The Structure of the World
(SH23/PHIL4057)

Wednesday 9:00 – 11:00
Location: Reid Room
Dr. Nathan Wildman
nathan.wildman@glasgow.ac.uk
Office hours: by appointment

Description
The broadly Quinean view that emerged in the middle of the 20th century took metaphysics to be about what there is. So conceived, metaphysics is concerned with questions about whether properties, relations, meaning, numbers, and mereologically complex material objects exist. This naturally led to debates between nominalists and realists about these various entities, as well as about the notion of ontological commitment and the nature and (in)substantiality of these existence questions.

Recently, however, metaphysicians have begun to challenge this Quinean conception, re-conceiving of their discipline as an investigation into how the world is structured, rather than how it is populated. This alternative, quasi-Aristotelian, Structural conception starts with a hierarchical view of reality, ordered by priority or building relations, where the (more) fundamental serve as the metaphysical foundation for the (more) derivative. Accordingly, the main task of metaphysics is to detail or describe the structure of the world. So conceived, the main metaphysical question isn’t determining whether properties, meanings, numbers, and mereologically complex material objects exist. Rather, it is whether they are fundamental (and, if not, what it is they are derivative upon).

Elucidating this Structural conception, which has risen to prominence in the last decade and a half, has led to the development of a variety of metaphysical tools and notions, including fundamentality, grounding, ontological dependence, and metaphysical explanation.

In this course, students will study the metaphysical structure of the world: investigate what we can know about its ultimate constituents and how they are arranged together. We will do so by examining several of the ‘structuring’ notions (many of which are still being refined and developed), against the background of the broader metametaphysical debate between the Quinean and Structural conceptions of metaphysics.

Objectives
This course is intended to explore in depth key philosophical topics within contemporary analytic metaphysics, and, in so doing, prepare students for future independent research on topics in this area.

Outcomes
Students taking this course will
1. Acquire knowledge regarding several key issues in metaphysics and metametaphysics.
2. Engage closely & critically with cutting-edge literature in these areas.
3. Develop their ability to think & write philosophically.

Requirements
- Reading. Students are expected to read all specified material prior to attending class. You must have read the required readings before class; otherwise you won’t be able to follow/participate
in the discussion. All readings will be made available on the course Moodle page and on the course webpage:

https://goo.gl/scTxMa

The ‘Readings’ page is password protected; the password is __________. If you lose the password, please contact the course organizer for a reminder.

- **Participation.** Students are expected to participate in in-class discussion or email contact with the instructor (in case you're shy about talking in class). With discussion, seminars can be lots of fun; without discussion, seminars are boring. Let's have fun, rather than be bored!

---

**COURSE SCHEDULE & READINGS**

Black bullet points are main readings; white bullet points are supplemental readings

1. **21 September – Ontological Disputes**

2. **28 September – Metaontology & Ontological Commitment**

3. **5 October – Ontological Realism & Anti-Realism**
4. **12 October – A Buffet of –Ism’s! Pessimism, Figuralism, Egalitarianism, Pluralism**

5. **19 October – Neo-Aristotelian Meta-Ontology**

**READING WEEK 26 October**

6. **2 November – Grounding & Ontological Dependence**

7. **9 November – Grounding Pt.2**

8. **16 November – Fundamentality**

9.  **23 November – Naturalness & Structure**

10. **30 November – Essence & Ontological Dependence**