

Topics in Metaphysics: Being and Beings

Place: TBD

Time: TBD

Instructor: Eric de Araujo

Office: TBD

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Office Hours: TBD

Texts & Materials

Fragmentation of Being, Kris McDaniel

Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology, Edited by David Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman

[Possibly] *The Question of Ontology: The Contemporary Debate*, Edited by Javier Cumpa

In addition to the above books, we will be reading and discussing several journal articles. These will be made available on the course website.

Course Description

In “On What There Is,” Quine famously wrote that “to be is, purely and simply, to be the value of a variable.” One way of taking this is to think that existence is univocal. This has been a dominant view in metaphysics. However, the promotion of ontological pluralism by philosophers like Kris McDaniel and Jason Turner has challenged this assumption. In this course, we will explore the positive case(s) for ontological pluralism, the objections to it, and some of the related issues in recent meta-metaphysics debates.

Course Goals & Objectives

A. You will be able to articulate debates about ontological pluralism and metametaphysics by:

Distinguishing metaphysical debates from metametaphysical debates, articulating the main positions in particular debates, restating objections to particular views.

B. You will be able to comprehend and critique others' metaphysical and metametaphysical views by:

Identifying the main conclusion of others' arguments, identifying the support given for a conclusion, evaluating the arguments of others, representing the logical structure of arguments, and determining what evidence is relevant to a conclusion.

C. You will be able to present the metaphysical and metametaphysical views of others:

Identifying the main conclusions of others' arguments, identifying the support given for a conclusion, evaluating the arguments of others, representing the logical structure of arguments, and summarizing arguments for others.

D. You will be able to contribute to metaphysical and metametaphysical debates by:

Identifying the main conclusion of others' arguments, identifying the support given for a conclusion, evaluating the arguments of others, summarizing arguments for others, constructing an original argument, and anticipating and defending views from objections.

Schedule

Here is the schedule we hope to follow. The first table lists the topics and associated readings.. You should read the material before the first day of discussion. Journal entries are due at the beginning of class. The second table lists when major assignments are due. The schedule is subject to change as the course progresses.

Schedule of Readings

Reading	Day
"Ways of Being," Joshua Spencer, in <i>Philosophy Compass</i>	1
Chapters 1 & 2 in <i>Fragmentation of Being</i>	2
Chapters 3 & 4 in <i>Fragmentation of Being</i>	3
Chapter 4 in <i>Metametaphysics</i>	4
Chapter 8 in <i>Metametaphysics</i>	5
Chapter 13 in <i>Metametaphysics</i>	6
Chapter 16 in <i>Metametaphysics</i>	7
Chapter 17 in <i>Metametaphysics</i>	8
"Metaphysically Indeterminate Existence," Elizabeth Barnes, in <i>Philosophical Studies</i>	9
"A Problem for Ontological Pluralism and a Half-Meinongian Solution," Michele Paolini Paoletti, in <i>Philosophia</i>	10
<i>Presentations (No Readings)</i>	11
	12

“The Only Way To Be,” Trenton Merricks, in <i>Noûs</i>	13
“Pluralism and The Problem of Purity,” David Builes, in <i>Analysis</i>	14

Schedule of Assignments

Day	Major Assignment Due	Goals
Throughout	Presentation on Reading	C
2	Pre-Course Reflection Paper	D
10	Essay Draft	B, D
11–12	Essay Presentations	C, D
12	Peer Review	B
14	Post-Course Reflection Paper	D
Exam Week	Essay Revision	B, D

Grading

<i>Journal</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>Essays</i>	<i>45%</i>
<i>Course Reflections</i>	<i>5%</i>	<i>Draft of Essay</i>	<i>5%</i>
<i>Reading Entries</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>Peer Review of Paper</i>	<i>5%</i>
<i>Participation</i>	<i>35%</i>	<i>Revision of Essay</i>	<i>35%</i>
Presentation on Reading	15%		
Essay Presentation	15%		
Class Participation	5%		

Course Mechanics

The course turns to the reading and examination of philosophical texts right away. We will read and reflect on arguments throughout the course with journal entries and presentations on the readings. Participation in our class discussion will prepare you to develop your own views for the essay. We will prepare a draft, present our papers to the class, provide feedback on the paper and presentation, and revise our drafts in light of the feedback.

Discussion

Doing philosophy is like having a conversation on a topic with a lot of people. This makes in class discussion a great way to practice doing philosophy. Discussion is an opportunity for you to ask questions about the reading, offer your own views and criticisms, and respond to the views of your peers. My job is to make the views we are looking at clear to the class and to facilitate a dialogue between you, your peers, and the philosophers we are reading.

I want everyone to grow more comfortable contributing to our in-class discussions. Trying out your ideas with your peers helps improve them. I will offer several ways for you to participate. These will range from large discussions with the whole class to conversations with a partner. In an effort to give everyone an opportunity to participate, I am open to trying different things so that everyone can make a contribution. Again, please contact me if there are any concerns about your contributions to the class.

Journal: Reading Entries

To help you prepare for our discussions, we will be writing short entries in a journal for each reading. The goal of this habit is to help you 1) complete the readings for our discussion, 2) react to what we read, and 3) begin formulating your views.

Reading entries are 1 page, submitted online, and due before class starts. They should engage with the text, rather than merely summarize the reading. I will provide more thorough feedback on earlier entries to indicate the quality of these entries.

Journal: Course Reflections

These reflection papers are an opportunity for you to reflect your own views. The initial paper is an opportunity for you to think about what ontological pluralism and metametaphysics is, what you hope to learn, or what views you might already have. The last paper is an opportunity for you to reflect on how your thinking has been shaped, if at all, by the course.

Reading Presentations

As part of their research, philosophers summarize and provide criticism of others' work. With essay presentations, we will practice doing this in a way that jumpstarts our class discussions.

You will be assigned a reading to present on. You will be responsible for summarizing the main moves in the reading, offering some criticism, and providing questions for the class to discuss. The presentation should last between 20–30 minutes. If you choose to let others engage during your presentation, it will stretch a bit longer (but this is entirely optional).

A draft or outline of the presentation will be uploaded to the course website 2 days before class. This will allow me to incorporate your insights and questions into the class discussion after you present.

Essay: Peer Review, Presentation, & Revision

Much of the dialogue in philosophy today is done through presenting and publishing papers. I want you to be able to contribute to the philosophical dialogue by writing and presenting your own papers. Like the presentation and revision process in academic publishing, we will have a presentation and revision process with the paper you write for this course.

You will upload a draft of your paper to the course website midway through the semester. I will assign you another student's draft to review and provide feedback on. Additionally, I will give you feedback on your drafts.

You will then give a 20 minute presentation on your paper to the class. Your peers will provide feedback on your argument and presentation. This will give you multiple sources of feedback to improve your paper for its final draft.

Office Hours

Office hours tend to be an underutilized resource (unless something is due soon). You are welcome to come and chat about anything related to the course or even philosophy in general. Office hours can be a good way to clear up misconceptions and better understand how you are doing in the course. I will make an effort to find a time to meet if you cannot make it to the scheduled times.

Policies

[I aim to keep policies consistent across courses. See the syllabi for previously taught courses for a list of my policies.]