

Advanced Introduction to Metaphysics

Fall 2013

Professor Peter Unger peter.unger@nyu.edu

Thursdays 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM

This course is primarily aimed at graduate students in their first or second year. Students in the course will read everything being read by the undergraduates in Professor Unger's metaphysics course concurrently offered at that level and also a good deal more.

Reading will be from five sources, two to be purchased, two distributed in class for free, and. Fifthly, the Internet:

1. A textbook, *Metaphysics* by Peter van Inwagen
2. An anthology, *Metaphysics: The Big Questions*, edited by van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman. In the course plan, I'll refer to this as MBQ.
3. A Coursepack, to be distributed freely in the class to all enrolled.
4. Photo-copies of material from books, to be distributed in class.
5. Internet material, as noted in the course plan below, and as deemed appropriate later.

While the professor will begin each class with a little oral presentation, rarely will that last for more than ten minutes. Primarily, each class will consist of discussion.

Each student will write two papers for the course. Near the middle of the semester, each student will submit a short paper, 5-9 pages in stand double-spaced format, on a topic discussed in the course. If the professor deems the paper promising, the student will be encouraged to improve and expand it, and submit the result about a week before the last class meeting. Such a paper should run from 12-16 pages. If the professor deems the paper not so promising, the student will write a second short paper, this one on another topic discussed in the course. Here's the course plan, to be followed flexibly, not rigidly.

Week 1: This week I'll try to sketch the metaphysical outlook with which we've been inculcated, by our culture and our early education. For some material relating to the sketch, but mostly for other reasons, in van Inwagen's *Metaphysics*, read chapter 1.

As well, students should go to Professor Unger's online repository for the course and read chapters 1 and 2 of his forthcoming book *Empty Ideas*.

Most of this week's reading will be quite discouraging, but DO NOT BE VERY DISCOURAGED!

Week 2: This week our topic will be The Puzzle of Concrete Reality. For a discussion of this topic, we shall read, in *Metaphysics: The Big Questions* (henceforth MBQ) Selection 52 (Lewis) pages 499-502 and 508-510, Selection 60 (Parfit) and Selection 61 (Swinburne). As well, we will read section 1 of chapter 9 of *Empty Ideas*.

Week 3: This week will be devoted to the Problem of Free Will. For discussion, in *Metaphysics*, read chapter 12. And, in MBQ, read Selections 44 (Hobart), 46 (Chisholm), 48 (van Inwagen) and Selection 49 (O'Connor). As well, and using the electronic resources of the NYU Libraries, read Professor Unger's paper "Free Will and Scientiphicalism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 65 (2002): 1-25.

Week 4: This will be the first week primarily devoted to what philosophers call The Mind-Body Problem: What are the main difficulties for the idea that each of us mental beings is a physical entity? In light of these difficulties, is it reasonable to think that we mental beings *aren't* physical? Or, is it possible to disarm the difficulties, and to think we mental beings *are* physical?

For this week's discussion, in *Metaphysics*, read chapter 10. Also, read Unger, "Two Cartesian Arguments for Some Spacelike Substantial Dualism", in the Coursepack. Then, in MBQ read Selections 41 (Chalmers), 42 (Russell), and 54 (Kripke) but only from bottom of page 535 to its end on page 539. Additionally, read these three papers, two by Jackson, available online, and one by Hirsch to have been distributed in class: Frank Jackson (1982) "Epiphenomenal Qualia" *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol.32, No.127 (Apr. 1982): 127-136, Frank Jackson (1986) "What Mary Didn't Know" *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.83, No.5 (May 1986): 291-295, and Eli Hirsch (2010) "Kripke's Argument Against Materialism".

Week 5: While we will continue to discuss The Mind-Body Problem, we shall also become involved in a closely related issue, The Problem of Personal Identity. That Problem comprises such questions as:

Is it possible for you to survive the destruction of your body?

Is it possible for several people simultaneously to have, or to share, a single body?

For discussion, read chapter 11 of *Metaphysics* and, in MBQ, read Selections 35 (Chisholm), 36 (Shoemaker) and (37) Olson. Finally, in Unger's *Empty Ideas*, in Chapter 8, read sections 1, 2 and 3.

Week 6: There'll be more discussion of The Problem of Personal Identity and The Mind-Body Problem. In MBQ, read Selection 38 (Parfit). In our Coursepack read Chisholm, "Questions about the Unity of Consciousness", Zuboff "The Story of a Brain" and three pieces by Unger: "I Do Not Exist," (Some pages from) "Why There Are No People" and (Some Pages from) "The Problem of the Many". And, provided on Unger's NYU Webpage, read his paper "The Mental Problems of the Many."

Week 7: This week we will come close to concluding our discussion of The Problem of Personal Identity and The Mind-Body Problem. Reread those items previously assigned that (you think) you need to understand more clearly and fully. Read those sections of chapter 4 of *Empty Ideas*, not previously assigned these being sections 4 through 10.

Week 8. This week, we'll discuss Berkeleyan Idealism, according to which all concrete reality is mental and nothing is material, or physical. And, we will also discuss contemporary Panpsychism, according to which, at least roughly, all concrete reality is both physical and also mental. For discussing this Idealism, in *Metaphysics*, read Chapter 3. For discussing contemporary Panpsychism, read these three related papers, available electronically: Galen Strawson (2006) "Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism" *The Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 13 (10-11): 3-31, Phillip Goff (2006) "Experiences Don't Sum" online in *The Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 10-11, 2006, pp. 53-61, and Frank Jackson (2006) "Strawson on Panpsychism" online in *The Journal of Consciousness Studies*, Vol. 13 (10-11): 62-64. Finally, for the week, in chapter 9 of *Empty Ideas*, read sections 2 and 3.

Week 9: Before the beginning of this week's class, electronically submit to Professor Unger your first paper for the course. This paper should be on one of the topics discussed during the first 7 weeks of the course. Your graded papers, with comments, will be returned within about a week.

In this week's class, we will discuss what we normally take to be material objects or, in terms, I prefer, ordinary spatial inhabitants. For discussion of this, first read, in the Coursepack, the few selected pages from Peter van Inwagen's *Material Beings*, "Contact". Then read chapter 6 of *Empty Ideas*.

Week 10: We will continue our discussion of ordinary spatial inhabitants. For this, first read chapter 5 of *Empty Ideas*. Then read the selection from Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* that you'll have been given in a previous class meeting. Finally, for the week, read chapter 4 of *Empty Ideas*

Week 11: This week we'll begin to discuss The Philosophy of Time. For discussion, first read, in *Metaphysics*, Chapter 4, but only up through page 81. Next, in MBQ read Selections 12 (Prior), (14) Broad and 16 (Prior). Next, in the Coursepack, read the selection by J. J. C. Smart, "The Space-Time World". Finally, in MBQ, read Selections 27 (Lewis), 28 (Lewis) and 29 (Zimmerman).

Week 12: We shall discuss some further questions concerning Time. For this discussion, first read those sections 2 and 3 of chapter 7 of Unger's *Empty Ideas*. Then, in the Coursepack, read the presented selection from Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons*, "Different Attitudes to Time".

Week 13: This week will be devoted to some very general questions about what individuals there are and, in the terms I prefer, how an individual might be propertied and related (to other individuals).

For this discussion, first read, in *Metaphysics*, chapter 2. Next, in MBQ, read Selection (4) Russell, (5) Armstrong, 6 (Price) and Selection 7 (Williams). Finally, in chapter 7 of *Empty Ideas*, read those sections not previously assigned, these being sections 1, 4 and 5.

Week 14: Beyond the tiny bit of material in the last and shortest chapter of *Metaphysics*, its chapter 13 "Concluding Meditation", I do not yet have in mind any reading for this week's discussion. Perhaps it will become clear that we need the time to discuss material assigned for some previous week, or weeks. If so, then that is what we will do. If not, then I will assign two or three pieces for this last week's discussion.

Students are to submit their final papers, electronically, within one week of the final class session of the course.