
Social Ontology

PHL 415 (23708)

W&M Spring 2018
Tuesday/Thursday: 9:30am – 10:50am
James Blair 142

Instructor: Aaron Griffith
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Office Hours: TTh 2:00pm – 3:00pm

Overview

This is a seminar on social ontology, the philosophical study of the nature and structure of the social world. Using foundational metaphysical notions such as dependence, grounding, essence, and kind, we will consider the ways in which the social world is produced and sustained. Specific topics considered will include the nature of institutions, groups, social structures, and the social construction of human social kinds such as gender and race.

Requirements

1. Regular attendance and participation (10%)
2. Presentation (20%)
3. Discussion Leader (5%)
4. Short essay (15%)
5. Research essay 15-20 pages (50%)

Schedule

The following schedule is tentative and may be amended during the course of the semester. All readings come from required course material. Optional readings can be found on the course Black Board page.

Week 1:

Thursday 1/18: Introduction, *The Ant Trap*

Week 2:

Tuesday 1/23: *The Ant Trap* Chapters 1 and 2

Discussion Leader 1:

Discussion Leader 2:

Thursday 1/25: *The Ant Trap* Chapters 3 and 4

Presentation:

Materials

Required Texts:

- Brian Epstein, *The Ant Trap*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- All other readings are PDFs that can be found on the course Black Board page.

Grading Scale

- A: 90-100 (90-93.5: A-, 94-100: A)
- B: 80-89 (80-83.5: B-, 84-86.5: B, 87-89: B+)
- C: 70-79 (70-73.5: C-, 74-76.5: C, 77-79: C+)
- D: 60-69 (60-63.5: D-, 64-66.5: D, 67-69: D+)
- F: 0-59

Optional: Kincaid, “Reduction, Explanation, and Individualism”; Schmitt, F. “Socializing Metaphysics: An Introduction.”

Optional: Guala, F. "The Philosophy of Social Science: Metaphysical and Empirical"

Add/Drop Ends Friday 1/26

Week 3:

Tuesday 1/30: John Searle, *Making the Social World* Chapter 5

Discussion Leader 1:

Discussion Leader 2:

Thursday 2/1: *The Ant Trap* Chapters 5 and 6

Presentation:

Optional: Schaffer, J. "On What Grounds What"; Mason, R. "The Metaphysics of Social Kinds"; Haslanger, S. "Social Construction: the 'Debunking' Project"

Week 4:

Tuesday 2/6: *The Ant Trap* Chapters 7 and 8

Discussion Leader 1:

Discussion Leader 2:

Thursday 2/8: *The Ant Trap* Chapter 10

Presentation:

Optional: Gilbert, M. "Walking Together"; Ritchie, K. "What are Groups?"; Uzquiano, G. "The Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Justices: A Metaphysical Puzzle."

Week 5:

Tuesday 2/13: *The Ant Trap* Chapter 11

Discussion Leader 1:

Discussion Leader 2:

Thursday 2/15: *The Ant Trap* Chapter 12

Presentation:

Week 6:

Tuesday 2/20: *The Ant Trap* Chapter 13

Presentation:

Thursday 2/22: *The Ant Trap* Chapter 14

Presentation:

Optional: Bratman, M. "Shared Intention"; List and Pettit, "Group Agency and Supervenience"

Week 7:

Tuesday 2/27: *The Ant Trap* Chapter 15

Discussion Leader 1:

Discussion Leader 2:

Thursday 3/1: *The Ant Trap* Chapter 16 and "Looking Ahead"

Presentation:

Week 8:

Tuesday 3/6: **Spring Break**

Thursday 3/8: **Spring Break**

Week 9:

Tuesday 3/13: Barnes, E. "Going Beyond the Fundamental: Feminism in Contemporary Metaphysics"; Mikkola, M. "Doing Ontology and Doing Justice: What Feminist Philosophy Can Teach Us About Meta-Metaphysics."

Presentation:

Thursday 3/15: Griffith, A. "Social Construction and Grounding"; Schaffer, J. "Social Construction as Grounding; Or: Fundamentality for Feminists, a Reply to Barnes and Mikkola."

Presentation:

Last day to withdrawal Friday 3/16

Week 10:

Tuesday 3/20: Appiah, K. Part 1 of "Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections"

Discussion Leader 1:

Discussion Leader 2:

Optional: Taylor, P. "Appiah's Unfinished Argument: Du Bois and the Reality of Race"

Thursday 3/22: Appiah cont.; Zack, N. "The Ordinary Concept of Race" in *Race and Mixed Race*

Presentation:

Week 11:

Tuesday 3/27: Andreasen, R. "Race: Biological Reality or Social Construct?"; Spencer, Q. "A Radical Solution to the Race Problem."

Presentation:

Optional: Glasgow, J. Chapter 5 of *A Theory of Race*

Thursday 3/29: **No Class**

Week 12:

Tuesday 4/3: Haslanger, S. "A Social Constructionist Analysis of Race"; Mills, C. "But What are You *Really*?"

Presentation:

Optional: Haslanger, S. "Social Construction: The 'Debunking' Project"; Jeffers, C. "A Cultural Theory of Race"

Thursday 4/5: Root, M. "How We Divide the World."

Presentation:

Optional: Sundstrom, R. "Race as a Human Kind"; Taylor, P. "What Races Are"

Week 13:

Tuesday 4/10: Alcoff, L. "The Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment"

Discussion Leader 1:

Discussion Leader 2:

Thursday 4/12: Blum, L. "Racialized Groups"

Week 14:

Tuesday 4/17: Glasgow, J. Chapter 6 of *A Theory of Race*

Presentation:

Optional: Mallon, R. "‘Race’: Normative, Not Metaphysical or Semantic"

Thursday 4/19: **No Class**

Week 15

Tuesday 4/24: Ludwig, D. "Against the Metaphysics of Race"; Hochman, A. "In Defense of the Metaphysics of Race".

Discussion Leader 1:

Discussion Leader 2:

Thursday 4/26: Wrap Up, **Essay Final Draft Due**

No Final Exam

Of Special Note

Attendance

Attendance is *mandatory*. Attendance will be taken at arbitrary points during the semester. You get 3 free documented absences during the semester. For each documented absence after your 3rd you will lose 1% off of your final grade. Please be on time to class. But if you are late to class, please enter the room quietly and unobtrusively. Absences may be excused for the following reasons only: **(a) a serious medical issue (i.e., one requiring hospitalization or confinement in the infirmary), (b) a family emergency (i.e., death or emergency hospitalization of an immediate family member), (c) conflicting University-related events, (d) religious observances, or (e) jury duty.**

Missed Tests

Make up or alternative tests will not be granted without documented proof of either (a) a serious medical issue (i.e., one requiring hospitalization or confinement in the infirmary), (b) a family emergency (i.e., death or emergency hospitalization of an immediate family member), (c) conflicting University-related events, (d) religious observances, or (e) jury duty. If you miss a test and do not have documented proof of these cases, you will receive a 0 (zero) as your score. (Alternate tests should be scheduled ahead of time for reasons (c) through (e).)

Papers

Papers will be marked down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day they are late. I am happy to help you get an early start on your written assignments. You are responsible for backing up texts composed on a computer, and failures of software or hardware are not acceptable reasons for a late assignment. I highly recommend using Dropbox to back up your files: <http://www.dropbox.com/>

If you do not understand why you received the grade you did, please come see me. Under no conditions will your grade be lowered if you do come see me to discuss a grade you received. *However, if you do want clarification you must submit to me in writing your question or concern before we meet in person.*

I also encourage you to take advantage of the writing resources on campus. The *Writing Resources Center* in Swem Library offers free feedback on your written work, including help with drafting, organizing, and editing your assignments. Find the writing center online at <http://www.wm.edu/as/wrc/>.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a serious matter and will be handled by the appropriate authorities. According to official William & Mary policy, plagiarism is “the presentation, with intent to deceive, or with disregard for proper scholarly procedures of a significant scope, of any information, ideas or phrasing of another as if they were one’s own without giving appropriate credit to the original source” (Section IV, C: Honor Code Violations). Turning in any work which is not your own and not properly acknowledged as such will result in a recommendation for failure in the course and subject you to further action by the university. Please review the university policy on academic dishonesty and speak to me if you have questions. See:

https://www.wm.edu/offices/deanofstudents/services/studentconduct/studenthandbook/honor_system/section_VI/index.php

Class Behavior

You are responsible for being prepared for each class session, which means having carefully read the assignment for each day of class and thought of questions you would like to discuss. You are responsible for all material covered in both lecture and the required readings.

I ask that all members of the class conduct themselves in a respectful manner. Respect for others takes a number of forms in this class, and in academic life generally. In the first place, it means that we need to be sensitive to how our behavior in class affects others. For example, I ask that students be conscientious about how your use of technology affects others in class. Take conversations and phone calls outside. Please do not text, chat online, or surf the net in class. If your behavior becomes problematic or disruptive, I will ask you to leave. I ask that you have intellectual respect for others, as well. This means that if you disagree with a position that someone holds, you should assume that the person is at least as smart as you are, and that the person probably has good reasons for thinking as he or she does. Your job is to be a good listener and exchange ideas, not to attack and degrade others.

Students with Disabilities

It is the policy of The College of William & Mary to accommodate students with disabilities and qualifying diagnosed conditions in accordance with federal and state laws. Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning, psychiatric, physical, or chronic health diagnosis should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Students will also need to contact Student Accessibility Services staff at 757-221-2509 or at sas@wm.edu to determine if accommodations are warranted and to obtain an official letter of accommodation. For more information, please see www.wm.edu/sas.

Additional Resources

Not all resources (especially those online) are created equal! You will not need to read or research any other material than the required readings to succeed in this course. However, you may be interested in pursuing our topics further. In addition to the optional readings I will provide on our course website, I recommend two websites in particular:

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: www.plato.stanford.edu/

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: www.iep.utm.edu/

Philosophy Compass: [http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/\(ISSN\)1747-9991](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1111/(ISSN)1747-9991)