1. Metaphysics for Life

There is at least one overarching goal for our class: *to make us see, if not live in, the world differently using something you learned from or found in these ancient texts on metaphysics*. A practical way to do this is to actually develop *your* metaphysics. There are three steps to doing this, which will correspond to the three main projects you will carry out this semester.

* 1. Your Metaphysics

One of the constant themes of our class is this: *metaphysics is not a rarified, merely theoretical discipline, but is instead an activity, a practice*. Metaphysics is something you really *do*. In this spirit, you will not only study and discuss metaphysics this semester, but will actually *construct your metaphysics*. In the first significant writing assignment this semester, you will do lay out your own metaphysical treatise, that is, I ask you to articulate what you take to be the *meaning of being or existence*

This will be structured like this. Begin with your metaphysical proposition. Make this clear, concise, convincing, and engaging. The rest of your paper will then consist of deep and thorough-going conceptual analysis and the pursuit of implications from your proposition and the concepts you dig up in your analysis. It should conclude with a bold and resounding conceptual synthesis.

*Abstract*: 1-page abstract that includes your metaphysical proposition written in bold at the top. The rest of the page should be the first movements of what will be, in your full draft, a complete conceptual analysis and the pursuit of implications of your proposition. This will be graded as either check or : pass means you get all the points, and a **Due:**

*Full Draft*: 5-page paper (min.), 12 pt. font, Times New Roman, double-spaced, 1-inch margins. (200 points or 20% of the grade). **Due:**

Rubric (scale: meh –> fabulous):

* + - 1. *Ontological proposition* (20%)

Does your treatise begin with a clear, engaging, concise articulation of your proposition and what to expect in the rest of your treatise?

* + - 1. *Conceptual analysis* (30%)

How precisely and carefully have you “cut up” the concept into its composing concepts?

* + - 1. *Conceptual implication* (30%)

How far and how carefully have you unpacked or tracked the concepts and claims that your proposition that follow?

* + - 1. *Concluding synthesis* (20%)

Have you brought everything together in a way that says something new or surprising about what was said above?

* + - 1. *Grammar, spelling, organization* (10%)

Are there helpful transitions that allow the argument/writing to proceed smoothly and logically clearly? Did you edit it *very, very* well.

* 1. Critique of Your Classmate’s Metaphysics

In the next significant writing assignment you will critique the metaphysics written by two of your classmates. The goal is to charitably and respectfully challenge the metaphysical treatises of two of your classmates. This is a difficult task, but one that is essential to sophisticated philosophical practice. To be a good, respectful critique does not mean being nice and uncritical; rather, it means taking seriously another’s ideas, arguments, and positions, and this seriousness means offering critical analysis of others’ work. You need to strike the balance between thoughtfully poking holes in others’ metaphysical thinking and yet being supportive and encouraging. Try to both find the weak spots and look for concrete ways to improve. Look for the argumentative problems (i.e., when a conclusion does not follow from previous statements, when a claim is not convincingly supported, etc.) and potential avenues for development. Be a harsh but objective critique. I will provide prompts, questions, and ways to help you offer a very helpful and respectful critique. Concretely, you will write two 3-page papers that thoroughly critique what others have said was the meaning of being. (200 points or 20% of the grade). **Due:**

Rubric (scale: meh –> fabulous):

* + - 1. Depth of engagement with ontological proposition (20%)
      2. Degree of evaluation of author’s conceptual analysis and implication (20%)
      3. How helpful, considerate, (20%)
      4. Grammar, spelling, organization (20%)

Finally, you must take a 30 min walk with the people who wrote the two metaphysical treatises that you critiqued. On these walks you will discuss your critiques and the meaning of being. During your walk you should ask each other the following questions and co-write a half-page report of your walk:

1. Why does this metaphysical proposition make most sense to you (the author)? What about your personal background frames this articulation of your proposition?
2. How did this proposition change your (the critic) understanding of being?
   1. From Your Metaphysics to Your Life

The last part of this ongoing metaphysics construction is to rewrite your metaphysics in response to the specific challenges expressed in the critiques. The critiques will point you to your weak points, those places at which you need to improve your thinking and writing, strengthen your argument. Taking these indications seriously will improve your account of metaphysics. You will thus not be writing from a blank slate, but will instead be refining a line of thinking that you have already been following for most of the semester.

Two-column Commentary*.* To ensure that you are engaging the critiques, you will create a two-column document (which I will show you how to do) with the main points in the critiques running down the left column and your responses to those critiques running down the right column. The left column should not just consist only of the words that your critics wrote, but should be your own words. This means that you must summarize and encapsulate your critics’ words. That is, you must distill the critiques of you into what you see as the main points of contention by translating into your own words. This sort of commentary tradition was very common in ancient philosophy, especially in commentaries on Aristotle’s metaphysics. It is a way of engaging in written dialogue on the page itself.

But this is not all. Not only will you refine your metaphysics treatise, you will also indicate specific ways in which this might affect how you live. The idea is this: *what* you think the world is made of affects *how* you live in the world. Put differently, your account of what it means to be changes your being in the world. To do this, you will rewrite your metaphysics with a new aim in mind: everyday life. In addition to responding to the critiques you were offered, you will also write a new introduction and conclusion to your metaphysical treatise that explains how your metaphysics might affect your life. The final version of your metaphysics treatise must be at least 8-pages long. **Due:**

Rubric (scale: meh –> fabulous):

* + - 1. Quality and quantity of revisions in response to your critics (40%)
      2. How well (logically and conceptually connected) are your metaphysics and ethics (40%)
      3. Grammar, spelling, organization (20%)