**Topics in Metaphysics: Fundamentality and Explanation**

**Spring 2016**

**Meetings:** Wednesdays: 7:00-9:30pm, main seminar room.

**Contact:**

Erica Shumener

Office: 1009C Cathedral of Learning (next to Anil’s office)

Office Hours: Thursdays, 3-5pm (or email me to set up a time to meet)

Email: [ehs20@pitt.edu](mailto:ehs20@pitt.edu)

Phone: 323-244-9912

**Course Website:**

<http://ericashumener.net/metaphysics_seminar/>

This site will contain pdfs of the readings and the syllabus. The site is password protected:

Name: grue

Password: bleen

**Seminar Description:**

In this course, we will focus on three sets of questions: 1. Is there a distinction between the metaphysically fundamental/non-fundamental—if so, how should we draw it? 2. How should we characterize metaphysical explanation? 3.  Which applications to first order metaphysical disputes, and to philosophical disputes more generally, do the resources of metaphysical explanation and fundamentality have (if they have any)? As for 3, we will focus on potential applications to metaethics, debates concerning laws of nature, and social & feminist philosophy.

This is a background seminar, which means I will not presuppose any familiarity with these topics. If everyone in the seminar is already familiar with these topics then we can turn up the heat. For those attending the seminar for credit, five short response essays (1-2 pages) will be due throughout the semester in addition to two short papers (3,000-6,000 words).

**Assignments:**

**Response Papers:** Due Tuesday night the week of the seminar.

**Term Papers**: Due March 2 and April 27. You can either write two papers (each 3,000-5,000 words) or you can write a single 8-10,000 word term paper by the end of the semester(April 27) and submit a draft or outline on March 2.

**Troubleshooting:** Suppose you’re taking this seminar for credit, a month has passed, and you have no idea what you want to write about for your first paper (been there, *believe me*). Here are two things I would recommend you do:

1. Come talk to me.
2. Write additional 1-2 page response papers. You can turn in more than five. If you keep writing these things, I bet a topic will emerge for your own paper, sooner or later.

**Grading Breakdown:**

Paper 1: 35%

Paper 2: 35%

Response Papers: 30%

**Seminar Presentations:** I don’t have any of these scheduled, but I’m happy to schedule them if you feel they would be beneficial.

**Seminar Conduct:** I doubt any issues will arise, but here are some discussion guidelines we will have in the background: https://wp.nyu.edu/philosophyclimate/discussion/

**Readings and Schedule (subject to change)**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Topic | Reading | Anything Due? |
| January 6 | Introduction | **Lewis,** “New Work for a Theory of Universals” |  |
| January 13 | Naturalness and the Bridge from Naturalness to Fundamentality | **Lewis**, New Work  **Sider**, Preface, Chapters 1 & 2 (& 3 if you can!) |  |
| January 20 | Fundamentality, continued. | **Sider**, *WtBotW*:  4.1, 4.2 , Chapter 6, 6.1-6.3, |  |
| January 27 | What Belongs in the Base? | **Sider,** Chapter 7 WtbotW  **Donaldson,** “Reading the Book of the World” |  |
| February 3 | Grounding—Introduction | **Schaffer**, “On What Grounds What”  **Rosen**, “Metaphysical Dependence” |  |
| February 10 | Grounding—Introduction, continued | **Fine**, “Guide to Ground”  **Sider**, Chapter 8 of *WtBotW* |  |
| February 17 | Grounding without the fundamental | **Schaffer**, “Monism: Priority of the Whole”  **Raven**, “Fundamentality without Foundations”  **Litland**, “An Infinitely Descending Chain of Ground without a Lower Bound.” |  |
| February 24 | Fundamentality without grounding | **Wilson**, “No Work for a Theory of Ground”  **Schaffer**, “Ground Rules: Lessons from Wilson”  **Koslicki**, “The Coarse-Grainedness of Grounding” |  |
| March 2 | Can Grounding Facts be Grounded? | **Bennett**, “By Our Bootstraps”  **DeRosset**, “Grounding Explanations”  **Wilsch**, “The Deductive-Nomological Account of Metaphysical Explanation” | Paper #1 Due |
| March 9 SPRING BREAK |  |  |  |
| March 16 | Fundamentality, Explanation, and Metaethics | **Fine**, “Question of Realism” |  |
| March 23 | ...Continued | **Berker**, “The Unity of Grounding” |  |
| March 30 | ...Continued | **Bader**, “The Grounding Argument against Non-reductive Moral Realism”  **Leary**, “Non Naturalism and Normative Necessities” |  |
| April 6 | Metaphysical Explanation and Scientific Explanation | **Loewer**, “Two Accounts of Laws and Time”  **Lange**, “Grounding, Scientific Explanation and Humean Laws”  **Hicks and van Elswyck**, “Humean Laws and Circular Explanation” |  |
| April 13 | Metaphysical Explanation and Laws of Nature | **Miller**, “Humean Scientific Explanation”,  Erica’s “Laws of Nature and Semantic Circularity” (?) |  |
| April 20 | Fundamentality and Feminist Metaphysics | **Barnes**, “Going Beyond the Fundamental: Feminism in Contemporary Metaphysics.”  **Sider**, “Substantivity in Feminist Metaphysics.” |  |
| April 27 | Buffer day |  | Paper #2 Due |

The following are topics I’ve left out, but I am happy to include them if there is strong interest:

Structural features of grounding (Jenkins, Schaffer, Litland, Raven, Fine, Makin, Dasgupta, Skiles)

Monism vs. pluralism. (Schaffer, Sider, Bohn, Steinberg, etc.)

Puzzles about ground (Fine, + lots of other people)

Plural grounding. (Dasgupta)

The Principle of Sufficient Reason (Della Rocca, Dasgupta, Amijee)

Issues with Recombination (Wang, Schaffer, Armstrong, Sider)

Applications of metaphysical fundamentality/explanation to philosophy of mind (Jenkins, Schaffer, Dasgupta)

Applications to Intrinsicality (Trogdon, Bader, Rosen, Marshall, Eddon, Skow, me)

Applications to Philosophy of Math (Donaldson, Litland, Fine)