

Metametaphysics and Ontology

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This course has two main aims. The first is to introduce students to various issues in ontology: the part of metaphysics that seeks to answer the question of which entities and which kinds of entities exist. In particular, we will look at debates about whether *mathematical* entities (such as numbers, functions, sets, etc) exist, and debates about when various objects compose a whole of which they are a part.

The second aim is to examine metaontology: the area of philosophy that reflects on ontological debates. For instance, we will discuss questions like the following: What does it mean to say that such-and-such an entity exists? Are there any objective facts about existence, or do existence-claims involve some subjective contribution (a "way of carving up the world" or "conceptual scheme")? What kinds of considerations could possibly resolve ontological disputes?

Philosophers we are likely to read include Quine, Putnam, van Inwagen, Lewis, Field, Carnap, Sider, and Thomasson.

Part One: Case Studies

Week 1: **Case study: mereology**

Lewis: *On the Plurality of Worlds*, pp. 211-3

Sider: 'Van Inwagen and the Possibility of Gunk'

Dorr & Rosen: 'Composition as a Fiction'

Week 2: **Case study: abstracta**

Field: *Science Without Numbers*, second edition (Preface to the First Edition & Preliminary Remarks)

Colyvan: *The Indispensability of Mathematics* (Chapters 1 and 4)

Quine's letter to Field, in *Science Without Numbers* (pp. 55-6)

Week 3: **Case study: material objects**

van Inwagen: 'Four-Dimensional Objects'

Sider: *Four-Dimensionalism* (Chapter 1)

Part Two: Ontology and Existence

Week 4: **Quinean orthodoxy**

Quine: 'On What There Is'

van Inwagen: 'Being, Existence, and Ontological Commitment' (in *Metametaphysics*)

Week 5: **Existence predicates and Meinongianism**

Fine: 'The Question of Ontology' (in *Metametaphysics*)

Parsons: 'Are There Nonexistent Objects?'

Part Three: The Substantivity of Ontological Disputes

Week 6: **Lightweight and heavyweight ontological commitment**

Carnap: 'Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology'

Eklund: 'Carnap and Ontological Pluralism' (in *Metametaphysics*)

Week 7: **Quantifier variance**

Hirsch and Warren: 'Quantifier Variance'

Putnam: 'Truth and Convention: On Davidson's Refutation of Conceptual Relativism'

Hirsch: 'Quantifier Variance and Realism'

Week 8: **Worries for quantifier variance**

Hawthorne: 'Superficialism in Ontology' (in *Metametaphysics*)

Hirsch: 'Three Degrees of Carnapian Tolerance', section 5.2

Rossberg: 'On the Logic of Quantifier Variance'

Warren: 'Quantifier Variance and the Collapse Argument'

Week 9: **Easy ontology and its critics**

Thomasson: 'Carnap and the Prospects for Easy Ontology'

*Dummett: 'Nominalism'

MacBride: 'Neo-Fregean Metaontology: Don't Ask Too Many Questions'

Week 10: **Metaphysical naturalness and metaphysical structure**

Lewis: 'Putnam's Paradox'

Sider: 'Ontological Realism' (in *Metametaphysics*)

*Sider: *Writing the Book of the World* (Chs 1, 5, 6)

Week 11: **Worries for naturalness and structure**

Hirsch: 'Language, Ontology, and Structure', section V

Warren: 'Sider on the Epistemology of Structure'

*Donaldson: 'Reading the Book of the World'

*Dorr: 'Reading Writing the Book of the World'

Week 12: **Grounding and its critics**

Rosen: 'Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction'

Schaffer: 'On What Grounds What' (in *Metametaphysics*)

Sider: *Writing the Book of the World* (Ch 8)

*Fine: 'The Question of Realism'

*Hofwever, 'Ambitious, Yet Modest, Metaphysics' (in *Metametaphysics*)