**Metaphysics Seminar: Stranger Things (Philosophy 653)**

Professor Karen Bennett

Fall 2019

kbennett@philosophy.rutgers.edu

Office hours: by appointment

**Description**:

This seminar is about the metaphysics of unabashedly nonfundamental entities. We will start the first class by addressing some foundational questions: why think there are nonfundamental entities? What does it mean to call something ‘nonfundamental’? Are nonfundamental entities proper targets of metaphysical inquiry at all? (Spoiler alert: yes). We will then look at some background questions about ontological commitment, and whether there could be true sentences about nonfundamentalia without the relevant nonfundamentalia in fact existing. Next up are some questions about how one could be a “naturalist” about nonfundamental entities—about how believing in highly nonfundamental social entities could be compatible with privileging science. We will then spend the semester inquiring into the nature of certain sorts of nonfundamentalia—like social groups, countries, restaurants—and dipping our toes into the (frighteningly immense) literature on “social construction”. What is it? How does it happen? What (in my terms) building relations are involved?

**Requirements:**

Auditors are welcome. The below requirements are for those taking the class for credit.

Reading: Everyone is expected to have done the reading and to be prepared to discuss it. Articles will be posted to Canvas. (At the time of circulating the syllabus, no course shell has been created. Working on it.)

Term paper: a paper to meet Rutgers norms for either the “research paper” or “non-research paper” option, due on December 18.

Presentations: During the last class or two, graduate students taking the course for credit will give a substantial presentation of their term paper project. These presentations will function as drafts, and class discussion will treat the material as work in progress (i.e., we will aim for constructive rather than destructive criticism). I will meet with each student afterwards to talk further about the project. Attendance at these presentations is mandatory for those taking the seminar for credit.

**Tentative schedule of readings**

*Metaphysics and the Nonfundamental*

9/4 Bennett, §8.3 of *Making Things Up* (2017)

Barnes, “Going beyond the fundamental: feminism in contemporary metaphysics” (2014)

Mason and Ritchie, “Social ontology” (forthcoming)

Cameron, “How to have a radically minimal ontology” (2010)

*Further optional/background reading:*

Mikkola, “On the apparent antagonism between feminist and mainstream metaphysics” (2017)

Schaffer, “Social construction as grounding; or: fundamentality for feminists, a reply to Barnes and Mikkola” (2017) *Note: this is assigned reading later in the term*

Sider, “Substantivity in feminist metaphysics” (2019)

Quine, “On what there is” (1948)

*Nonfundamental Metaphysics and Science*

9/11 Papineau, “Naturalism” (2007)

 Hawley, “Social science as a guide to social metaphysics?” (2018)

*Groups*

9/18 Uzquiano, “The Supreme Court and Supreme Court justices” (2004)

 Effingham, “The metaphysics of groups” (2010)

 Ritchie, “What are groups?” (2013)

9/25 Continue with Uzquiano

 Epstein, *The Ant Trap* chapter 10 (2015)

 Epstein, “What are social groups? Their metaphysics and how to classify them” (forthcoming)

10/2 Uzquiano, “Groups: Toward a theory of plural embodiment: (2018)

 Thomasson, “The ontology of social groups” (2016)

10/9 Ritchie, “Social structures and the ontology of social groups” (forthcoming)

 **visit by Kate Richie**

*Places and Location*

10/16 Ruben, “Social wholes and parts” (1985)

 Hindricks, “The location problem in social ontology” (2011)

10/23 Varzi, “Introduction” (2001)

 Thomasson, “Geographic objects and the science of geography” (2001)

10/30 Korman, “The metaphysics of establishments” (forthcoming)

**11/6 no class**

*Social Construction*

11/13 Hacking, chapter 1 of *The Social Construction of What*? (1999)

 Searle, “Creating institutional facts”, chapter 2 of *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995)

 Thomasson, “Foundations for a social ontology” (2003)

 (maybe) Haslanger, “Ontology and social construction” (2000/2012)

*Some further optional/background reading:*

Ásta, “Social construction” (2015)

 Diaz-Leon, “What is social construction?” (2015)

Mallon, *The Construction of Human Kinds* (2016)

Mallon, “A field guide to social construction” (2007))

Mallon, “Naturalistic approaches to social construction” (revised 2019)

11/20 (maybe) Haslanger, “Ontology and social construction” (2000/2012)

 Ásta, introduction, chapter 1 and 2 of *Categories We Live By* (2018)

 Schaffer, “Social construction as grounding; or: fundamentality for feminists, a reply to Barnes and Mikkola” (2017)

**11/27 no class (Rutgers operates on a Friday schedule)**

12/4 Note: I am listing a “short form” and a “long form” on the grounds that one can glean a lot about a critical piece from the reply. The long form is an absurd amount of reading to expect. (The section of the SEP entry is short, and helpful, though.)

Short form:

 Epstein, introduction and chapter 6 (“Grounding and Anchoring”) of *The Ant Trap*

Epstein, “Reply to Hawley, Mikkola, and Hindriks” (2019)

Epstein, “Anchoring vs. grounding: Reply to Schaffer” (forthcoming)

Long form:

 Epstein, introduction and chapter 6 (“Grounding and Anchoring”) of *The Ant Trap*

Epstein, §2.3 of SEP entry “Social Ontology” (2018)

Hawley, “Comments on Brian Epstein’s *The Ant Trap*” (2019)

Mikkola, “Grounding and anchoring: on the structure of Epstein’s social ontology” (2019)

Schaffer, “Anchoring as grounding: On Epstein’s *The Ant Trap*” (forthcoming)

Epstein, “Reply to Hawley, Mikkola, and Hindriks” (2019)

Epstein, “Anchoring vs. grounding: Reply to Schaffer” (forthcoming)

12/11 first hour: continued from last week

second 2 hours: three student presentations (40 minutes apiece for presentation & discussion)