

PHL 342 Metaphysics: Philosophy of Time

Tuesdays, Thursdays 2 – 3:15pm

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 10am-noon, Thursdays 4-5pm, and by appointment

This course will examine several topics in a central area of metaphysics, the philosophy of time. We will move quickly from a historical discussion to the forefront of current philosophical debate. Beginning with Augustine's reflections on time in his *Confessions*, we will move to the Enlightenment period, engaging the debate between Newton's student, Clarke, and Leibniz regarding whether time exists absolutely or is nothing more than a relation amongst other things. We will then see how developments in modern physics, particularly relativity theory, serve to demonstrate that both Leibniz and Clarke's arguments must be rethought. Using this foundation, we will address several issues: is time unreal? Does it make sense to talk of time's flow or passage? Are present things all that exist, or are past, present, and future entities equally real? Is time travel possible, both conceptually and according to modern physics? Can one go back in time and kill one's own grandfather? Finally, what is the relationship between the ordinary concept of time with which we are familiar through our own experience and the concept of time (or space-time) discussed by the physicist?

No prior knowledge of physics or metaphysics will be required, but students will be expected to have already taken courses in philosophy or acquired the permission of the instructor.

Texts

There are two required books for this course available at the bookstore.

1. Robin LePoidevin and Murray MacBeath, eds. *The Philosophy of Time*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993. (L&M)
2. Brian Greene. *The Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time, and the Texture of Reality*. New York: Vintage, 2004. (G)

There is also a course packet (CP) available with the rest of the assigned readings.

Grading

Assessment in this course will be on the basis of class participation, short presentations, and a final paper.

I. Class Participation

The format of this class is a seminar, therefore students will be expected to attend every class and be prepared to discuss the material. On presentation days, it will be expected that the students who are not presenting will have questions or comments for the presenter. Class participation will count as 20% of your final grade.

II. Presentations

Depending on the number of students in the class, everyone will be expected to give two short presentations over the course of the semester. These presentations will involve a fifteen minute discussion of the reading for the day following by questions and discussion by the rest of the class.

Presentations will be informal. There is no need to read a paper that one has prepared. Instead, one can come with a handout that summarizes the main arguments in the reading and a few questions and/or critiques of these arguments. The most important part of the presentations is that you are able to give a clear summary of what the author is saying which you can convey to the rest of the class, as well as some good questions to feed discussion. Producing your own original ideas on the piece is secondary. If you are preparing an argument for presentation but still seem confused about it, please don't hesitate to stop by my office and we can discuss it beforehand. These presentations will count for 30% of your final grade.

III. Term Paper

Lastly, students will write a 10-12 page paper on a topic discussed in the course which engages the assigned readings. Suggested topics will be handed out in the weeks before the due date, December 15, 2005. Students are also welcome to propose their own paper topics in which case these proposals must be approved no later than two weeks prior to the due date. The grade on your final paper will be worth 50% of your final grade.

Topics and Assigned Readings

I. From Augustine to Einstein

September 1

- St. Augustine, Time Tends Not to Be (CP)

September 6

- Isaac Newton, Scholium to *Principia Mathematica* (CP)
- Gottfried Leibniz/Samuel Clarke debate, selections (CP)

September 8

- Brian Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos*, pp. 23-38; 44-61(G)

II. McTaggart's Argument for the Unreality of Time

September 13

- J.M.E. McTaggart, The Unreality of Time (L&M)

September 15

- Michael Dummett, A Defense of McTaggart's Proof of the Unreality of Time (CP)

September 20

- Sydney Shoemaker, Time Without Change (L&M)

III. Time's Passage

September 22

- Prior, Changes in Events and Changes in Things (L&M)

September 27

- Ned Markosian, How Fast Does Time Pass? (CP) `

September 29

- Greene, *Fabric of the Cosmos*, pp. 127-139 (G)
- Hilary Putnam, Time and Physical Geometry (CP)

IV. The Presentism/Eternalism Debate

October 4 & 6

- Theodore Sider, Against Presentism (CP)

October 11 & 13

- Markosian, A Defense of Presentism (CP)

October 27: Ned Markosian visit

October 20: NO CLASS MEETING

October 25

- Mark Hinchliff, A Defense of Presentism in a Relativistic Setting (CP)

October 27 & November 1

- Simon Keller, Presentism and Truthmaking (CP)

V. Time Travel

November 8

- Jack Meiland, A Two Dimensional Passage Model of Time for Time Travel (CP)

November 10

- David Lewis, The Paradoxes of Time Travel (L&M)

November 15

- Paul Horwich, On Some Alleged Paradoxes of Time Travel (CP)

November 17

- Keller and Michael Nelson, Presentists Should Believe in Time Travel (CP)

November 22

- Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos*, pp. 448-469 (G)

November 24: NO CLASS MEETING, THANKSGIVING BREAK

VI. Experience and Science

November 29

- Craig Callender, The Subjectivity of the Present (CP)

December 1

- Gregory Currie, Can There Be a Literary Philosophy of Time? (CP)

December 8

- Richard Healey, Can Physics Coherently Deny the Reality of Time? (CP)

December 15: FINAL PAPERS DUE