

# Seminar in Metaphysics

Philosophy 560  
Tuesdays 4:30–7pm, January 12 – April 26, 2016  
MHP 102, University of Southern California

## Instructors

Shieva Kleinschmidt  
[kleinsch@usc.edu](mailto:kleinsch@usc.edu)

**Office Hours**  
Stonier Hall 226  
Tuesdays 2:00–3:00pm & by appt

Jeff Russell  
[jeff.russell@usc.edu](mailto:jeff.russell@usc.edu)

**Office Hours**  
Stonier Hall 227  
Tuesdays 12:30–2pm & by appt

## Course Description

This course will be taught in two parts.

The first part (led by Shieva) will focus on Persistence, Location, and Mereology. We will begin by asking how things persist across time. This will lead us to more general questions about how entities are located in space and time, and which sorts of parts things have. We will then examine particular theories of Mereology and Location, theories about how these are related, and implications of and complications with these views. There are two goals for the content of these lectures: to give you a broad enough overview of these debates that you can turn around and use the material in teaching Metaphysics to undergraduates, and to work through the details enough to enable you to meaningfully engage in these debates in your own research.

The second part of the course (led by Jeff) will be about ways in which ontology might be “up to us”. There are two different strands here. One is the idea that what there is may depend on how we conceptually carve things up, and be subject to our own choices or stipulations. The second strand is that we human beings are ourselves part of what there is, and apparently form various kinds and groups. What is the status of these “superhuman” entities? Are there any such things as communities, institutions, races, or genders? In what sense (if any) are these aspects of the human world part of “objective” reality?

## Objectives

- To give you broad enough knowledge of some debates in metaphysics to be able to teach those topics
- To give you in-depth knowledge of cutting-edge work on these topics
- To help you develop original responses to that work, producing new conference-length papers
- To practice contributing to other people's philosophical projects, both in informal collegial discussion, and by providing detailed, constructive, critical commentary

## Requirements

Over the course of the semester you will be developing a research paper in metaphysics suitable for presentation at philosophy conferences. The requirements for this class are designed to help you through the process of coming up with an idea and developing that idea into a polished contribution to a conversation among professional metaphysicians.

You should start working on this the very first week of the semester. That means you'll be looking for a paper subject before we have discussed very much metaphysics at all. You should look ahead through the syllabus (right now!) for a topic you find interesting that you may want to write about, and start doing background reading. Of course you can change your mind, and of course you needn't have an idea for the paper yet. The ideas will come as you read on the topic; your first task is just to choose a topic you think you will find interesting. You can get feedback on your ideas during the research report part of the seminar, and by coming to our office hours or making another appointment. We encourage you to meet with us to hash out the very rough thoughts you have as you're looking for ideas, as well as later in the process.

Paper topics which are only loosely connected to the main seminar topics are often fine, but you should discuss them with one or both of us well in advance of any deadlines.

At the end of the semester we will all present our final work in a "mock APA meeting", simulating the setting of a typical professional philosophy conference. In addition to presenting your own research, you will also present comments on another student's work, and participate in Q&A for each session.

The course requirements which will be graded are as follows. There are more details about each requirement below.

| <i>Requirement</i>             | <i>Weight</i> | <i>Due</i>                               |
|--------------------------------|---------------|--|
| <b>Seminar discussion</b>      | 10%           | weekly                                   |
| <b>12 research reports</b>     | 20%           | weekly                                   |
| <b>Proposal</b>                | 5%            | 4:30pm, Tuesday, March 22                |
| <b>Draft</b>                   | 5%            | 5pm Friday, April 8, to your commentator |
| <b>Comments</b>                | 5%            | 5pm Friday, April 15, to author          |
| <b>Conference presentation</b> | 20%           | Tuesday, April 19 & Tuesday, April 26    |
| <b>Final draft</b>             | 35%           | 5pm, Monday, May 9                       |

## Seminar Discussion

Each seminar meeting will be divided into two (or sometimes three) parts.

The first part of each seminar meeting will be a metaphysics working group. Each of you will give an informal 5–15 minute presentation (including time for feedback from others). More details below.

In the second half of each seminar meeting, Shieva or Jeff will present on a topic in metaphysics. You should be prepared for this by carefully reading and thinking about the assigned reading. You should ask questions, raise objections, and contribute your own ideas.

We will also spend time discussing how to successfully write conference papers and journal articles, and we will sometimes do group exercises aimed at developing writing or presentation skills.

## Research Reports

You will give weekly research reports (except for the first week and the last two weeks). Each report has two components.

- An informal **5–15 minute presentation** (including time for discussion). Usually this will consist of summarizing an article or chapter that you have read in the course of looking for paper ideas, and commenting on what you think the piece is doing and how it might help your work. (This should not be one of the required course readings.) Later in the course, this may instead take the form of a proposed outline for your paper (or some part of your paper).

- **Two** hard copies of a **one-page** response paper. (If you wish, you can also provide copies for the rest of the class as a handout. Copies can be made in the philosophy department office.) We will not usually provide written feedback on these response papers, but you are welcome to discuss them with either or both of us.

The main point of this is to help you prepare and focus your presentation. A response paper should typically include (i) a statement of the central thesis of the article or chapter you are discussing, (ii) a synopsis of some central, interesting argument made in that piece (preferably as a premise/conclusion outline), and (iii) a (brief!) comment either evaluating the argument, or discussing how it might relate to your own project. It's fine for this to be in bullet-point format, rather than pretty prose.

Students auditing the course are also encouraged do both components of these weekly research reports.

## Proposal

Immediately after spring break you should turn in a proposal describing in detail the final paper that you intend to write. This should be about 1,000 words. Your proposal should at a minimum provide the following:

- A statement of the main thesis that you intend to defend.
- Explanation of the background which is necessary for understanding what that thesis says, and why it is intellectually interesting. (What debates would this thesis advance, if it is true?)
- An outline of the argument you intend to give for this thesis.

It is perfectly fine for your ideas to change from what your proposal says: your proposal is in no way a binding commitment. But you should turn in something that is a genuinely useful step toward the final project.

## Draft

Each of you will comment on someone else's work in our final conference. You will provide a draft of your own paper to your commentator about two weeks before the conference. This draft should be basically complete and clear, but it does not need to be completely polished. It should be a suitable length for a 25 minute presentation. (This is probably a bit shorter than the final draft you'll turn in. If there are parts of your draft that you won't have time to present, you should indicate this clearly to your commentator.)

Note that it is generally rude to your commentator to make major changes between the version that they see and the version that you present: they may have put substantial work into responding to the original version of your ideas, and you don't want to make

that work look bad, or put them in the position of needing to substantially revise it at the last minute. That said, sometimes changes can be appropriate so long as they are sufficiently small, and you clear them in advance with your commentator. (Sometimes you just have to present something you don't think is right anymore, and let the issues come out in comments and Q&A.)

## Comments

You will write comments responding to someone else's paper draft. These should be suitable for a 10 minute presentation. As a commentator, you should provide a draft of your comments to the paper author a few days before the conference presentation. Comments should exemplify the following virtues.

- **Charity.** Try to understand and reply to the best version of the author's idea. If there are points that didn't come across clearly, or which involve slips of precision or care, your job is to help make the author's ideas clearer, more precise, and more careful, rather than trying to pin the author to the letter of what they wrote. It is also appropriate to ask clarifying questions in your commentary.
- **Helpfulness.** Try to "get inside" the author's project and think about how to advance it, rather than merely trying to undercut it.
- **Substantiveness.** You should try to help improve the paper by identifying the places where it is weak (always bearing in mind the first two virtues!). Raising important objections, especially those the author may not have thought about, is part of your job. Trying to identify promising responses to those objections is also good. So is highlighting points the author made that you think are especially valuable.

It is good practice for authors and commentators to have a brief informal discussion in person at some point before your conference presentation. This gives you a chance to sort out any misunderstandings before you're on the spot.

## Conference Presentation

You will have three different roles in our conference: as a presenter of your own paper, as a commentator on someone else's paper, and as a participant in each Q&A session. The format of each session will be a 25 minute paper presentation, a 10 minute presentation of comments, a 5 minute response, and 15 minutes for Q&A. (This format is subject to change depending on scheduling.) We will also invite other members of the philosophy department to attend these sessions and participate in Q&A.

You will receive feedback on both the content of your work and on your presentation style, time management, handout preparation, and visuals.

The norms listed here are worth contemplating: <http://consc.net/norms.html>

## Final Draft

The final draft of your seminar paper will be due at the end of the semester, after you have had a chance to think about and respond to the feedback you received from the conference. The target length for your final draft is about 4,000 words, excluding footnotes and bibliography. Our hope is that this paper will be suitable for submitting to philosophy conferences, and perhaps eventually to journals.

## Course Texts

Almost all of our reading will consist of papers that will be emailed to you. However, we will also be reading chapters from the following books (boldface indicating required reading). You should buy Simons' book, as we'll be reading three chapters from it. For the rest, we will only be reading small parts of the text, and most of these readings will be optional. For these, it may make sense for you to simply photocopy the relevant pages from a copy of the text in the library.

- **Peter Simons, *Parts: A Study in Ontology***
- Ted Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time*
- **John Hawthorne, *Metaphysical Essays***
- Roberto Casati and Achille Varzi, *Parts and Places*
- Hud Hudson, *A Materialist Metaphysics of the Human Person*
- **Maudlin, *Philosophy of Physics***
- **David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds***
- **Amie Thomasson, *Ontology Made Easy***
- Amie Thomasson, *Ordinary Objects*
- Dan Korman, *Objects*
- Agustín Rayo, *The Construction of Logical Space*
- Peter van Inwagen, *Material Beings*
- Ted Sider, *Writing the Book of the World*
- **Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality***
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me*

## **Class Conduct**

Behavior that hinders the learning of your classmates is not allowed. Thus, cell phones must be turned off during class (or at least, set to silent and not used during class). And using computers for anything that is not course-related is not allowed. (E.g., no checking Facebook during lectures.) If we notice you engaging in these or other disruptive behaviors, you will be asked to leave the classroom.

## **Equality, Diversity, and Support**

This classroom is a safe environment. Any discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sex, sexuality, socioeconomic status, disability, national origin, religion, or age will not be tolerated. If at any time while at USC you feel you have experienced harassment or discrimination, you can file a complaint: see <http://equity.usc.edu> for more information. You are also welcome to bring the complaint to any faculty or staff member at USC.

## **Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00. The recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A. Students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review, should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty. The Review process can be found at: <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

## **Statements for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

# Schedule

Required readings are in boldface. The other listed readings are optional. Topics and readings may change significantly: we will update you via email of any changes.

## Persistence and Time

January 12 Course Overview, Philosophy of Time Overview

January 19 Persistence Intro

**Heller, “Temporal Parts of Four-Dimensional Objects”**

Fine, “In Defense of Three-Dimensionalism”

Sider, *Four Dimensionalism*, ch. 3.

Hawthorne, “Three-Dimensionalism”, in *Metaphysical Essays*

Miller, “The Metaphysical Equivalence of 3 and 4Dism”

January 26 Temporary Intrinsic

**Zimmerman, “Temporary Intrinsic and Presentism”**

Brower, “Aristotelian Endurantism: A New Solution To...”

Spencer, “A Tale of Two Simples”

Sider, “The Stage View and Temporary Intrinsic”

Hawley, “Why Temporary Properties are not Relations...”

February 2 Time and Special Relativity (Jeff)

**Maudlin, *Philosophy of Physics*, ch. 4 (“Special Relativity”)**

Hawley, “Metaphysics and Relativity”

Zimmerman, “Presentism and the Space-Time Manifold”

## Mereology and Location

February 9 Mereology Intro

**Simons, *Parts: A Study In Ontology*, ch. 1–3**

McDaniel, “Parthood is Identity”

Cotnoir, “Antisymmetry and Non-Extensional Mereology”

February 16 Theories of Location

**Parsons, “Theories of Location”**

Casati and Varzi, *Parts and Places*, ch. 7

Hudson, *The Metaphysics of Hyperspace*, ch. 2, esp. §4

Eagle, “Location and Perdurantism”

February 23 Relations Between Mereology and Location

**McDaniel, “Extended Simples”**

Saucedo, “Parthood and Location”

Casati and Varzi, *Parts and Places*, ch. 1–2

Markosian, “A Spatial Approach to Mereology”

Nolan, “Balls and All”

Brzozowski’s “On Locating Composite Objects”

Uzquiano, “Mereological Harmony”

Uzquiano, “Receptacles”

March 1 Mereology, Location, and Time-Travel (and/or Applied Mereology)

**Effingham and Robson, “A Mereological Challenge to...”**

Effingham, “Temporal Parts and Time-Travel”

Gilmore, “Why Parthood Might Be a Four-Place Relation...”

## Vagueness, Arbitrariness, Conventionality

March 8 Vagueness

**Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, pp. 212–213**

**Sider, “Against Vague Existence”**

Koslicki, “The Crooked Path from Vagueness ...”

Sullivan, “The Minimal A-Theory”

Båve, “How to Precisify Quantifiers”

Thomasson, *Ordinary Objects*, ch. 5 (“Problems of Vagueness”)

Korman, *Objects*, ch. 9 (“Vagueness”)

March 15 Spring Break (woo!)

— Paper proposals due March 22 —

March 22 Convention 1

**Thomasson, *Ontology Made Easy*, ch. 3 (“Easy Ontology and ...”)**

Thomasson, *Ordinary Objects*, ch. 6 (“Handling Existence Questions”)

Hirsch, “Quantifier Variance and Realism”

Carnap, “Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology”

Rayo, *The Construction of Logical Space*, ch. 1

Wright & Boolos, “Is Hume’s Principle Analytic?”

March 29 Convention 2

**Hawthorne, “Plenitude, Convention, and Ontology”**

Van Inwagen, *Material Beings*, Introduction and ch. 13 (“Artifacts”)

Dorr, “On Numbers and Electrons”

Sider, “Ontological Realism”

Sider, *Writing the Book of the World*, ch. 9 (“Ontology”)

## Social Metaphysics

April 5 Human Kinds

**Haslanger, “Gender and Race”**

Barnes, “Realism and Social Structure”

Sveinsdottir, “The Social Construction of Human Kinds”

Appiah, “How to Decide if Races Exist”

Thomasson, “Realism and Human Kinds”

Coates, *Between The World and Me*

— Papers due to commentators 5pm Friday, April 8 —

April 12 Groups

**Uzquiano, “The Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Justices”**

Effingham, “The Metaphysics of Groups”

Barker, “Group Terms in English”

Boolos, “To Be is to be the Value of a Variable ...”

— Comments due to authors 5pm Friday, April 15 —

April 19 Conference

April 26 Conference

— Final papers due May 9 —