

Philosophy of Reality

(PHIL 352; #14670)

CSUN

Term: Fall 2026

Room: Jerome Richfield 301

Time: M/W 1:00–2:15

Instructor: Dr. John Birmingham

Office: Sierra Tower 531

Office Hours: T/R 1–2:15; W 11:30–12:45

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Course Description

An introduction to metaphysics: the nature, scope, and theory of reality. Among the topics we will discuss are the following: constitution and identity, mind and body, freedom and determinism, essence and existence. Our focus throughout the course will be on the evaluation of historically important arguments associated with these topics.

Prerequisite: Completion of the lower division writing requirement.

Course Objectives

Students who complete PHIL 352 will be able to do the following:

- **Describe** the main claims and **explain** the arguments presented for those claims in philosophical works.
- **Articulate** various positions on significant issues in metaphysics, **articulate** differences between those positions, and **evaluate** those positions.
- **State** and **defend** philosophical positions in writing.

Reading Material

- **Textbook:** *Riddles of Existence*, New Edition, by Earl Conee and Theodore Sider (Oxford University Press, 2014). Copies are available for sale in the bookstore.
- **Essays:** Available online (for free!), many of which are classic sources.

Contact Information and Tech Support

- My **office hours** during the Fall 2026 semester are Tue/Thu 1–2:15 and Wed 11:30–12:45 (both in ST 531). If you have questions about the course content, you can contact me at my CSUN email address above (and below). (If you try to contact me through Canvas, you likely won't get a response.)
- Occasionally, I will post announcements. You can view them in the **Announcements** thread at the top of the **Homepage**.
- I will also post your grades so that you can view them by clicking on **Grades** in the Navigation Bar to the left of the **Homepage**. Contact me immediately if you detect any mistakes.
- I can be reached at john.birmingham@csun.edu for any questions you have about the course. Be sure to tell me in the email which course you are taking. I will do my best to respond to emails within forty-eight hours (except on Saturdays and Sundays). Please restrict your inquiries to questions not already answered in the **Syllabus**. Otherwise, you should expect no response.
- Please do *not* contact me for tech support. Instead, contact the **IT Help Center** at 818-677-1400 or online [here](#).

Time Commitment

This is a full semester, three-unit course. You will be required to keep track of deadlines and pace yourself appropriately. The material can be quite difficult. It involves a great deal of careful analysis and precise evaluation. But for those willing to put forth the effort, it is certainly doable. To do it well, however, you should expect to spend *at least* two hours per week, on average, outside of class.

Course Structure and Content

Here is a short outline of the course. You can find the readings and videos on our Canvas course website by clicking on the following series of links: **My Courses > Canvas Homepage > PHIL 352.**

Introduction

Unit 1: Constitution and Identity

- A. Material Constitution
- B. Artifact Identity
- C. Personal Identity

***** FIRST EXAM (9/16) *****

Unit 2: Mind and Body

- A. Dualism
- B. Phenomenalism
- C. Physicalism

***** SECOND EXAM (10/14) *****

Unit 3: Freedom and Determinism

- A. Logical Fatalism
- B. Theological Fatalism
- C. Causal Determinism

***** THIRD EXAM (11/9) *****

Unit 4: Essence and Existence

- A. Concept of Necessity
- B. Existence of God
- C. Existence of Anything

Conclusion

***** FINAL EXAM (12/16) *****

Assignments and Grading

There are three types of graded assignments in this course: discussions, multiple choice quizzes/exams, and essays. In each case, the assignments will be accessed and submitted online in Canvas. Grades can be checked at any time anytime by clicking on **Grades** in the Navigation Bar to make sure the assignments have been submitted properly and graded. If there is any discrepancy, be sure to contact me at once.

• **Unit Glossaries** (5 points each) to contain the definitions of important philosophical terms. For each unit, create a glossary of at least 20 important philosophical terms from the readings/discussions of that unit. No term should appear in more than one glossary. Each term should be given a careful definition *in*

your own words of the philosophical concept expressed by that term. Do not copy or paraphrase from *any* source or use AI to generate the definitions. To be submitted to Turnitin (see below).

- **Midterm Exams** (40 points each) tentatively scheduled to be taken on 9/16, 10/14, and 11/9. They will be non-cumulative and consist of objective questions, emphasizing both factual and conceptual information from the readings and class discussions. I will drop your lowest score of the three.

- **Unit Essays** (10 points each) tentatively scheduled to be taken at the end of each unit. One essay of 500 words or less per unit on a topic of my choice. Each essay should be totally *in your own words*. Do not copy, paraphrase, or quote from *any* source or use AI to generate any part of it. And do not include a bibliography. I will drop your lowest score of the first three. To be submitted to Turnitin (see below).

- **Cumulative Quiz** (5 points **extra credit**). A short objective quiz over the basic content of the course. It will be given during the Final Exam period.

- **Final Exam** (40 points) on Wednesday, December 16 from 12:45 to 2:45 pm. It will cover material introduced after the third midterm and emphasize both factual and conceptual information from the readings and class discussions.

- **Penalty for Being Absent** (2 percent each day). For each day missed past 4, I will deduct 2 percent from your final grade. You can miss up to 4 “sick” days (= 2 weeks) without penalty, but understand that those days are meant to cover illnesses, emergencies, etc. So, if you have an emergency or get sick, etc., after having missed 4 days, do not ask to be excused. That’s what the sick days are meant to cover. The only exception is for students, such as athletes, etc., who have an official excuse from the university. And even then, 4 of those excused days will be counted as sick days.

Grading Standards

Final %	90↑	80-89.9	70-79.9	60-69.9	59.9↓
Letter Grade	A	B	C	D	F

Regulations

The glossaries and essays will all be written and submitted to Turnitin on Canvas. Here are the rules regarding plagiarism and the use of AI on these assignments:

1. If Turnitin says there is between a 25% and 49% chance that your submission was plagiarized or generated by AI, you will automatically receive a 0. But at your request, you can submit a make-up glossary/essay (on a different set of definitions/topic). If Turnitin gives your make-up submission a 25% or greater chance of having been plagiarized or generated by AI, you will get a 0 for the assignment and forfeit all future make-up opportunities for any Turnitin submissions. If, instead, it gives your make-up submission less than a 25% chance of having been plagiarized or generated by AI, you will receive half-credit for the assignment and not forfeit all future make-up opportunities for any Turnitin submissions.
2. If Turnitin says there is a 50% or greater chance that the glossary/essay was plagiarized or generated by AI, you will automatically get a 0 on the assignment and forfeit all future make-up opportunities for any Turnitin submissions

Anyone otherwise caught cheating or plagiarizing on any assignment will, at the very least, receive a zero for that assignment and, possibly, even be suspended from the school. And yes, presenting any work that is not entirely your own when it isn’t counts as cheating, so don’t do it (or anything like it). Honesty is the best policy!

Those who abide by these regulations will reap the benefits of their good behavior.

Late Policy

Each glossary and essay has a specific due date (and time) that cannot be violated. No make-ups will be allowed. The same is true of the Final Exam. However, if you miss one of the midterms, you can take a make-up for it during the Final Exam period on Wednesday, December 16 right after you take the Final.

Important Dates

The CSUN Academic Calendar for Fall 2026, including all important dates, can be found [here](#).

Possible Amendments

- I reserve the right to change this syllabus, with fair warning, at any time.