

METAPHYSICS: ONTOLOGY

Philosophy 415, Spring 2021
Online, M/Th 9:50–11:10

Description

This course will be about ontology, the study of what exists. After a brief introduction to ontology in general, we will discuss two ontological questions: the question of constitution and the question of composition. Then we will turn to “metaontology”, the question of what ontological questions are all about.

Prerequisite

Two prior courses in philosophy.

Readings

All readings will be posted on the Canvas site:

<https://rutgers.instructure.com/courses/106521>

Requirements

Four papers, worth 10%, 20%, 30%, and 40% of your grade, respectively. Papers must be turned in via Canvas by the start of class on the due date. Late papers will be penalized as described in the lateness policy. (Short version: two day grace-period with no lateness penalty; 2.5 points per day subsequently; exceptions only for documented serious circumstances; technological mistakes are not excuses.) Your work must be solely your own; plagiarism will be reported to the office of academic integrity.

Learning goals

Students will gain an in-depth understanding of ontology and metaontology, and by wrestling with cutting-edge journal articles on the subject, will develop skills in philosophical analysis and writing.

Tentative schedule (All readings on Canvas.)

Introduction to Ontology

1/21 Quine, “On What There Is”

1/25 Lewis and Lewis, “Holes”

Constitution

1/28 Two-thing-ism: Wiggins, “On Being in the Same Place at the Same Time”

2/1 Many-thing-ism: Bennett, “Spatio-Temporal Coincidence and the Grounding Problem”

2/4 Temporal parts: Quine, “Identity, Ostension, and Hypostasis”, section 1

2/8 catch-up

2/11 Composition as identity: Wallace, “Composition as Identity, Part 1”

2/15 Bundle theory: Paul, “Coincidence as Overlap”

2/18 Eliminativism: van Inwagen, *Material Beings* pp. 124–9

2/22 catch-up

Composition

2/25 The special composition question: Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings*, chapters 1–3

3/1 Universalism: Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, pp. 211–13

3/4 Organicism: van Inwagen, *Material Beings*, pp. 81–2; 98–114.

3/8 catch-up

Metaontology

- 3/11 Internal vs External: Carnap, “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology”
- 3/22 Quantifier variance: Hirsch, “Quantifier variance and realism”
- 3/25 Quantifier variance: Hirsch, “Against Revisionary Ontology”
- 3/29 catch-up
- 4/1 Easy ontology: Thomasson, *Ontology Made Easy*, pp. 20–2; 82–126
- 4/5 ...continued
- 4/8 Ontological realism: Sider, *Writing the Book of the World*, pp. 1–8, 44–7, 67–72, 166–97 (but *skip* sections 9.5.1 and 9.6.1).
- 4/12 ...continued
- 4/15 ...continued
- 4/19 Entity grounding: Schaffer, “On What Grounds What”
- 4/22 ...continued
- 4/26 Fine, “The Question of Ontology”
- 4/29 ...continued
- 5/3 catch-up