be held up as a model metaphysical thinker.*

## REQUIRED TEXTS

The following texts are required and available at the bookstore:

*Fides et Ratio*, by John Paul II  
Pauline Books & Media, 2003 (ISBN: 0819826693). The philosopher-pope's encyclical on the relationship between faith and reason, including an interpretation of the history of philosophy and special attention to metaphysics. Other editions are acceptable as long as they are printed with paragraph numbers for ease of reference.

*A Presocratics Reader*, ed. Patricia Curd  
Hackett Publishing Company, 1996 (ISBN: 0872203263). A collection of readings, mostly fragments, of early Greek philosophers.

*Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. H. G. Apostle  
Peripatetic Press, 1979 (ISBN: 0960287019). There are many other English versions of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, but this edition was chosen for its literalness, useful English and Greek glossaries, and commentary.

Aquinas, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. Timothy McDermott  
Oxford University Press, 1993 (ISBN: 0192835858). A collection of St. Thomas's writings from a wide variety of works and covering a wide range of philosophical topics.

Other required readings will be made available during the semester, including:

Selections from Plato:

*Phaedo*, on the discovery of Forms (95e-102a)

*Republic*, on the Sun, Line and Cave (503c-518d)

*Parmenides*, difficulties with the Forms (130b-136d)

*Sophist*, the great battle over being (241d-249d)

Selections from Aristotle:

*Categories*, 1-5 (the predicables, substance, accident)

*Physics*, I.1-2, 7, 9; II, 1-9; III, 1-2; VII.1 (the four causes, motion and the unmoved mover)

Selections from Cajetan's *Commentary on the Categories*, on the relation of logic and metaphysics

Selections from Plotinus's *Enneads*, on the Hypostases, the One, and the Good (5.1 and 6.9)

Selections from Proclus's *Elements of Theology*, on first causes (propositions 1-9)

## GRADED COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

**Participation** (10%). Students are expected to do all the readings by the time class meets on the day indicated, and to be prepared to discuss the readings in class. Students will occasionally be given prompts and reading questions to help focus their reading and prepare for class, but students should take the initiative to read critically and actively. Participation does not necessarily mean being ready to answer questions about the readings posed by the professor, but asking questions or testing interpretations in class. Like any part of philosophy, metaphysics is not learned by the passive reception of information, but is acquired by the persistent activity of the inquiring intellect. Consistent participation in class discussion, prepared by consistent engagement with assigned readings, is the best occasion to practice and exhibit this activity.

**Response papers\*** (3 x 5%). The first three written assignments will be brief (1-2 page) and relatively informal responses to assigned readings, prompted by questions about those readings to be supplied by the professor. These response papers need not have a thesis or develop an argument, but should show thoughtful reflection on the text considered in light of the questions posed.

The **first response paper** is due on the second day of class, and should address the following questions: What does John Paul II say about “metaphysics” in *Fides et Ratio*? What does it seem that metaphysics is, according to JP II? Why is it important? What does JP II describe as an obstacle or threat to metaphysics? What is the relationship of metaphysics to Christian theology?

**Short papers\*** (2 x 10%). More formal than the response papers, two written assignments later in the semester will require students to compose short (3-4 page) essays on assigned topics, to be announced.

**Final paper\*** (20%). The final written assignment will be a more substantial (8-10 page) paper. A variety of topics will be proposed, and students will have the option of developing their own paper topics in consultation with the professor.

### \*NOTE ON ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

- All written assignments must be typed, double spaced, with 1 inch margins.
- Your name, the date, and the course number should be clearly indicated either at the top of the first page or the bottom of the last page.
- Written assignments should be proofread for spelling and grammar.
- Written assignments are due by the beginning of class on the day indicated. Late papers will be penalized one letter grade per day. Exceptions will be made in serious circumstances, but arrangements should be made with me before the due date.
- If more than one page, pages should be numbered, stapled, and your name should be in a header or footer on each page.
- All work should be backed up and saved on disk.
- Unless otherwise indicated, I will not accept papers by e-mail.

**Midterm (15%).** An in-class midterm on Thursday, October 6 (the last class before fall break) will test comprehension of material covered up to that point. The test is expected to take about half of the class period, and further information about the exam will be conveyed beforehand.

**Final (20%).** There will be a cumulative final exam at the designated time during exam week. Further information about the exam will be conveyed before the end of the semester.

## EVALUATION STANDARDS FOR WRITTEN WORK

Response papers will be evaluated for thoughtfulness, insight, clarity, and concision. Short papers and the final paper will be evaluated for these qualities, with additional emphasis on carefulness of organization, perspicacity of reasoning, and maturity of composition, including spelling, grammar and diction.

Grades should be tools of communication, and while the professor's comments on graded written work should describe its particular strengths and weaknesses, students should keep in mind the following general guidelines for the meaning of the grading scale:

"A"	Excellent	Exceptionally careful reasoning and incisive thought, demonstrating full mastery of material and keen insight, written in consistently clear and mature prose, with impeccable grammar and spelling.
"B"	Good	Careful reasoning and a solid grasp of the material, strong composition, reasonably free of grammatical and spelling errors.
"C"	Adequate	Fulfills assignment, but typically exhibits only a general or slightly incomplete understanding of the material, is not consistently clear or well organized, and may contain more than a few grammatical and spelling errors.
"D"	Not Satisfactory	Does not adequately fulfill assignment. This may be due to poor expression of ideas, lack of organization, or severe misunderstanding of the material.
"F"	Failing	Substantial failure to satisfy assignment. Typically, such papers, due to incompleteness or plagiarism, lack any argument or organization, and show very little or no evidence of understanding.

## POLICY ON ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students should especially be aware of the following:

### Philosophy Department Policy on Plagiarism

One of the curricular goals of Mount Saint Mary's College is to develop the skills and habits of good writing. Essential to the attainment of this goal is not only the development of the ability to express clearly your own ideas but also the requirement that in any work you submit you distinguish your own thoughts from those of others and that you not submit the words or ideas of another as your own. The failure to satisfy this requirement is called plagiarism; plagiarism is a form of dishonesty, inconsistent with genuine scholarship, and a serious offense against college policy. This policy forbids all forms of cheating, including plagiarism, and it stipulates (1) that all offenses be reported both to the Chair of the instructor's department and to the Dean of Academic Services, (2) that the minimum penalty for the first offense will be a failing grade for the assignment or examination on which the offense occurred, (3) that the minimum penalty for the second offense will be a failing grade for the course in which this second offense occurs, and (4) that the penalty for the third offense will be expulsion from the College.

Plagiarism takes many forms and need not be intentional to be plagiarism. It can include quoting, paraphrasing, summarizing, or utilizing the published or unpublished work of others without proper acknowledgment. Most frequently it involves the unacknowledged use of published books or articles from periodicals, magazines, and newspapers. However, any unacknowledged use of another's ideas constitutes plagiarism; this includes the use of, among other things, papers written by other students, interviews, radio or TV broadcasts, any published or unpublished materials (e.g., letters, pamphlets, leaflets, notes, or documents), and so forth. Some practices to avoid (because they can be considered plagiarism) and some examples of plagiarism can be found in Diana Hacker's *The Bedford Handbook* (5<sup>th</sup> Ed., New York; St. Martin's Press, 1998, pp. 554-562 and 569-573).

Good writing and good scholarship require that you produce original work – in your own words. Anytime you use the work, the words, or the ideas of another you **must** acknowledge this use with a footnote or other reference. Adequate acknowledgment requires that in the case of printed materials the footnote or other reference be to the specific work utilized and that it include the exact page or pages containing the utilized material; a general reference to a work or a listing in a bibliography is not sufficient. When the borrowed idea is the result of private discussions – and even in assignments intended to involve collaboration with other students – there should be a footnote or a page of acknowledgments indicating with whom the ideas expressed in the paper have been discussed. For an explanation of the correct form for footnotes and endnotes, in-text references, and bibliographical references, see Hacker, pp. 613 ff.

Another form of cheating in regard to papers is to submit in one course a paper originally written for another course. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating in this or any other course, please contact your instructor before submitting any written work.

- Please note that the departmental policy makes clear that **plagiarism need not be committed intentionally in order to be culpable**. There is thus a burden on the student to understand what counts as plagiarism and avoid it. If a student has any question about whether something counts as plagiarism, **the student has a responsibility to seek clarification**.
- **Students should know that in philosophy classes, unintentional plagiarism most often occurs when, instead of explaining the conceptual structure of an author's argument, the student mimics and rephrases the linguistic structure of the author's verbal composition.** A good rule of thumb is that if you cannot compose your sentences without looking at someone else's sentences, you are probably plagiarizing. If you are at the writing stage, you should have a good enough understanding of the ideas you are writing about to stop looking at the original words another author used to convey those ideas.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

<i>Day</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Due</i>
Th 8/25	INTRODUCTION	
Tu 8/30	John Paul II, <i>Fides et Ratio</i>	Response 1
Th 9/1	Ionians, Heraclitus, Pythagoras (Curd, 9-24, 29-41)	
Tu 9/6	Xenophanes, Eleatics, Pluralists (Curd, 25-28, 43-92)	
Th 9/8	Plato ( <i>Phaedo</i> and <i>Republic</i> selections)	Response 2
Tu 9/13	Plato ( <i>Parmenides</i> & <i>Sophist</i> selections)	
Th 9/15	Aristotle, <i>Categories</i> 1-5; Cajetan's commentary	
Tu 9/20	Aristotle, <i>Physics</i> I.1-2, 7, 9; II, 1-3, 7.	
Th 9/22	Aristotle, <i>Phys.</i> II. 4-6; 8-9; III. 1-2; VII.1	
Tu 9/27	Aristotle, <i>Metaphysics</i> A, $\alpha$	
Th 9/29	Met. B	Response 3
Tu 10/4	Met. $\Gamma$	
Th 10/6	Met. $\Delta$	Midterm
FALL BREAK		
Tu 10/18	Met. Z	
Th 10/20	Met. H, $\Theta$	
Tu 10/25	Met. I	
Th 10/27	Met. K	Short Paper 1
Tu 11/1	Met. $\Lambda$	
Th 11/3	Plotinus, <i>Enneads</i> 5.1 & 6.9; Proclus, <i>Elements of Theology</i> , prop. 1-9	
Tu 11/8	Aquinas, <i>On Being and Essence</i> , prol. & ch. 1 (McDermott, pp. 91-93)	
Th 11/10	<i>On Being and Essence</i> , ch. 2 (93-99)	
Tu 11/15	Aquinas, selections on the soul (121-129, 184-193)	
Th 11/17	Aquinas, <i>On Being and Essence</i> , ch. 3 (99-102)	Short Paper 2
Tu 11/22	<i>On Being and Essence</i> , ch. 4 (102-106)	
THANKSGIVING BREAK		
Tu 11/29	<i>On Being and Essence</i> , ch. 5 (106-109)	
Th 12/1	Aquinas, selections on God (196-209)	
Tu 12/6	Aquinas, selections on natural and revealed theology (TBA)	
Th 12/8	CONCLUSION AND REVIEW	Final Paper
FINALS WEEK		Final Exam

The schedule, policies, and assignments described in this syllabus are subject to change, with due notification, at the discretion of the professor.