

PHI513: Recent and Contemporary Philosophy Fall 2020

An Opinionated Overview of Ontology

Mark Johnston
Henry Putnam University Professor
Director of the Program in Cognitive Studies
Princeton University

Zooming on Thursdays 1:30-4.20 pm for 12 weeks, beginning September 3rd. (Class zoom number 980 2685 9023)

Ontological confusions have deformed contemporary discussions in ethics, philosophy of mind and philosophy of religion. This is a course in ontology, aiming to help students become familiar with the contemporary literature, and see their way beyond it.

Syllabus (Further readings to be added)

The seminar will be structured around six two week units, chosen from the following eight topics, in response to student interest. The first week of a unit will familiarize students with the dominant issues in the literature. The second week will explore things a little more deeply.

Unit 1: Particulars and Properties

The historical revival of ontology in the 20th century. “The” Problem of Universals and the ground of predication. Truth supervenes on being. Ostrich Nominalism. Family Resemblance. Natural Properties. The Trope Theory.

Reading for First Class

David Lewis “New Work For A Theory of Universals” 1983.

Other Reading

Johnston, Mark *Particulars and Persistence* 1984.

Egan, Andy Second-Order Predication and the Metaphysics of Properties
Australasian Journal of Philosophy 82 (1):48-66 (2004)

Moltmann, Friederike (2007). Events, tropes, and truthmaking. *Philosophical Studies* 134 (3):363-403.

McDaniel, Kris (2001). Tropes and ordinary physical objects. *Philosophical Studies* 104 (3):269-290.

Moltmann, Friederike (2004). Properties and kinds of tropes: New linguistic facts and old philosophical insights. *Mind* 113 (449):1-41.

Levinson, Jerrold (2006). Why there are no tropes. *Philosophy* 81 (4):563-580.

Parsons, Terence (1991). Tropes and Supervenience. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 51 (3):629 - 632.

Hochberg, Herbert (1992). Troubles with tropes. *Philosophical Studies* 67 (2):193 - 195.

Bacon, J. (2007). Review: If Tropes. *Mind* 116 (462):459-462.

Fisher, A. R. J. (2020). Abstracta and Abstraction in Trope Theory. *Philosophical Papers* 49 (1):41-67.

Johnston, Mark (2006) Better Than Mere Knowledge? The Function of Sensory Awareness in John Hawthorne & Tamar Gendler (eds.), *Perceptual Experience* Oxford University Press. pp. 260--290 (2006)

Johnston, Mark (2011). On a neglected epistemic virtue. *Philosophical Issues* 21 (1):165-218.

Nanay, Bence (2012). Perceiving tropes. *Erkenntnis* 77 (1):1-14
1:30-4:20pm

Egan, Andy Second-Order Predication and the Metaphysics of Properties
Australasian Journal of Philosophy 82 (1):48-66 (2004)

Moving beyond the dominant themes in the literature on particulars and properties. Editorial Nominalism. Better, it's particularism, not nominalism! Detach particularism from trope theory understood as a one-category ontology. Why there really aren't any properties. Red is not the property of being red, etc., etc. What to learn from the trope theory, even if historically it has been misused—cases of essence kinds are more fundamental than property instantiations. Basic (substances) and non-basic cases (modes). Types and tokens, kinds and cases are all particulars.

Unit 2: Identity Over Time and Across Worlds

Numerical identity versus qualitative identity. Counterpart theory. Endurance/perdurance—what was the original distinction? 3D-ism, 4D-ism, 5-dism. Real processes considered at different scales versus weak continuants. The stage view. Fission and fusion. The only a and b principle. The “invidious distinction” between essence and accident. Accidental unities versus substances.

Reading for Class

David Lewis “Survival and Identity”, “Counterpart Theory and Modal Logic”, “Counterparts of Persons and their Bodies”,

Penny Mackie “Transworld Identity” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
Sider, Theodore (1996). All the World's a Stage. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (3):433 - 453.

Alex Kaiserman “Stage theory and the personite problem”
Analysis 79 (2):215-222 (2019)

Other Reading

Salmon, Nathan (1986). Modal Paradox: Parts and Counterparts, Points and Counterpoints. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 11 (1):75-120.
Katherine Hawley *How Things Persist* OUP 2001
Merricks, Trenton (2003). Review of Katherine Hawley's *How Things Persist*. *Mind* 112 (445):146-148.
Hansson Wahlberg, Tobias (2008). Can I be an Instantaneous Stage and yet Persist Through Time? *Metaphysica* 9 (2):235-239.
Wright, Stephen (2010). The Leibniz's Law Problem. *Metaphysica* 11 (2):137-151.
Viebahn, Emanuel (2013). Counting Stages. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 91 (2):311-324.

Moving beyond the dominant themes in the literature on identity. The deep problem with continuity theories of identity over time. Just what is required to have an essence? Modal realism aside, why Saul Kripke and David Lewis were both right, but about different kinds of particulars. Fission again. Higher-order individuals.

Unit 3: Constitution

Is constitution identity? Co-occupancy, the spork, etc., etc. Burke on dominant sortals. Can there be two Fs in the same place at the same time? Karen Bennett on the grounding problem. Peter Van Inwagen on constitution. Analyses of the concept of constitution by Judith Thomson and Lynne Baker Rudder. Nihilism about constitution. A thing's immediate independent parts as its immediate constitution.

Reading for Class

Thomson, Judith Jarvis (1998). The statue and the clay. *Noûs* 32 (2):149-173.
Baker, Lynne Rudder (1997). Why constitution is not identity. *Journal of Philosophy* 94 (12):599-621.
Johnston, Mark (1992). Constitution is not identity. *Mind* 101 (401):89-106.
Burke, Michael B. (1994). Preserving the principle of one object to a place: A novel account of the relations among objects, sorts, sortals, and persistence conditions. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 54 (3):591-624.
Bennett, K. (2004). Material coincidence and the grounding problem. *Philosophical Studies*, 118(3), 339-371.

Other Reading

Hudson, Hud (2000). On constitution and all-fusions. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 81 (3):237-245.
Burke, Michael B. (1994). Dion and theon: An essentialist solution to an ancient puzzle. *Journal of Philosophy* 91 (3):129-139.

Burke, Michael B. (1992). Copper Statues and Pieces of Copper: A Challenge to the Standard Account. *Analysis* 52 (1):12 - 17.

deRosset, Louis (2011). What is the Grounding Problem? *Philosophical Studies* 156 (2):173-197.

Torrenzo, Giuliano (2013). The Grounding Problem and Presentist Explanations. *Synthese* 190 (12):2047-2063.

Précis of sameness and substance renewed David Wiggins
Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 71 (2):442-448 (2005)

Sameness and Substance Renewed Brian Weatherston
Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews 2002 (9) (2002)

Moving beyond the dominant themes in the literature on constitution. Seven ways of being ontological trash. Nihilism and trash. The contemporary fixation on vagueness has masked a more interesting phenomenon, one which is wholly ontological.

Unit 4: Stuff, Kinds, Magnitudes and Qualities

Objects versus stuff. Natural kinds. Is The Natural Kind a natural kind? Are particular examples or cases of natural kinds essentially so? Are natural kinds and non-trashy or “pristine” particulars “reference magnets”? What then is the strength of the magnetic field, i.e. how much in the way of descriptive mismatch can it overcome? What was Scott Soames’s problem about rigidly designating natural kinds? Wholly manifest, partly manifest and wholly occult kinds. Is water a wholly occult kind? Magnitudes and their measures.

Moving beyond the dominant themes in the literature. The Tiger, Tigricity and the property of being a tiger. The property mistake. Red and the property of being red.

Unit 5: The Nature of Experience

Four basic facts about experience: (i) it provides us with more than mere seemings, (ii) it introduces subjects to hosts of new topics of thought and talk, (iii) it can introduce a subject to a new topic of thought and talk without the subject relying upon such attributive (in the sense of Keith Donnellan) definite descriptions as “the dominant external explanatory cause of this experience, whatever it is” (iv) it can provide a subject with a new topic of thought and talk even on the basis of an illusory presentation of the item in question. The argument from hallucination to a narrowly supervening mental state understood as a common factor in the seamless transition from a veridical to a hallucinatory experience. The sense data view, the content view and the adverbial view. The obscure object of hallucination. Objections to the dispositional view of sensible qualities due to Paul Boghossian, David Velleman and Colin McGinn.

Moving beyond the dominant themes in the literature. Is there really an adverbial view? If red is not the property of being red what is it? Mosaics as qualitative modes of presentation, expanses as constituent elements of mosaics revealed by the change

in visual focus characteristic of the “painterly attitude”. How expanses differ from sense data. Colors and visual shapes as expanse types. The confusion in the objections to the dispositional view of being red.

Unit 6: The Mind-Body Problem

Functionalism. Type/token Identity, Supervenience. Token identity. Does Davidson’s argument for token identity leave mental properties impotent? What if there really aren’t properties? Grounding accounts of reduction. Reductive naturalism as a grounding thesis. The Mary Problem versus type and token identity physicalism.

Moving beyond the dominant themes in the literature. (i) So deployed, the Mary problem rests on a category mistake, the mistake embodied in the idea of qualia, i.e. the idea that qualities are mental. Not even pain is a mental quality. There are no mental fields such as the visual field or the body field or the auditory field. The real problem behind the confused invocation of qualia is a problem about sensory intentionality, which reveals something of the nature of qualities. There is no naturalistic ontological reduction of intentionality. (ii) The paradox of reduction. Weren’t the identity theorists partly eliminativists.

Unit 7: Objective Prescriptivity

Can reality contain objective prescriptions? Is the objection to wanton cruelty, racism, sexism and winnerism (the Aristotelian view that the interests of the winners in the acquisition of power, wealth and virtue count uppermost) just some sophisticated meta-ethical riff on the fact that we don’t like these things? What is the ontological basis for the historically novel view of a universal moral status, i.e. the idea that *everyone’s* real interests count equally? Does building that idea into the concept of morality, either directly—or indirectly as in Tim Scanlon’s account of what *anyone* can reasonably object to—simply highlight the question of why we should be universalists?

Readings

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy “The Grounds of Moral Status” Agnieszka Jaworska and Julie Tannenbaum

Leiter, Brian (2019). The Death of God and the Death of Morality. *The Monist* 102 (3):386-402.

Leiter, Brian (2013). Moralities are a sign-language of the affects. *Social Philosophy and Policy* 30 (1-2):237-258.

Moving beyond the dominant themes in the literature on universal moral status: Does ontological naturalism itself undermine the practical viability of the idea of a universal moral status?

