

Social Metaphysics [University]

Class Information

Philosophy [Number] – [Semester]
T/R – [Time]
[Building Name] – [Room Number]

Contact Information & Office Hours

Jennifer Gleason
[Email]
[Office]
[Office Hours]

About This Class

This course provides an overview of social metaphysics. Metaphysics is the study of existence and the nature of things that exist. With that in mind, social metaphysics is the study of the existence and nature of social entities. In this course, we will discuss the metaphysics of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and disorder. After some background readings on the metaphysics of properties, we will discuss whether or not race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and disorder can be identified with biological properties. We will then consider whether or not race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and disorder are socially constructed. Finally, we will discuss how our views of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and disorder affect our political goals and projects.

General Education Goals and Expected Learning Outcomes

[Course classification and university goals and expected learning outcomes]

[Description of how course meets these university goals and learning outcomes]

Grade Components

1. Reading Quizzes (10% of final grade)

There will be *unannounced* reading quizzes administered at the beginning of some of our class periods. These quizzes consist in a few simple questions about the assigned readings. If you have complete the assigned readings, these quizzes should be easy for you. There will be at least 12 exercises in total, but only your 10 best scores count towards the final grade. The main purpose of these exercises is to incentivize you to attend, pay attention, and engage with the assigned material so that we do not need to waste valuable class time summarizing this material. It is also a way to keep track of your attendance.

2. First Paper (25% of final grade)

Each student will turn in a paper (approximately 3-5 typed pages), in which they provide a detailed criticism of a view that has been covered in class. Students must then consider how a proponent of the view might respond. More detailed requirements will be distributed later.

3. Second Paper (25% of final grade)

Each student will turn in a paper (approximately 3-5 typed pages), in which they provide a detailed criticism of a view that has been covered in class. Students must then consider how a proponent of the view might respond. More detailed requirements will be distributed later.

4. Final Paper (30% of final grade)

Each student will turn in a paper (approximately 5-10 typed pages), in which they provide an argument in support of a thesis on a topic relevant to social metaphysics, and develop and deflect 2 counterarguments. More detailed requirements will be distributed later.

Default Schedule

The following is a “default” schedule for the course. Specific topics and dates-of-coverage are subject to change, depending on how class progresses. Examination dates are firm. Readings will be posted online.

Week	Topic	Readings (read prior to class meeting)
1 Tu	Intro to Social Metaphysics	Make sure you are familiar with the syllabus!
2 Tu	Background: Properties	Russell – “The World of Universals” pp. 91-100 Quine – “On What There Is” pp. 29-30
2 Th	Background: Properties	Williams – “On the Elements of Being: I,” Lewis – <i>On the Plurality of Worlds</i> pp. 59-63
3 Tu	Anti-Biologism: Race	Glasgow – “Breaking Nature’s Bones”
3 Th	Anti-Biologism: Gender	Leboeuf – “One is Not Born, But Rather Becomes, Woman’: The Sex-Gender Distinction and Simone de Beauvoir’s Account of Woman”
4 Tu	Anti-Biologism: Sexual Orientation	Stein – Selections from <i>The Mismeasure of Desire</i>
4 Th	Anti-Biologism: Disability	Barnes – “Constructing Disability” pp. 1-13
5 Tu	Anti-Biologism: Mental Disorder	Gleason – “Mental Disorder is not ‘Medically Useful’”
5 Th	Realism	Boyd – “Realism, Natural Kinds, and Philosophical Methods”
6 Tu	Realism: Race	Hardimon – Selections from <i>Rethinking Race: The Case for Deflationary Realism</i>
6 Th	Anti-Realism: Race	Hochman – “Replacing Race: Interactive Constructionism about Racialized Groups”

7 Tu	Realism: Gender	Mikkola – “Elizabeth Spelman, Gender Realism, and Women”
7 Th	Anti-Realism: Gender	Mikkola – “Gender Scepticism and Feminist Politics”
8 Tu	Realism: Sexual Orientation	LeVay – Selections from <i>Gay, Straight, and the Reasons Why: The Science of Sexual Orientation</i>
8 Th	Anti-Realism: Sexual Orientation	Dembroff – “What is Sexual Orientation?”
9 Tu	Realism: Disability	Daniels – Selections from <i>Just Health Care</i>
9 Th	Anti-Realism: Disability	Barnes – “Constructing Disability” pp. 13-27
10 Tu	Realism: Mental Disorder	Broom/Bortolotti – “Mental Illness as Mental: In Defense of Psychological Realism”
10 Th	Anti-Realism: Mental Disorder	Szasz – “The Myth of Mental Illness”
11 Tu	Social Construction	Haslanger – “Social Construction: Myth and Reality”
11 Th	Social Construction: Race	Glasgow – “Constructivism, Revisionism, and Anti-Realism” pp. 113-132
12 Tu	Social Construction: Race & Gender	Haslanger – “Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?”
12 Th	Social Construction: Gender	Mikkola – “Gender Concepts and Intuitions”
13 Tu	Social Construction: Sexual Orientation	Wilkerson – “Is it a Choice? Sexual Orientation as Interpretation”
13 Th	Social Construction: Sexual Orientation	Díaz-León – “Sexual Orientation as Interpretation? Sexual Desires, Concepts, and Choice”
14 Tu	Social Construction: Disability	Barnes – “Constructing Disability” pp. 27-39
14 Th	Social Construction: Mental Disorder	Gleason – “Mental Disorder: (What) Is It? (What) Do We Want It To Be?”
15 Tu	Social Metaphysics & Politics	Haslanger – “Future Genders? Future Races?”
15 Th	Social Metaphysics & Politics	Saul – “Gender and Race”

Class Policies

Attendance

You will not get much out of this course if you don’t attend the lectures, pay attention, and take notes. It is crucial that you attend class! If you ever have to miss class, ask a classmate for his or her notes. It is your responsibility to obtain this material; I cannot catch up each of you individually. So don’t contact me to find out what you missed; contact a classmate instead. If, after studying your classmate’s notes, you have specific questions about the material, you may of course consult with me. If you miss an exam and you do not have an excuse (such as a doctor’s note) for the absence, you will not get the chance to make up the exam.

In Case of Emergency

You have a right to privacy and are never under any obligation to divulge personal information to me. In case of emergency (physical, mental, medical, emotional, familial, etc.), you can email me and say: **“Something important has come up that warrants an excused absence from class today.”** No further details will be required. I trust that you know what warrants an excused absence, and I trust that you will not abuse this policy.

Should some sort of emergency get in the way of a deadline or due date, you can send an email of the following sort: **“I am dealing with something that warrants an extension of [Assignment] as it has prevented me from completing [Assignment] to the best of my abilities.”** Once I have received this email, we will work together to determine the best course of action. I may ask a few questions (i.e. “Do you think that you will be in a better place by X date and able to complete the assignment by then?”) to help determine the best course of action. Again, I trust that you know what warrants an extension of an assignment, and I trust that you will not abuse this policy.

Phone and Computer Use

Phones, computers, and other mobile devices are not permitted *unless* this is the device by which the student takes notes or accesses the class readings. Use of devices for non-class purposes will result in an *unexcused absence*.

Packing Up

It has become fairly common among students to begin packing up belongings five or so minutes prior to class officially being over. This is incredibly distracting as it creates both (1) a flurry of motion, and (2) a fair amount of noise. This results in the last few minutes of each class period being wasted, and the loss adds up. To prevent a loss of class time, students are not permitted to pack up their belongings until class is officially over.

Late Work

Work that is submitted late will be accepted but will receive a 10% deduction **for each day that it is late**.

Academic Misconduct

Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated in this course. Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to the University’s Code of Student Conduct. Any suspected violations will be reported to the Committee on Academic Misconduct. [Link to Code of Student Conduct]. Useful information about plagiarism is found here: [Did I Plagiarize?](#)

Diversity

[University] affirms the importance and value of diversity in the student body. Our programs and curricula reflect our multicultural society and global economy and seek to provide opportunities for students to learn more about persons who are different from them. We are committed to maintaining a community that recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among each member of our community; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. Discrimination against any individual based upon protected status, which is defined as age, color, disability, gender identity or expression, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status, is prohibited.

Mental Health

A recent American College Health Survey found stress, sleep problems, anxiety, depression, interpersonal concerns, death of a significant other and alcohol use among the top ten health impediments to academic performance. Students experiencing personal problems or situational crises during the quarter are encouraged to contact [counseling services] for assistance, support and advocacy. This service is free and confidential.

This course covers a variety of topics that may be triggering to some students due to descriptions of and/or scenes depicting acts of violence, death, catastrophe, or disregard for human life. If needed, please take care of yourself while watching/reading this material (leaving the computer to take a water/bathroom break, debriefing with a friend, contacting [resource], and contacting the instructor if needed). Expectations are that we all will be respectful of our classmates while consuming this media and that we will create a safe space for each other. Failure to show respect to each other may result in dismissal from the class.

Student Resources

College is hard. If everything was going perfectly behind the scenes, then college would still be hard. Unfortunately, for many students, things are not going perfectly behind the scenes. With that in mind, I want you to be aware that the university has numerous resources that can be incredibly useful in helping you navigate [University's] structure and resolve issues you encounter while here at the university. You have a right to privacy, and you are never under any obligation to divulge personal information to me. If you need an in class accommodation (more time on the exam, a note-taker, etc.) then you need to register with [disability services]. Once you have registered with disability services, then they can tell me what needs to be done on your behalf without you having to divulge anything personal to me. You can find [the office of disability services] online at [link] or at [Address], [phone number], and [Email].

I want you all to succeed both in my class and here at the university as students. If there is ever something that comes up that starts to get in the way of your education, health, and/or wellness, please know that the university has many resources that are here to help you in a variety of ways. I have included those resources below:

- Emergency Financial Resources: [link]
- Disability Resources: [link]
- Student Advocacy Resources: [link]
- Mental Health Resources: [link]

If you are experiencing a crisis that is not one of disability, hospitalization, mental health, or finance, I still strongly suggest reaching out to [link] to see what supportive resources they may be able to provide.