Advanced Metaphysics
Philosophy 5700, Winter Spring 2013

General information

Instructor: Ben Caplan
Time: T Th 2:20 PM – 3:40 PM
Location: 2150 Smith Lab
Office: 372 University Hall
Office hours: M 2:00 PM – 2:45 PM, Th 3:45 PM – 4:30 PM, or by appointment
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Description

This course is on grounding and related notions such as fundamentality and dependence. Our stalking horse throughout the semester will be Jonathan Schaffer’s view, priority monism, according to which the cosmos—the biggest thing there is—is the most fundamental of all.

As much as possible, we will (i) ignore skepticism about grounding, (ii) shy away from the technical or formal stuff, and (iii) connect up metametaphysical questions (e.g. what is grounding?) with first-order metaphysical questions (e.g. is priority monism true?). How much material we will cover depends on the pace of class discussion, not vice versa. So, especially as we’re getting used to semesters, it’s hard to predict exactly how much material we’ll cover.

We’ll begin by looking at Schaffer’s views about grounding (in his influential “On What Grounds What”) and his arguments for priority monism in “Monism: The Priority of the Whole.” This will take us into other first-order metaphysical questions about quantum entanglement and emergence, and about the possibility of gunk (roughly, proper parts all the way down) and junk (roughly, proper parts all the way up). This will probably be the longest part of the course.

We’ll finish by returning to priority monism and looking at another argument of Schaffer’s for the view, this time a neo-Hegelian one about the interdependence of all things. (Seriously.)

What we do in between depends on how much time we think we’ll have. But here’s a sketch of what we can do if we have the time. In the second part of the course, we can look at alternative views about grounding due to Gideon Rosen and Kit Fine, and at Ted Sider’s criticisms of Schaffer and Fine. (This part will be especially hard.) And, in the third part of the course, we can pick up a question that will probably come up in the second part of the course: namely, whether grounding is itself grounded. But we’ll see how much of this we’ll get to.
Course requirements

Your final grade will be based on two short assignments (30% each) and a final paper (40%). Each short assignment will be either a problem set or a short paper (3-5 pages). The final paper should be about 5-10 pages.

Readings

Readings will be available on Carmen. In addition to the readings, here are some helpful background pieces.


Schedule

A detailed schedule will be updated on Carmen. There will be no class on 12 or 14 March 2013 (spring break). In addition, I will be out of town on 7 and 28 March 2013, and there is a good chance I will cancel class on 26 March 2013 (Passover). Details about what will happen on those days will be provided later.

Disabilities

Students who might need accommodations are encouraged to contact me and the Office for Disability Services (http://www.ods.ohio-state.edu/).

Academic misconduct

Academic misconduct is a serious offense. You are responsible for knowing what counts as academic misconduct. In accordance with Faculty Rule 3335-5-487, all suspected cases of academic misconduct will be reported to the university’s Committee on Academic Misconduct. For further details, see the Code of Student Conduct at http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp.

Tentative outline

1. Priority monism


1.1. Quantum entanglement and emergence


1.2. Gunk and junk

*Gunk*

Jonathan Schaffer, “Is There a Fundamental Level?,” *Noûs* 37.3 (Sept. 2003), 498-517.


*Junk*


2. Rosen, Fine, Sider


3. Is grounding grounded?


4. Neo-Hegelianism


Dean Zimmerman, “A Recent Defense of Monism Based Upon the Internal Relatedness of All Things,” ms.