

Structure in Ontology

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Questions about the structure of entities and the associated relation of parthood are fundamental in metaphysics and especially ontology. First of all, what makes an entity have unity, rather than constituting just a multitude of parts, and in particular what makes a collection be 'one' rather than 'many'? Second, what possibly distinguishes an object from the material that constitutes it, in particular what is it about the structure of an object that makes it distinct from the material that makes it up? Third, what is the structure, if any, of 'propositional entities', such as states of affairs, facts, and propositions? Finally, in what way, if any, do abstract objects have structure?

Such questions have been addressed throughout the history of metaphysics, starting with Aristotle and Plato. However, in contemporary metaphysics there is also new and particularly interesting work devoted to these questions. This course will give an overview of the ontological issues, discuss in greater depth some of the contemporary work on the questions and, last but not least, explore in our intuitions – in particular, linguistic intuitions – that bear on questions of structure in ontology. We will also see how a deeper understanding of the ontological issues bears on a range of issues in linguistic semantics.

This course addresses itself to philosophers as well as linguists interested in semantics with its interface with ontology.

Validation: The course can be validated for the Cogmaster of the DEC as well as for philosophy at the ENS.

Prerequisites: Some basic knowledge in philosophy and first-order logic is desirable.

Time: Thursdays 10-12.

Place: Salle de reunion, Ground Floor, Pavillon, 29 rue d'Ulm

(New) starting date: November 8, 2007.

Suggested readings from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

Varzi on mereology:

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mereology/>

Grandy on identity and sortals:

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sortals/>

McGrath on propositions:

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/propositions/>

November 8:

1. Methodological issues.

- 1.1. "On What There Is": ontology or metaphysics?
- 1.2. The Quinean mottos, part I: "To Be Is to Be the Value of a (Bound) Variable".
- 1.3. The Quinean mottos, part II: "No Entity Without Identity".
- 1.4. Descriptive or prescriptive metaphysics?

November 15:

2. The structure of material objects.

- 2.1. The theory of *substrata* and properties and its problems.
- 2.2. The bundle theory and its problems.
- 2.3. The theory of tropes and its problems.
- 2.4. The theory of substance and its problems.
- 2.5. The *stuff theory* and its problems.

November 22:

3. The identity of material objects.

- 3.1. "One object to one place"? Synchronic identity and material constitution.
- 3.2. Persistence-through-change or temporal parts? Diachronic identity and change.
- 3.3. "The same F": the doctrine of relative identity.

November 29:

4. The part structure of material and abstract objects.

- 4.1. Intuitions about part structure and linguistic expressions of part-whole relations.
- 4.2. Conceptions of part-whole structure.
- 4.3. The structure of abstract objects vs. the structure of concrete objects – some fundamental differences.

December 6:

5. Unity and plurality.

- 5.1. Plurals in natural language.
- 5.2. What makes an entity have unity?
- 5.3. Plural reference vs. reference to a plurality.
- 5.4. Unrestricted mereological composition?

December 13:

6. The Structure of facts, states of affairs and propositions.

- 6.1. Are there facts, states of affairs and/or propositions, and what role do they play?
- 6.2. The structure of facts, states of affairs and propositions.
- 6.3. The problem of non-mereological composition.

December 20:

7. Open session.