PHIL 400/500
Topics in Metaphysics
Fall 2009
M 2-4:50
Assiniboia 2-02A

Parts

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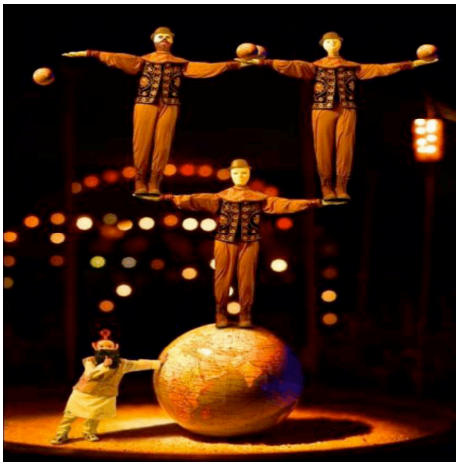

Blurb

We'll survey the recent philosophical literature on mereology, partly as a case study in metaontology. With less jargon: we'll begin by studying the philosophical issues raised by the general relation holding between a whole and its parts (the 'mereology' bit). These include: When are there wholes? Are they identical with their parts? Can they survive the loss of a part? Do things persist in virtue of having temporal parts? Are there simples, things without parts? Is there gunk, things whose every part has itself a part? Then we'll step back and reflect on what we've been doing. We'll ask, what is it to dispute whether or not something, such as a whole, a temporal part, a simple or gunk, exists? This issue on the nature of ontological disputes themselves (the 'metaontology' bit) has received much recent attention. The contemporary discussion emerges from an exchange between Quine and Carnap on abstract entities, so we'll begin with some background on abstract entities, and then study the Quine and Carnap, before looking at some very recent work.

Texts

- Sider, Hawthorne and Zimmerman edd. *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. 2007. Basil Blackwell
- several readings available online through http://www.library.ualberta.ca/

Assessment

The course is a seminar. Participation is crucial both for the seminar to go well and for you to benefit from the seminar. Preparation through doing the assigned reading before each meeting is, in turn, important for being able to participate. Although dense, the reading will be of an average number of pages for a seminar.

1. **Participation** is worth 1/6th of the final grade. A required short **weekly email**, sent to the class email list, asking a short, substantive question or identifying a problem you've had on the weekly reading, is due Sunday 11:59 PM before each class. The participation grade is based on the weekly emails and/or active participation in discussion.

2. A 3-5 pg. **short paper** due in class on November 2 and worth 1/3rd of the final grade. The aim here is to clearly present the argument of one of the suggested further readings.

3. A 8-12 pg. **term paper**, worth 1/2 of the final grade, due in the Philosophy Department office, Assiniboia 2-40, on December 10 at 2 PM or before. A promising strategy here is to present, explain and assess an argument in one of the suggested further readings, listed below. In the interests of fairness, I can't read drafts but please come talk to me about your topic. Late papers will not be accepted without a documented medical excuse.

Prereq's

Like any 400-level course, the prerequisite for the course is "successful completion of 6 units of course weight in Philosophy, including a 200-level course." However, highly recommended background for this course is a metaphysics survey, such as PHIL 200 at the University of Alberta.

Policy

Of course, all work must be your own and all sources must be clearly cited. But plagiarism isn't just quoting stuff without citation. If the *thought* expressed by your sentence isn't your own, you must say who conveyed that thought to you. And don't rely on web sources; most of them suck. The University of Alberta asks me to tell you that it "is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour (online at www.ualberta.ca/secretariat/appeals.htm) and avoid any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University. Policy about course outlines can be found in § 23.4(2) of the University Calendar."

Detailed Bibliography

Mereology

September 21

Preliminaries

We'll begin with an overview of formal mereology and the notion of identity

Required

Black, M. "Identity of indiscernibles," *Mind* (1962) 61: 153-64. Available online.

Recommended Reading

Varzi, Achille, "Mereology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2009 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/mereology/

September 28

Is a composite identical with its components?

Required

Johnston, Mark. "Composition is not identity," *Mind* (1992) 91: 89-106. Available online.

Suggested Further Reading

Composition is identity: Baxter, D. "Many-One Identity," *Philosophical Papers* (1988) 17: 193–216.

Composition is analogous to identity: Lewis, D. *Parts of Classes*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1991, pp. 81-7.

Does composition as identity entail vague objects?: Merricks, T. "Composition and Vagueness," *Mind* (2005)114: 615–637.

A related question is, can a whole survive the loss of a part?

Arguments for mereological essentialism: Chisholm, R. "Parts as Essential to Their Wholes," *Review of Metaphysics* (1973) 26: 581-603. Available online.

Arguments against mereological essentialism: Plantinga, A. "On mereological essentialism," *Review of Metaphysics* (1975) 28: 468-76.

Does taking composition as identity entail mereological essentialism? Merricks, T. "Composition as Identity, Mereological Essentialism, and Counterpart Theory." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (1999) 77: 192–195.

October 5

When are there wholes?

Required

Sometimes (Restrictivism): Van Cleve and Markosian "Mereology," *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*.

Suggested Further Reading

Never (Nihilism): Unger, P. "I do not Exist," *Perception and Identity*, G. F. MacDonald (ed.), London: Macmillan, 1979.

Always (Universalism): Lewis, op. cit.

When there is an organic entity (Organicism): van Inwagen, P. "The Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetatched Parts," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* (1981) 62: 123-37.

Markosian, N. "Brutal Composition," *Philosophical Studies* (1998) 92: 211-49. Markosian's papers can be also downloaded from http://myweb.facstaff.wwu.edu/nmarkos/Papers/Papers.htm

Does unrestricted composition entail vague objects? Sider, T. "Parthood," *Philosophical Review* (2007) 116: 51-91.

October 19 and 26

Are there Temporal Parts?

Required

Sider and Hawthorne "Persistence" *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*.

Suggested Further Reading

Hawley, K., "Temporal Parts", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, E. Zalta (ed.) http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/temporal-parts

Heller, M. "Temporal parts of four dimensional objects," *Philosophical Studies*. 1984. 46: 323-34. Reprinted in Loux, M. ed. *Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings*. Routledge.

Parsons, J. 'Must a Four-Dimensionalist Believe in Temporal Parts?' *The Monist* 83 (2000): 399–418.

November 2

Are there Simples or Gunk?

Required

Hud Hudson, 2007. "Simples and Gunk," *Philosophy Compass* 2 (2), pp. 291–302. http://www.blackwell-compass.com/subject/philosophy/

Suggested Further Reading

For the question what is it in virtue of which an object might be simple or a mereological atom, see

Markosian, N. "Simples," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (1998) 76: 213–26.

McDaniel, K. "Against MaxCon Simples," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (2003) 81: 265–75.

Could simples be extended?

McDaniel, K. "Extended Simples," *Philosophical Studies* (2007) 133: 131-41.

Whether simplicity can be vague has consequences for ontic vagueness

McKinnon, N. "Vague Simples," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* (2003) 84: 394–7.

Does the possibility of gunk undermine certain views on restricted composition?

Sider, T, "Van Inwagen and the Possibility of Gunk," *Analysis* (1993) 53: 285-289.

Metaontology

November 16

The background literature on universals and abstract entities.

Required

Swoyer and Dorr "Abstract Entities," *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*.

Suggested Further Reading

Russell and Price. Reprinted in Loux, *Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings*. Routledge.

Devitt, M. "'Ostrich Nominalims' or 'Mirage Realism'?" and D. Armstrong "Against 'Ostrich' Nominalism: A Reply to Michael Devitt," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* (1980) 61: 433-49. Reprinted in Mellor and Oliver edd. *Properties*. Oxford.

Benacerraf, P. "Mathematical Truth," *Journal of Philosophy* (1973) 70: 661-79.

November 23

Ontological Commitment and the roots of contemporary metaontology

Required

Quine, W. V. "On what there is" Reprinted in *From a Logical Point of View*. Harvard; Loux ed. *Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings*. Routledge, and elsewhere. Handout.

Carnap, "Empiricism, semantics and ontology," Reprinted in Benacerraf and Putnam edd. *Philosophy of Mathematics*. Cambridge. Handout.

Suggested Further Reading

Quine, "Two dogmas of empiricism" Reprinted in *From a Logical Point of View*. Harvard and elsewhere.

Soames, S. "Ontology, Analyticity and Meaning: The Quine-Carnap Dispute," Chalmers, Manley and Wasserman edd. *Metametaphysics*. 2009

Yi, B. "Is Mereology Ontologically Innocent?" *Philosophical Studies* (1999) 93: 141–160.

November 30

What do we disagree about when we disagree about ontology?

Required

Eklund and Hirsch "Metaontology," *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*.

Suggested Further Reading

Sider, T. "Ontological Realism," Chalmers, Manley and Wasserman edd. *Metametaphysics*. OUP. 2009

Chalmers, D. "Ontological Anti-Realism," *Metametaphysics*, 2009.

Dorr, C. "What we disagree about when we disagree about ontology," Mark Kalderon, ed. *Fictionalist Approaches to Metaphysics*. Oxford University Press, 2005.