

# PL395: *Metaphysics*

Dr. P. J. Mooney, Department of Philosophy  
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## INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

### Contact Information

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- (216) 397-4786; *email and in-person are my strongly preferred means of contact; please use phone only if absolutely necessary.*



### Short Bio

My doctorate in philosophy (1996) is from the University of Wisconsin. I was hired by JCU in 1995, and tenured in 2001. I am presently writing a book on Socratic Intellectualism (my primary area of research), and an article on how to read Plato's Socratic dialogues; I am also a frequent contributor to *Philosophy in Review*. Other interests include metaphysics, philosophy of language, philosophy of mathematics and philosophy of music.

## COURSE INFORMATION

### Course Description

Half-jokingly—but only *half*-jokingly—metaphysics can be described as theoretical physics without the math. It has also been observed that metaphysics makes a thesaurus possible. (Next time you're in the library, find a thesaurus and examine how its contents are organized.)

Metaphysics concerns itself with some of the most basic questions philosophers ask about the world: What items exist? Physical objects? Non-physical objects? God? Minds? Propositions? How do objects persist through time? How can an object change and still be the *same* object? What *are* objects, anyway? What, if anything, is time? Does our world really contain causal relations, or not? Are there possible worlds? Are some truths merely contingent upon other truths, and are some necessarily so? Is it possible that nothing at all is real? Metaphysics, in short, is about nothing less than ultimate reality. This course will examine the answers to a subset of these questions, critically examining the arguments offered on behalf of each. Students in this course will complete regular reading assignments and write periodically about specific metaphysical theories and arguments.

### Course Requirements

#### **. . . in brief**

- Regular class attendance: No student may miss more than 4 regular class periods.
- Regular reading in preparation for class: About 10-30 pages per week.
- 3 "tutorial" papers.

- No final exam, but students *must* meet with the instructor *during the scheduled exam period*.
- Submission of *Read-and-Receipt of Course Syllabus* form no later than the third class period of the semester (Tuesday, 9/8).
- These requirements are non-negotiable, and will not be changed in any way to accommodate individual students.

... in detail

**Attendance and Routine Lateness.** A strong attendance record is required to pass this course. Once the student has missed more than 4 class periods the student will need to drop the course, or receive an ‘F’ for the course. Please note that it will not matter what the reason is for the absences. In my professional judgment, and given the sort of course that PL395 is, I cannot agree that the student has undergone the appropriate rigor and regimen needed in order to receive 3 college-level credits in *Metaphysics*, having missed more than two weeks of class. Thus: **it will not matter what the reasons are for the absences—each absence counts, no matter what. It follows that there are no such things as ‘excused’ absences; all absences are absences. Please do not hand to me “excuse slips” from coaches, doctors, or others. None of them will be accepted.** What is at issue here is not whether or not the student is to be blamed for an absence (which is what students normally suppose), but only whether or not a sufficient number of class contact hours have been accumulated. Attendance is taken at each class meeting.

Similarly, routine lateness to class will not be tolerated. Students who are routinely late (three or more times, and by more than just a few moments) will be dismissed from the course. Also: those late to class may not be allowed to sign the sign-in sheet verifying attendance.

**Reading.** Please plan to read 10-30 relatively difficult pages in preparation for that week’s class periods. What’s more, because this is the sort of reading that often demands re-reading, students should plan accordingly. Please do not be fooled by the comparatively modest number of pages that you are being asked to read—that does not mean that the reading can be adequately completed in a short amount of time. As with most other disciplines, the reading in this course will prove to be a mixed bag for most students: Some of the readings will be “easy” reads and others will be stubborn and resist understanding. Either way, the course will be conducted under the presumption that each student has done all the assigned readings by their relative due dates. However, few, if any, presumptions will be made about how much of the reading was fully understood by students. Accordingly, part of our class meetings will be devoted to clarifying and examining each of the readings. Class discussion of the readings is far more productive if all students have done the reading, quite regardless of how little was understood; and reading comprehension increases the more the student practices the activity.

**Tutorial Papers.** Each student must submit 3 short tutorial papers for this course by their relative due dates. No late papers are accepted without prior arrangement made with the instructor; late papers may be rejected outright and receive an ‘F’ with no chance of make-up. Each paper will be no more than 2 ½ pages, single spaced. What distinguishes a tutorial paper from your standard college paper? This and other questions are answered below in, *Tutorial Papers: Guidelines and Procedures*.

**Final Exam Period Meeting.** In the award-winning film, *Annie Hall* (1977), Woody Allen remarks that he was thrown out of NYU his freshman year for cheating on his *Metaphysics* final: He got caught looking into the soul of the student sitting next to him.

Although there is no final exam for this course, *all* students are *required* to meet with the instructor during his or her section’s scheduled final exam period.

**Form Submission.** All students *must* the *Syllabus Read-and-Receipt*, included at the very end of this syllabus, no later than class time, Tuesday, September 8. Students failing to submit the form by this time will not be allowed to continue the course, and they *must* drop.

**Requirements are Non-Negotiable.** Please note that all of these requirements, plus all course policies, are *non-negotiable*. Please plan accordingly.

### Daily Reading Assignments

Daily reading and class preparation will be advertised during class and either through email and/or through our CANVAS site.

### Learning Goals and Assessment: University, Department of Philosophy, and this Course

The learning goals for this course are as follows.

- **Reading.** Student will be able to read carefully and productively about key philosophical ideas in metaphysics.
- **Writing.** Student will be able to write knowledgably and coherently about key theories, arguments, and problems in metaphysics.
- **Philosophy.** Student will be able to present philosophical theories and arguments in metaphysics; will be able to recognize and resolve philosophical problems with those arguments.

These are the specific learning goals that this course intends for its students to achieve. The course also periodically assesses to what extent those goals are met and makes changes to how it is taught in light of that information. Below is an explanation of how these goals contribute to the University's broader educational objectives as well as of the process of how this course is assessed for how well its students meet the course goals.

#### **The Bigger Picture**

John Carroll University has specific learning goals for all of its students—intellectual, academic and social abilities that it intentionally works to develop and strengthen in its students. (A list of those University-wide learning goals can be found at: <http://sites.jcu.edu/assessment/sample-page/learning-goals/academic-learning-goals/> .)

To help achieve those goals, academic departments and programs (like Philosophy) have their own sets of learning goals that are tied to the goals of the University. Department-level learning goals are that department's contribution, so to speak, to our collective, University-wide learning goals. (The learning goals for the Department of Philosophy can be found below and also at: <http://sites.jcu.edu/assessment/sample-page/learning-goals/program-learning-goals/>.)

Likewise, in order to achieve the department-level learning goals, each course in the department must have its own learning-goals—goals that contribute to the department's learning goal efforts. The course goals listed above are designed to do that.

# University Learning Goals

## Department and Program Learning Goals

### Particular Course Learning Goals

In addition to having these various sets of learning goals, the University, departments and programs, and individual courses, will also *assess* the extent to which those goals are met and then institute changes in light of the information gathered from that assessment. At the course-level, this assessment is often conducted by specially recording how well students do on a particular course assignment, given what the course goals are. Instructors may then analyze this information and determine how the course may need to be changed the next time it is taught in order to better meet its goals.

Overall, this big, University-wide, project is a way of ensuring that our courses, departments and programs, and the University as a whole, actually achieve with our students what we want to achieve with them. Meeting the course goals for PL395: *Metaphysics*, will help the Department of Philosophy to meet its goals, and that, in turn, will contribute to the University meeting its goals. This is a very ambitious, but necessary, “quality control,” endeavor, especially designed with the educational welfare of our students in mind.

#### **How are the Course Goals Related to the Department Goals? --And to University Learning Goals?**

Each of the learning goals for this course is directly linked to the goals of the Department of Philosophy. The learning goals for the Department of Philosophy are as follows:

1. Our students will write and speak knowledgably about central aspects of and problems within the history of philosophy, as well as about philosophy’s major historical figures.
2. Our students will critically evaluate arguments and evidence.
3. Our students will understand the relationship between philosophy and other academic disciplines.
4. Our students will develop the skills necessary to engage critically with contemporary social issues.

Although each of the goals of this course pertain to all of these Department goals, PL395: *Metaphysics*, most directly links to Department goals #1 and #2. More specifically, the READING goal pertains to Department goals #1 and #2; the WRITING goal to #1; and the PHILOSOPHY goal to #2. Therefore, the assessment of this course focuses

upon contributing to goals #1 and #2.

In turn, this course helps the University meet its learning goals. Specifically, it contributes to the following University-level goals for its students. Our students will, or will be able to:

- Identify and understand the fundamental elements of a problem
- Demonstrate the ability to analyze multiple forms of expression (such as oral, written, digital or visual)
- Develop critical thinking skills

### **How are the Course Assignments Related to the Course Goals?**

The central assignments in this course--regular reading about metaphysical arguments and ideas, and three formal papers ("tutorial papers")--are specifically designed to teach students how to read philosophy, how to read it critically, and how to write about it in a clear, coherent and knowledgeable way. In each class period, we will discuss specific metaphysical theories and arguments based upon that period's reading. We will also then demonstrate the process of critically evaluating those arguments. The three formal papers required for this course ask that students present, explain and evaluate metaphysical theories arguments on their own. Over the course of the semester, students will thus develop and strengthen their own abilities to perform the tasks described in the course goals.

### **How Do We Know How Well the Course Goals are Met?**

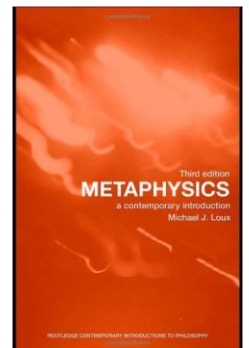
To determine the extent to which this course meets its learning goals, PL395: *Metaphysics*, will be formally assessed once every five semesters. This course will next be assessed in the Fall of 2015.

I assess this course in the following way. Using the second tutorial paper, I record how well each student meets the course goals. I record that information on the attached performance rubric (second-to-last page of this syllabus). Once I analyze the collected data, I then compare these results with my performance expectations. If the results—the "learning outcomes"—fail to meet the expectations, I then try to identify what changes to the course, or to my teaching, ought to be made in order to better meet those expectations for the next time that I teach the course. Those changes are then implemented beginning that semester.

### Course Books

There is one book required for this course.

- Loux, Michael J. *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction*, Routledge, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (2006), ISBN 13: 978-0415401340



## **POLICIES**

### Grading

Papers will be evaluated according to the substantive criteria (as opposed to the items of format) discussed below under, *Tutorial Papers: Guidelines and Procedures*. Each paper will receive two scores. The first score covers those respects in which the paper was "at its best"; the second score covers those respects in which the paper was "at its worst." Thus, the two scores indicate the *range* of the paper's quality. If the student wishes to know the paper's quality less ambiguously, he or she may simply determine the average of the two scores. Numeric scores are associated with letter grades according to the scale that appears on the next page.

**Example.** Suppose that your first paper is scored  $34 \rightarrow 17$ . This means that in some respects the paper was of B+ caliber and that in other respects it was of C caliber. The paper's average score is 25.5, B-. However, notice how much more informative  $34 \rightarrow 17$  is, than is a simple 25.5. A 25.5 could also have resulted from a paper that was scored  $26 \rightarrow 25$ , but *that* set of scores is a rather different set of information than is  $34 \rightarrow 17$ .

**Final grades** are based upon the 6 scores that the student has accumulated throughout the semester (3 papers X 2 scores each). *In some cases*, 2 points are then added to the resulting average. Thus, in some cases:

$$((\text{Sum of 6 tutorial paper scores}) / 6) + 2 = \text{Final Course Score}$$

The contingent, additional, 2 is a *bonus* to help offset some of the effects of my frank and rigorous evaluation of the student's work. In many cases, the *bonus* improves the student's grade by one step (e.g., from C- to C). However, this bonus will *not* be awarded to those students whose final paper is either a D or an F: *Commodum ex iniuria sua nemo habere debet*. This will help to discourage students from mostly neglecting the third paper in cases where they are otherwise satisfied with the grade that they would likely otherwise receive. In virtually all cases, the grade of 'A' will rely upon the 2-point *bonus*.

#### **Example of how each student's final grade is calculated.**

Let us suppose that the student has accumulated the following 10 tutorial paper scores:

- $34 \rightarrow 17, 7 \rightarrow 0, 42 \rightarrow 37$
- The total of these scores is 137.
- $137/6 = 22.83$
- Since this student's final tutorial paper is higher than a 'D,' a bonus of 2 is awarded.
- $22.83 + 2 = 24.83$
- $24.83 = \text{B-}$  (see scale below)

As with paper scores, the student's final score is translated into a letter grade according to the scale below.

**Please Note!** The assignment of all paper grades and all course grades is final. The instructor will *not* "negotiate," or otherwise reconsider, the student's paper grades or final grades. Please do not ask to meet with me for this purpose, nor initiate email exchanges for this purpose. In all due respect, no such inquiries will receive substantive replies, except as noted in the next paragraph. Quite simply, students are not qualified to judge the overall quality of a philosophy paper, and so such inquiries will not be accommodated.

It is possible, however, that I may make a mistake in recording the final grade that I have determined for you. For example, you may have earned a 32 (B+), but I instead, record, say, 'B' with the Registrar as your final grade. This is plainly a mistake on my part and I will be eager to correct it. If this sort of error should occur, *please* contact me immediately explaining the discrepancy. Please do so within seven days of final grades having been posted.

**Please Note!** The above policy is only about paper *grades* and final *grades*. Students are always welcome to discuss their *papers* with me even after they have been graded, where the purpose of such a meeting is educational—to further discuss the material and the student's work.)

<b>A</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>B+</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>B-</b>	<b>C+</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>C-</b>	<b>D+</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>42-38</b>	<b>37-35</b>	<b>34-32</b>	<b>31-27</b>	<b>26-24</b>	<b>23-21</b>	<b>20-16</b>	<b>15-13</b>	<b>12-10</b>	<b>9-5</b>	<b>4-0</b>

## Students With Disabilities

From the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities:

In accordance with federal law, if you have a documented disability (Learning, Psychological, Sensory, Physical, or Medical) you may be eligible to request accommodations from the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Please contact the Director, Allison West at (216) 397-4967 or come to the office located in room 7A, in the Garden Level of the Administration Building. Please keep in mind that accommodations are not retroactive so it is best to register at the beginning of each semester. Only accommodations approved by SSD will be recognized in the classroom. Please contact SSD if you have further questions.

## Plagiarism and Fraudulent Papers

No fraudulent papers will be accepted. Students turning them in will be dismissed from the course with a failing grade. In addition, there may be University sanctions applied to the student, including expulsion.

A paper is fraudulent if it is **plagiarized**—that is, if it contains *any* material—no matter how little—that is not a result of the student's own work. This includes material that is copied verbatim from any source—whether hard-copy or internet—as well as material that is *paraphrased* (not copied verbatim) from any source. While it is acceptable to call the reader's attention to the thoughts of another by way of quotation marks and appropriate citation, tutorial papers are nevertheless not the sorts of paper that will ever call for such material. In short, tutorial papers are to be 100% the result of the student's own work. The idea here is that tutorial papers help students discover and develop their own thinking about philosophical matters as well as improve their ways of expressing it. Not only is plagiarism academically dishonest, but it undermines the fundamental method of the course.

**This policy is enforced.** On average, 3 students *per semester* (!) are dismissed from each of my courses on account of submitting plagiarized, fraudulent work. This data is correct for the period from September, 1995 – August, 2015.

As is explained below under, *Tutorial Papers: Guidelines and Procedures*, students must work alone on their papers in order for the paper-writing process to work effectively. These are *not* in any way collaborative efforts, nor should students consult the internet or any in-print material to help them write their papers. Should a student be in need of help, or otherwise wish to ask questions about writing their papers, he or she should instead contact me, the instructor. I will know how to provide the student with the help needed without undermining the tutorial method.

## Phones and Electronic Devices

No phones, laptops, cameras or other electronic devices may be used in my classroom. Please shut them off and store them away prior to each class period. The only exception to this policy is for reading-dedicated devices, such as Kindle or Nook, which are the source of the student's course text.

## Basic Decorum

Although I run a somewhat laid-back class, it is imperative that students still observe some basic formalities. Except for emergencies, no student should be exiting and re-entering the classroom during the class period. Similarly, each student is expected to refrain from engaging in side-conversations with other students during the class period. Lastly, please wait to be called upon before speaking in class: with 25+ students, that is the only means by which I can make

sure to distribute contributions. (Sometimes, too, this means that no one gets called on even though hands are raised.)

### Letters of Recommendation

Due to the volume of requests for letters of recommendation, my own skepticism about their value to any application process, plus my serious doubt about the relationship between a liberal arts education and certain professions which typically ask students to supply letters, I will only consider requests that meet the following criteria:

1. My primary letter-writing time will be devoted to philosophy majors applying for graduate work in philosophy.
2. . . . Then to philosophy minors applying for graduate work in philosophy.
3. . . . Then to non-philosophy majors and minors applying for graduate work in philosophy
4. . . . Then to other students applying for graduate work in traditional fields in the liberal arts (English, math, physics, history, etc.).
5. I will NOT write letters for application to law schools, military organizations, or business schools.

I will NOT write letters for application for Resident Assistant positions, other campus positions, nor for JCU scholarships, fellowships, etc.

### Finishing with an 'Incomplete'

The mark of 'Incomplete' (I) *is not automatically granted in this course.* Students wishing to file for a mark of 'I' *must* first secure the instructor's permission *in advance.* A grade of 'F' will be assigned to students who have not turned in all written work by the final due date unless an 'I' has been officially granted.



## PL395: *Metaphysics* Assessment Rubric

Learning Objectives	12-9 : Excellent Work	8-5: Average Work	4-1: Poor Work	Score
<p><b>Reading.</b> Student will be able to read carefully and productively about key philosophical ideas in metaphysics. [Maps onto PL Goals #1 and #2]</p>	<p>Paper is attentive to all aspects of the texts; makes use of all skills and information pertaining to reading philosophy learned in class.</p>	<p>Paper is somewhat attentive to the texts; there may be some accuracy problems; makes use of some skills and information pertaining to reading philosophy learned in class.</p>	<p>Paper is not attentive to the texts; there are many accuracy problems; makes little or no use of skills or information pertaining to reading philosophy learned in class.</p>	
<p><b>Writing.</b> Student will be able to write knowledgably and coherently about key theories, arguments, and problems in metaphysics. [Maps onto PL Goal #1]</p>	<p>Paper is written clearly; makes use of all skills and information pertaining to writing philosophy learned in class.</p>	<p>There are some clarity problems; makes use of some skills and information pertaining to writing philosophy learned in class.</p>	<p>There are serious clarity problems; makes little or no use of skills or information pertaining to writing philosophy learned in class.</p>	
<p><b>Philosophy.</b> Student will be able to present philosophical theories and arguments in metaphysics; will be able to recognize and resolve philosophical problems with those arguments. [Maps onto PL Goals #1 and #2]</p>	<p>Paper identifies and accurately presents all theories and arguments asked about; discusses several philosophical problems and offers solutions to them.</p>	<p>Paper identifies and presents some arguments asked about; there are some accuracy problems; discusses some (but not all) philosophical problems and offers some solutions to them.</p>	<p>Paper identifies and presents few or no theories arguments asked about; discusses few or no philosophical problems or offers few or no solutions to them.</p>	

# TUTORIAL PAPERS: GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

## ABOUT TUTORIAL PAPERS

**What are tutorial papers?** Tutorial papers comprise answers to a series of related questions that are given to the student ahead of time. Tutorial papers are *not* standard essays—no thesis, body, conclusion format. The questions are normally about specified passages from philosophical texts and prompt the student to make a variety of philosophical and interpretive decisions about what is going on in the passages. The aim of tutorial papers is for the student to independently develop his or her own interpretation of the selected passages—usually about how a certain philosophical argument is supposed to work—and to make his or her own decisions about the relative merits of the passage.

Tutorial papers are more a *record of the student's thought* about the questions and the texts than they are “presentational” papers, such as standard college-level essays. As such, they are written more to be *read and discussed*.

Pedagogically, students tend to develop a deeper philosophical insight about texts and questions when they are tasked to come up with their own positions on things, and then critically discuss what they've come up with. The point, then, is *not* to have memorized a particular view and then demonstrate that one can put it in writing, but for the student to formulate what he or she actually thinks—on his or her own—given the available evidence of the text, plus philosophical smarts. This is how actual philosophers actually work, by the way, and so is a *sine qua non* in a liberal arts course in philosophy.

## TUTORIAL PAPER WRITING GUIDELINES

- Paper Submission.** All papers are to be submitted to me electronically, i.e., as an e-mail attachment, by their due dates and times. **No late papers are accepted without my prior approval.** Please send papers to me at [pmooney@jcu.edu](mailto:pmooney@jcu.edu).
  - If you are using MICROSOFT WORD, 2007, 2010, or later, please submit your paper as a “word document” (.doc).
  - If you are using ANY OTHER WORD PROCESSOR please instead submit your paper in “rich text format” (.rtf). This format is made available to you in a “drop-down” box when using the “SAVE AS” command, and affords more trouble-free reading of documents between computers with differing word processors.
- Paper Formatting and Page Limits.** Please adhere to the following formatting in order to afford easier reading and marking-up of your papers.
  - Indicate: **Name, course, Tutorial Paper Title (given on question sheet), term** anywhere at the top of the first page: (e.g., “**Colage Studint, PL395, ‘The Problem of Universals,’ Sp15**”).
  - No more than 2 ½ pages, single-spaced.
  - Normal margins.
  - Normal size font (10, 11 or 12 for most fonts).
  - Include a clearly identifiable question number preceding each of your answers. This ensures that I know what question portions of your paper are supposed to be answering. Often, tutorial questions have several parts. Please indicate the individual answer parts, as well.
- Get going on the tutorial questions as soon as possible.** Some of the questions will prove quite challenging and so will need a little time to “sit” with you. Also, you can't know what problems that you will face in answering the questions until you start writing, and so you'll need to *allow yourself plenty of time* to work through these problems, and to *revise your answers* as your thinking progresses. You will normally

receive each set of tutorial questions two weeks before your papers are due. (Summer sessions may not be able to meet the two-week advance.)

4. **Work Independently.** Students must *not* work with other students, or any other person (**including the new Learning Commons**), except for the instructor. The other exception is seeking help from the Writing Center. Among the aims of tutorial work is the development of the individual student's own capacities. This aim is far too often thwarted when students work with someone else in answering the tutorial questions. If you find that you've hit a roadblock of some kind, and need a bit of a jumpstart, *please instead seek help from me*. I am in a far better position than anyone else about how to lend the appropriate hand without marring your own development. Success in this course depends heavily upon your own development...regardless of where you're starting from. (In addition, students too often don't know how to work with one another in such a way as to avoid plagiarism.)

In those cases where the student needs considerable help in writing mechanics, they may consult the Writing Center for help. But under no circumstances should that help go beyond writing mechanics (e.g., grammar, paragraph structure, etc.).

5. **Answer the actual questions asked.** Past students have often simply neglected the question altogether, choosing instead to discuss some issue related to the question. But there is indeed a difference between *answering* a question (which you *must* do), and giving what is merely a general discussion on the question topic (*which is not a substitute for answering the question*). *Answering* a question is *not* the same thing as having something to say when asked a question.
  - a. It is rather easy to lose one's focus in answering difficult questions about deep and complicated philosophical texts. To help avoid this problem, my advice is to answer the question directly, precisely and briefly, *first*, and *then* give your explanation, argument or other discussion.
  - b. Make sure that your explanation, argument or other discussion really explains, argues for, or otherwise helpfully discusses your initial, brief answer. If it doesn't, don't write it. Put a different way, make sure that everything you write *does some work* towards answering a question, or explaining and defending your answer. If not, the sentence, paragraph, page—or whatever—is philosophically useless and oughtn't to be written.
  - c. Be sure to answer *all* questions, question parts, etc.
6. **Clarity of Writing.** In philosophy there is a rather high premium placed upon the *clarity* of writing. Mostly, this means that you must make every effort to ensure that your readers can readily follow what you are saying, sentence by sentence. Specifically, you will need to pay very close attention to matters of grammar and spelling, and to work for the most efficient organization and presentation of your thoughts that you can manage.
  - a. Clarity also requires striving for *simplicity*. For a variety of reasons, writing philosophy may seem to invite students to use overly complex means of expression in their writing. (No doubt, you have read philosophers that reveal a flair for complexity; but this is not what makes that philosopher great, if he or she is great.) But, unless there is no way out of complexity, *avoid it*. One consequence of following this advice is that it will demand of you that you rewrite your answers several times (--again: do not wait to get started on the questions).
  - b. A final word about mechanics: In general, I will make remarks about grammar, spelling, etc., only in the first paragraph or two, *even if the remainder of the paper contains additional mechanical errors*. Often, too, I will resort to abbreviations for these sorts of remarks. Far more often than not, mechanical problems make for worse papers—at least to the extent that the problems interfere with the reader figuring out what you're trying to say. Your knowing what you mean when you use bad grammar, sloppy spelling, etc., is not a good reason for believing that anyone else will know what you mean. In general, it is expected that all papers will meet high mechanical standards

(college-level standards). Very probably, students cannot pass this course without being able to meet such standards.

7. **Tutorial vs. Essay Paper.** The papers you will write for this course are *tutorial* papers, *not essay* papers. Among other things, this means that it will *not* be necessary that you answer the tutorial questions as though you were producing one coherent essay--that is, in such a way that your paper shows the relationship between all of your answers. In fact, I discourage you from trying to write your papers in that way: you will find that your page limit is almost too little space to adequately answer the questions, let alone to explain to the reader some grander thesis that ties them together. Instead, I strongly prefer that you simply answer each of the questions “by itself,” and leave the relationship between the answers to be drawn out at a later time. I am convinced that the best way to learn anything about the strengths and weaknesses of various philosophical views is, first, by concentrating your thought upon quite specific passages using the method of question and answer and, second, by discussing what you say about these passages in focused tutorial meetings. For these purposes, the “standard essay” method is an extremely poor instrument, so please avoid it.
8. **Philosophical Responses to Objections.** Almost all of the tutorial papers will require that the student say how Socrates (or whomever) might *respond* to certain objections raised against their views. In doing so, however, students find it very tempting to simply *restate* the philosopher’s view, and then suppose that this is the same as a response to the objection. In philosophy, though, a response to an objection makes the objection “go away,” so to speak, and so is not merely a restatement of the original view.
  - a. To make the objection “go away”, one has to *show* that the objection is either groundless, that it misses the point, that it itself makes false presumptions or that the original view is somehow able to account for the objection without damaging the theory--or by yet some other means. In any case, a response is no mere digging-in-of-heels, but in one way or another weakens the force of the objection. Your papers will not be devoted to merely setting out two or more opposing views (though this will often be involved), but to actually determining which of two or more opposing views is *more likely correct*!
9. **Be honest about your difficulties.** It is often quite tempting to try to write “smooth” answers to tutorial questions--that is, answers which cover up, or gloss over, almost obvious difficulties that your answers face. Philosophy students must avoid this, however. The idea behind writing in philosophy is to be as *honest* as you can about the difficulties that your answer faces. The best way to find a good answer to a philosophical question, after all, is to be as forthright and clear about what the difficulties are that proposed answers face. So if there are difficulties that your answers face, please be candid about these in your answers! I will, of course, be looking for papers that exhibit a strong, concerted effort to provide thoroughly thought-out answers. But it is perfectly consistent with this standard that you openly acknowledge where you are not quite sure of yourself, and *why*.
10. **Openly challenge Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (or whomever) about their arguments and their philosophical presumptions.** Many of the questions will afford you the opportunity to say whether or not you think the philosophers in question are right or wrong about what they say. If you think they are wrong on a certain point, there is no need to be shy in saying so and in saying *why* you think they are wrong. In fact, go out of your way to be hard on them, if you think it is warranted.
11. **Good arguments and bad arguments.** Often, you will need to say whether or not you think that a particular argument is a good or bad argument. What makes an argument good or bad is itself a matter of controversy in philosophy. However, at the very least, a good argument is one in which its conclusion is amply supported by its premises, and the premises are likely to be true. So some reasons for thinking that an argument isn’t very good might include: the premises don’t sufficiently support the conclusion; one or more of the premises are false; and so on. Likewise, the following considerations are *not* reasons for thinking that

an argument is good (I make use of phrases typical of student papers): “It makes sense”, “It got whomever Socrates was speaking with to back down,” “Socrates does a good job of explaining himself,” etc. The criteria for a good argument, in short, are *scientific* criteria, broadly construed, and *not* mere rhetorical criteria.

12. **Do not write something just because you think it is what I would agree with or would like to hear.** Such a strategy will almost certainly wind up in disaster. You stand a far better chance of doing well on your papers by writing what you yourself think is true, even if you suspect that what you think is quite the contrary of what I think. Also, it is much easier to reason plausibly for a particular philosophical position if you feel sincerely pulled toward that position.
13. **Textual evidence and citations.** In answering the questions *rely upon the text as much as possible*. Do not attribute a view to Socrates, Plato or Aristotle (or whomever) unless you have textual evidence that you can cite which justifies your attributing views to them. Far more often than not the text will tell you--*in one way or another*--what you need to know. I do not say that the text will tell you this “directly,” for sometimes the only way to figure out what is being said is to develop some instincts for *how* Socrates, Plato and Aristotle (or whomever) get things across. Nevertheless, you cannot simply dismiss the text.
  - a. Make sure to actually cite the textual evidence for your views where appropriate. For example, if you say that Aristotle’s views about voluntary wrongdoing are such and such, you must indicate the passage or passages which support your claim. In *Ancient Greek Philosophy* (PL210), this is normally done by citing the Stephanus pages and line numbers (Plato), or Bekker pages and line numbers (Aristotle). For all other of my courses (PL101, PL 270, etc.), use the page numbers of whatever the common text is for the course, or paragraph number if the text supplies it (as is the case, say, with Berkeley’s, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Understanding*).
  - b. Cite the textual evidence even if you choose not to directly quote from Plato or Aristotle (or whomever), but merely to paraphrase them. Most scholarly disagreements about what a philosopher’s arguments are for their views arise as the result of a disagreement about what a particular passage is really saying. So you will always need to alert your readers as to the evidence that led you to ascribe a certain view or argument to the philosopher: this way, they may investigate the passage for themselves to see if they agree that what you say is evidence for your interpretation really *is* evidence for your interpretation.
  - c. For our purposes, your citations may be indicated by inserting a parenthetical notation right in the body of your papers. For example: (*Meno*, 77b4-5), and (*De Motu Animalium*, 701a1-5). You may abbreviate the names of works in your citations [e.g., the second example above may be indicated as follows: (*DMA*, 701a1-5).] *There is no need for footnotes or bibliographies to catalogue any of this information.*
14. **Stay within the bounds of the specified page limit.** This limit is partly imposed by the time constraints of tutorial meetings, partly by our common interest in my returning your papers to you in a reasonable amount of time and mostly to force you into improving your writing towards the more concise and on-point. In any case, the questions are designed to fit this limitation with good, clean, concise writing. A few lines or a small paragraph *over* the page limit is not a problem, *but any amount more than that may not be read by me.*
15. **No fraudulent papers will be accepted.** Students turning them in will be dismissed from the course with a failing grade. A paper is fraudulent if either: (a) It contains any material that is not the result of the student’s own work. It is acceptable, of course, to call the reader’s attention to the thoughts of another. But any such “borrowed” material must either appear in quotes (with appropriate citation), or, if paraphrased, must nevertheless be introduced as belonging to another (and with appropriate citation), or, (b) It contains any material the relevance of which the student is unable to adequately explain, even if appropriately cited.

- a. All papers will require that you sign a statement of originality. Unsigned papers may not be evaluated.
- b. Fraudulent papers may also result in expulsion from the University.

## READ-AND-RECEIPT OF *COURSE SYLLABUS*

By signing below, the named student confirms having received the *Course Syllabus* for PL395-51 (*Metaphysics, Fa15*); understands all of what is required of him or her in order to receive credit for the course; understands all course policies associated with how the course is conducted; and agrees to abide by all requirements and policies. The student understands that failure to abide by all requirements and policies may result in dismissal from the course, and/or in whatever consequences are explained in the *Syllabus*.

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Student Signature

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Print Name

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Date