

Metaphysics
Philosophy 2580
Fall 2011

Instructor: Chris Tillman
Time and Location: MWF 11:30-12:20, 202 SJC
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This course is an introduction to metaphysics, the branch of philosophy that aims to comprehensively describe the world at a fundamental and abstract level. Metaphysical questions include: Are people's actions determined? Do people have free will? What is the nature of physical objects? Do any things other than physical objects (for example numbers, properties, events, God) exist? What is the nature of time and space? Can anything from the present time cause things to happen in the past? What is the nature of persons? Are persons physical objects? How can any thing, including persons, survive change? What does it mean to say that a certain state of affairs is necessary or possible? What is causation? What is a law of nature?

We will focus on challenges to commonsense views about what things there are (commonsense ontology). Roughly, commonsense ontology includes posits of the sciences along with everyday ordinary objects. According to it, atoms, cats, tables, people and planets exist. Nihilists reject commonsense ontology. For a variety of reasons, nihilists hold that there are *less* things in the world than the commonsense view supposes. Permissivists also reject commonsense ontology. But not because permissivists hold that there are less things than countenanced by commonsense. Rather, permissivists hold that there are *more* things in the world than the commonsense view supposes. According to permissivists, in addition to atoms, cats, tables, people, and planets, there is a thing composed only of your eyeballs, the contents of Obama's pockets, six Cheetos, and the sun. While our focus will be on whether the commonsense view can be sustained in the face of challenges, we will also discuss parthood, identity, vagueness, and a bit about causation and persistence (how things manage to survive change).

Requirements

1. Regular attendance and participation in class discussion. *It is a class requirement that you attend class.* You will be penalized for unexcused absences. What counts as a legitimate excuse is solely at my discretion. (10%)
2. Several short reading quizzes. (15%)
3. Three essays (20%), (25%), and (30%), respectively.

Course Weblog

I have set up a course weblog at <http://metaphysics2580.blogspot.com/>. The main purpose of the blog is to advance discussion of topic raised in the readings and in class. Often people who are shy find it difficult to contribute in class. More often you may think of a point or a question after class is over or after we have moved on to a different topic. The blog is the place to raise that point or question. **Extra credit** is available for substantive blog posts and for substantive comments on blog posts that exceed the ordinary participation requirement. I will need your preferred email address to invite you to join the blog. I should stress that you can pick your own username to ensure your privacy, provided you inform me what that username is.

Course Schedule (Tentative)

Ancient Problems with Commonsense Ontology

Conee, Earl and Theodore Sider. 2005. "Constitution." In Conee and Sider *Riddles of Existence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 134-153.

Rea, Michael. 1995. "The Problem of Material Constitution." *Philosophical Review* 104(4): 525-552.

Nihilism

van Inwagen, Peter. 1993. "Precis of *Material Beings*." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53(3): 683-686.

Merricks, Trenton. 2003. "Precis of *Objects and Persons*." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 67: 700-703.

Sider, Theodore. Ms. "Against Parthood."

Rosen, Gideon and Cian Dorr. 2002. "Composition as a Fiction." In Gale, Richard. Ed. *The Blackwell Guide to Metaphysics*. Oxford: Blackwell. Pp. 151-174.

Against Nihilism

Sider, Theodore. 2001. *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time*. Oxford: Clarendon. Pp. 176-180.

Sider, Theodore. 1993. "Van Inwagen and the Possibility of Gunk". *Analysis* 53: 285-289.

Sider, Theodore. 2003. "What's So Bad about Overdetermination?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 67: 719-726.

Schaffer, Jonathan. 2007. "From Nihilism to Monism." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 85(2): 175-191.

Uzquiano, Gabriel. 2004. "Plurals and Simples." *The Monist* 87(3): 429-451.

McGrath, Matt. 2005. "No Objects, No Problem?" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83: 457-486.

Korman, Dan. 2009. "Eliminativism and the Challenge from Folk Belief." *Nous*.

Korman, Dan. Ms. "The Language of the Ontology Room."

Commonsense Ontology

Markosian, Ned. 1998. "Brutal Composition." *Philosophical Studies* 92: 211-249.

Markosian, Ned. 2008. "Restricted Composition." In Sider, Theodore, John Hawthorne, and Dean Zimmerman (Eds). *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Contemporary Debates in Philosophy 10. Malden, MA: Blackwell. Pp. 341-363.

Problems for Commonsense Ontology

Hawthorne, John. 2006. *Metaphysical Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. Vii; 109.

Cartwright, Richard. 1975. "Scattered Objects". In Kim, Jaegwon and Ernest Sosa (Eds.) 1999. *Metaphysics: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sider, Theodore. 2001. *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time*. Oxford: Clarendon. Pp. 120-132.

Permissivism

Universalism:

Rea, Michael. 1998. "In Defense of Mereological Universalism." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58: 347-360.

van Cleve, James. 2008. "The Moon and Sixpence: A Defense of Mereological Universalism." In Sider, Theodore, John Hawthorne, and Dean Zimmerman (Eds). *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Contemporary Debates in Philosophy 10. Malden, MA: Blackwell. Pp. 321-340.

See also Sider, Cartwright, and Hawthorne.

Diachronic Universalism:

Sider, Theodore. *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time*. Oxford: Clarendon. Pp. 132-139.

Plenitude:

Hawthorne, John. 2006. *Metaphysical Essays*. Oxford: OUP. Pp. 53.

Eklund, Matti. 2008. "The Picture of Reality as an Amorphous Lump." In Sider, Theodore, John Hawthorne, and Dean Zimmerman (Eds). *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Contemporary Debates in Philosophy 10. Malden, MA: Blackwell. Pp. 382-396. Section 4.

Bennett, Karen. 2004. "Spatiotemporal Coincidence and the Grounding Problem." *Philosophical Studies* 118: 339-371. Section 4.

Constitutionalism:

Thomson, Judith. 1983. "Parthood and Identity Across Time." *The Journal of Philosophy* 80: 201-220. Section 6.

Thomson, Judith. 1998. "The Statue and the Clay." *Nous* 32: 149-173.

Johnston, Mark. 1992. "Constitution Is Not Identity." *Mind* 101: 89-105.

Johnston, Mark. 2006. "Hylomorphism." *The Journal of Philosophy* 103: 652-698. Section 8

Same-Kind Permissivism:

Fine, Kit. 2000. "A Counterexample to Locke's Thesis." *The Monist* 83: 357-361.

Johnston, Mark. 2006. "Hylomorphism." *The Journal of Philosophy* 103: 652-698. Sec. 9-10.

Against Permissivism

Carmichael, Chad. Forthcoming. "Vague Composition Without Vague Existence." *Nous*.

Korman, Dan. 2008. "Unrestricted Composition and Restricted Quantification." *Philosophical Studies* 140: 319-334.

Korman, Dan. 2010a. "The Argument from Vagueness." *Philosophical Compass* 5: 891-901.

Korman, Dan. 2010b. "Strange Kinds, Familiar Kinds, and the Charge of Arbitrariness." *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* 5: 119-144.

Uzquiano, Gabriel. 2006. "The Price of Universality." *Philosophical Studies* 129: 137-169.