Metaphysics of the Social World
MW 12:45 - 2:00
Professor: Sara Bernstein

This class will use metaphysics to examine the natures of a wide range of social entities and phenomena. Topics discussed will include the metaphysics of social kinds, including gender, race, and disability; the metaphysics of social groups, like baseball teams, the Beatles, and the Supreme Court; the metaphysics of social entities, like restaurants; the metaphysics of social relationships and activities, like love and video games; the metaphysics of virtual reality and cryptocurrency; and the metaphysics of food. We will end by discussing the metaphysics of collective responsibility.

This class will be conducted on Zoom.

All readings will be posted on Sakai. Starred readings are required. Others are recommended.

Assessment:

- 30% in-class participation*
- 10% in-class presentation on a reading or a topic related to the course (sign up by Feb 15)
- 30% short paper (due March 15)
- 30% final paper (due May 17)

Extra credit opportunities will be available.

Schedule

Introduction

Wednesday, February 3: Introduction to Metaphysics of the Social World

* “Social Ontology,” Rebecca Mason and Kate Ritchie
Metaphysics of Social Groups

Monday, February 8: Social Groups I

* “The Metaphysics of Social Groups,” Kate Ritchie

Recommended: “Social Structures and the Ontology of Social Groups,” Kate Ritchie

Wednesday, February 10: Social Groups II

* “The Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Justices: A Metaphysical Puzzle,” Gabriel Uzquiano
* “Is a Band Without Its Original Members Still the Same Band?,“ Geoffrey Himes (Smithsonian Magazine article)


Monday, February 15: Social Groups III ****Deadline for signing up for presentation dates and topics****

* “Sporting Teams, Space-Time Worms, and Israeli Football,” David Papineau
* “The Ship of Theseus,” Jenn Wang (Wireless Philosophy video)

Metaphysics of Gender and Sexual Orientation

Wednesday, February 17: Ameliorative Accounts of Gender

* “Gender and Race: What are they? What do we want them to be?,” Sally Haslanger

Recommended: “Metaphysics and Social Justice,” Aaron Griffith

Monday, February 22: Metaphysics of Gender

* “The Conferralist Framework,” Ásta

Recommended: “Science Fiction Double Feature: Trans Liberation on Twin Earth,” B.R. George and R.A. Briggs

Wednesday, February 24: Metaphysics of Sexual Orientation

* “What is Sexual Orientation?,“ Robin Dembroff

Monday, March 1: Gender and Modality

* “Countersocial Counterfactuals,” Sara Bernstein

Metaphysics of Race

Wednesday, March 3: Metaphysics of Race I

* “‘But What are you Really?’: The Metaphysics of Race,” Charles Mills

Monday, March 8: Metaphysics of Race II

* “Racial Realism I: Are Biological Races Real?,” Quayshawn Spencer
* "Racial Realism II: Are Folk Races Real?,” Quayshawn Spencer

Wednesday, March 10: Metaphysics of Race III

* “Cultural Constructivism,” Chike Jeffers

Monday, March 15: Metaphysics of Intersectionality ****First paper due****

* “The Metaphysics of Intersectionality,” Sara Bernstein

**Metaphysics of Disability**

Wednesday, March 17: Disability I

* “Disability, Minority, and Difference,” Elizabeth Barnes

Recommended viewing: “Deaf U”

Monday, March 22: Disability II ***Special Guests: Katharine Jenkins and Aness Webster***

* “Disability, Impairment, and Marginalised Functioning,” Katharine Jenkins and Aness Webster

Recommended: “The Complicated Relationship of Disability and Well-Being,” Stephen Campbell and Joe Stramondo

Recommended viewing: “Fixed”

Wednesday, March 24: Non-canonical Disabilities

* “Lookism,” Francesca Minerva
* “The Invisible Discrimination Before our Eyes,” Francesca Minerva

Recommended reading: Ted Chiang, “Liking What You See: a Documentary”

Monday, March 29: Catch-up and Review.

**Metaphysics of Games**

Wednesday, March 31: Metaphysics of Games I ***Special Guest: C. Thi Nguyen***

* “Introduction” and “The Possibility of Striving Play” from Games: Agency as Art, C. Thi Nguyen

Monday, April 5: Metaphysics of Games II

* “Games as Social Transformation” from Games: Agency as Art, C. Thi Nguyen

**Metaphysics of Food**

Wednesday, April 7: The Metaphysics of Eating Establishments

* “The Metaphysics of Establishments,” Dan Korman

Monday, April 12: The Metaphysics of Food
“The Metaphysics of Food,” Alexandra Plakias
“Can Unmodified Food be Culinary Art?,” Sara Bernstein

Metaphysics of Love

Wednesday, April 14: The Metaphysics of Love

* “What is Love?: an Incomplete Map of the Metaphysics,” Carrie Jenkins
* “A Dispositional Theory of Love,” Hichem Nar

Metaphysics of Virtual Reality

Monday, April 19: The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality

* “The Virtual and the Real,” David Chalmers

Monday, April 26: Social Media

* “Moral Outrage Porn,” C. Thi Nguyen and Bekka Williams
* “The Anonymity of a Murmur: Internet (and Other) Memes,” Simon Evnine

Recommended reading: “Retweeting: its linguistic and epistemic value,” Neri Marsili
Recommended viewing: Black Mirror, “Nosedive”

Metaphysics of Money

Wednesday, April 28: The Metaphysics of Cryptocurrency

* “Is Bitcoin Money?,” Asya Passinsky
* “Cryptocurrency: Philosophy, Politics, and Economics” (pp. 1-11), Andrew Bailey, Brad Rettler, and Craig Warmke

Collective Responsibility

Monday, May 3: Collective Responsibility by Random Groups

* “Collective Responsibility,” Marion Smiley
* “Can a Random Collection of Individuals be Morally Responsible?,” Virginia Held

Wednesday, May 5: Causation and Moral Responsibility

* “Causal Proportions and Moral Responsibility,” Sara Bernstein

Monday, May 10: Final Review

A few notes concerning...

*Class Participation

Philosophical skill is best acquired by doing philosophy rather than passively learning about it. Active participation in class, which includes asking questions, coming up with cool and/ or silly examples, asking for clarification on confusing concepts, and/ or presenting an informed opinion
about the reading, is central to learning to do philosophy. Talking once per class will be enough to do well in class participation.

**Philosophical “Bedside Manner”**

Academic philosophy has a reputation as a blood sport. It need not be so. We’re all in the Truth Trenches together. Philosophical interaction can be friendly and collaborative while still being constructive and rigorous. Please contribute to class in ways that aim at discovering the truth rather than establishing intellectual dominance.

**Syllabus Changes**

It is possible that topics will be added, removed, or changed on the syllabus. If this happens, it will be announced in class and over email.

**Extensions**

Everyone is permitted one 24-hour extension on a class assignment. You don’t need to apologize or explain why you need one; just ask at least 48 hours in advance.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is representing another person’s work as one’s own. Outside works must be clearly cited or placed in quotes. Any cheating will be handled according to the university’s policy on academic dishonesty. Please see the Honor Code for more information.

**Ways to Reach Sara**

Email: sbernste@nd.edu

Office Hours: on Zoom, by appointment.