

Metaphysics Proseminar

Wednesdays, 16:00-18:30

Office hours: Tuesdays 15:00-17:00, and by appointment

Overview: This class is designed to improve your ability to think clearly and critically about some of the core issues that arise in metaphysics; and my primary aim is to help you to think *more broadly* about what it means to do metaphysics. People from a wide variety of different cultures, with a wide range of differing assumptions, have found themselves doing metaphysics for a long time. We will try to think about why this is the case, and we will think about why different starting points tend to yield different metaphysical hypotheses.

Writing: You are required to write **brief responses** (roughly 300 words) to something we have read each week. These assignments are due by midnight on Tuesday, and they should help you prepare for this discussion-centered seminar. You can link ideas from the reading to other ideas you're working on; you can offer an objection to one of the arguments we will be addressing; or you can extend an idea from the reading to a novel domain. I don't care *what* you write about, so long as you engage with the reading. Each seminar member will also write a **short paper** (max 3000 words) which address an argument or position we have discussed; these papers should be the sort of thing you could submit for a presentation at a conference (and I am happy to work with you to write successful conference papers!)

Reading: We will read the following five books: **Muhammad Ali Khalidi**, *Natural categories and human kinds*; **Joshua Glasgow, Sally Haslanger, Chike Jeffers, & Quayshawn Spencer**, *What is race: four philosophical views*; **Jennan Ishmael**, *How physics makes us free*; **Noa Ronkin**, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics*; **Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad**, *Advaita metaphysics and epistemology*. We will also read some papers on natural kinds, some papers in the philosophy of race, and several chapters from Tyron Goldschmidt & Kenneth Pearce (eds), *Idealism: New Essays in Metaphysics*. There are cases where you will be able to find the books digitally on the Library website. For all readings, [the number of pages in blue](#).

Kinds and Races	
9/4	Muhammad Ali Khalidi , <i>Natural categories and human kinds</i> (Chs 1-3; 124)
9/11	Muhammad Ali Khalidi , <i>Natural categories and human kinds</i> (Chs 4-6; 105)
9/18	Ian Hacking , "Natural Kinds: Rosy Dawn, Scholastic Twilight" (37); Lara Franklin-Hall , "Natural Kinds and Categorical Bottlenecks" (23); Marion Godman , "Psychiatric Disorders qua Natural Kinds" (8)
9/25	Joshua Glasgow, Sally Haslanger, Chike Jeffers, & Quayshawn Spencer , <i>What is race: four philosophical views</i> (Chs 1-4; 149)
10/2	Joshua Glasgow, Sally Haslanger, Chike Jeffers, & Quayshawn Spencer , <i>What is race: four philosophical views</i> (Chs 5-8; 123)
10/9	Adam Hochman , "Replacing race" (26); Eric Winsberg , "Putting races on the ontological map" (16); Phila Msimang , "Racializing races" (26); (optional) Bryce Huebner , "The emptiness and interdependence of whiteness"

Agency, Minds, and Worlds	
10/16	Jennan Ishmael , <i>How physics makes us free</i> (Chs 1-4; 112) [Available through the library]
10/23	Jennan Ishmael , <i>How physics makes us free</i> (Chs 5-end; 113)
10/30	Noa Ronkin , <i>Early Buddhist Metaphysics</i> (Chs. 1-3; 132)
11/6	Noa Ronkin , <i>Early Buddhist Metaphysics</i> (Chs. 4-5, concluding thoughts; 112)
11/13	Susan Schneider , "Idealism, or Something Near Enough" (14); Sara Bernstein , "Causal Idealism" (13); Helen Yetter-Chappell , "Idealism Without God" (16)
11/20	Kris McDaniel , "The Idealism of Mary Whiton Calkins" (14); Samuel Lebens , "Hassidic Idealism: Kurt Vonnegut and the Creator of the Universe" (19); Bronwyn Finnigan , "Buddhist Idealism" (19)
11/27	Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad , <i>Advaita metaphysics and epistemology</i> (Intro, Sections 1-2; 130)
12/4	Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad , <i>Advaita metaphysics and epistemology</i> (Sections 3&4; 128)

Accessibility and diversity: The diversity of teaching and learning styles in a modern university may not always mesh in ways that are conducive to the success and wellbeing of everyone in a course. But there are often ways of improving things. I am happy to discuss the structure of the course, and to try to make it more accessible to everyone in the class. So please talk to me if things could be better. I sincerely think that every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating classroom experience! Disabled students and students on record with the university as requiring particular accommodations, please let me know that this is the case, in confidence, during the first few weeks of the semester—and please take advantage of the services provided by the university. And if you find that additional accommodations are necessary, please let me know.