

Syllabus

Philosophy 6014: The Construction of Social Reality

Dr. Brian Epstein

Is there such a thing as race? Is gender a biological category, or is it something we imagine and just project on the world? For that matter, are pencils and desks, or dollar bills and banking systems, or clarinet notes and musical genres, natural features of the world? Or are they categories we define, or are they something else? In this seminar, we will consider the metaphysics of social kinds and the semantics of social kind terms, gathering together a wide range of approaches and literatures. Significant attention will be paid to works in the philosophy of language, pertaining to natural, theoretical, and nominal kind terms. Additional selections will come from social constructivists and naturalization projects. Readings from Locke, Lewis, Putnam, Burge, Millikan, Searle, Kornblith, Schwartz, Appiah, and others.

Readings will be available on Blackboard.

Schedule:

Introduction: Social construction and social reality

Jan. 20: Introduction

Jan. 27: The critique of concepts

Nietzsche, from *The Genealogy of Morals*.

Foucault, Michel. Preface to *The Order of Things*.

Marx, "The Fetishism of Commodities," from *Capital*.

*Lukacs, Georg. "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," from *History and Class Consciousness*.

*Appiah, K. A. "The Illusion of Race." from *In My Father's House*.

*Appiah, K. A. "Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections." In *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*, ed. K. A. Appiah, A. Guttman, pp. 192. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Optional:

Susan Bordo, "Anorexia Nervosa: Psychopathology as the Crystallization of Culture." In *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, Ch. 21.

Dupre, John, from *The Disorder of Things*.

Feb 3: The idea of construction

*Haslanger, Sally. "Ontology and Social Construction." *Philosophical Topics* (1995) 23.

*Hacking, Ian. *The Social Construction of What?* Harvard University Press. Cambridge, 1999.

Haslanger, Sally. "Social Construction: The 'Debunking' Project." In *Socializing Metaphysics*, Frederick Schmitt, ed.

The meaning of social terms

Feb. 10: The nominal kinds / real kinds distinction, and Lockean anti-essentialism

- *Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
Book 2, Ch. 2, 12, 22, 23, 24
Book 3, Ch. 5, 6
- Atherton, Margaret. "The Inessentiality of Lockean Essences." (1984). In *Locke*, ed. by Vere Chappell, ch. 10.
- Bolton, Martha Brandt. "The Relevance of Locke's Theory of Ideas to his Doctrine of Nominal Essence and Anti-Essentialist Semantic Theory." (1992). In *Locke*, ed. by Vere Chappell, ch. 11.

Also of interest in the Chappell volume:

- Bolton, Martha Brandt. "Substances, Substrata, and Names of Substances in Locke's Essay."
- Ashworth, E.J. "Locke on Language."

Feb. 17: Implicit definition

- *Lewis, David. "How to Define Theoretical Terms." In *Philosophical Papers*.
- _____. "Naming the Colors." In *Philosophical Papers*.

Feb. 24: Externalism

- *Putnam, Hilary. "The Meaning of Meaning." (1975) In *Mind, Language and Reality*.

Mar. 3: Nominal/real debate with respect to social kinds

- Wiggins, David. From *Sameness and Substance*.
- *Schwartz, Stephen. Introduction to *Naming, Necessity, and Natural Kinds*.
- *_____. "Putnam on Artifacts." *Philosophical Review* 87 (1978): 566-74.
- _____. "Natural Kinds and Nominal Kinds." *Mind* 89 (1980): 182-95.
- *Kornblith, Hilary. "Referring to Artifacts." *Philosophical Review* 89 (1980): 109-14.
- _____. "How to Refer to Artifacts." Forthcoming.

Mar. 17: Descriptiveness

- Kripke, Saul. From *Naming and Necessity*.
- *Soames, Scott. From *Beyond Rigidity*.
- *Abbott, Barbara. "Nondescriptiveness and Natural Kind Terms." *Linguistics and Philosophy* 12 (1989) 269-91.
- Kornblith, Hilary. "How to Refer to Artifacts." Forthcoming.

Naturalism

Mar. 24: Stability and homeostasis

- *Boyd, Richard. "What Realism Implies and What it Does Not." *Dialectica* (1989) 43.1-2: 5-29.
- _____. from "Metaphor and Theory Change." In *Metaphor and Thought*. Andrew Ortony (ed.).
- *Mallon, Ron. "Social Construction, Social Roles, and Stability." In *Socializing Metaphysics*.

Optional: Exchange between Hacking and Boyd

- Hacking, Ian. "A Tradition of Natural Kinds"
- Boyd, Richard. "Realism, Anti-foundationalism, and the Enthusiasm for Natural Kinds."
- Hacking, Ian. "On Boyd."

March 31: History, functions

- Millikan, Ruth Garrett. From *Language, Thought, and other Biological Categories*.
- *Millikan, R. G. "Historical Kinds and the "Special Sciences"." *Philosophical Studies* (1999) 95: 45-65.
- Boyd, Richard. "Kinds, Complexity, and Multiple Realization: Comments on Millikan's "Historical Kinds and the Special Sciences" *Phil Studies* 95 No 1-2 (1999) 67-98.
- *Elder, Crawford. From *Real Natures and Familiar Objects*.

April 7: Musical ontology

- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. From *Works and Worlds of Art*.
- Goehr, Lydia. From *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works*.
- Nussbaum, Charles. "Kinds, Types, and Musical Ontology." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 61:3 (2003).

April 14: Projection on real properties

- *Searle, John. From *The Construction of Social Reality*.
- Smith, Barry and Searle, John. "The Construction of Social Reality: An exchange."
- Smith, Barry. "Introduction." *John Searle*. Ed. by Barry Smith. Cambridge Univ. Press.

Fictionalism**April 21:**

- Stephen Yablo, "Go Figure: A Path through Fictionalism"
- Amie Thomasson, from *Fiction and Metaphysics*.

Selection and factors in individuation**April 28: Reference and sparseness**

- Epstein, "The Realpolitik of Reference"; "Sparseness"

April 28: Factors in individuation, socialness, idealization

- Burge, Kripke, readings on models and idealization

Grades:

Participation: 15%

Reaction papers: 25%

Paper: 60%

Weekly reaction papers:

- Two pages total per week, due in class. On the readings with asterisks in the list above. If there are two readings with asterisks, just one page on each.
- The idea is to demonstrate understanding of the reading, and to generate some thoughts for issues, problems, objections, topics for discussion. For each reaction, it's perfectly reasonable to devote half a page to a quick reconstruction of the argument, and half a page to your reactions.
- Reaction papers won't be assigned letter grades, but simply assessed for overall quality. Collect them and hand them in as a packet at the end of the term, with your final paper.

Participation:

- Is a requirement for the seminar. The idea of the seminar is to work through these difficult problems as a group, contributing to your own and the group's understanding.
- The purpose of the class is to understand and critically assess the literature and analyses in this field. Consequently, it's essential to do two (conflicting?) things:
 - To apply your critical faculties to the readings and the arguments of others in class
 - To listen to others and help direct the conversation constructively.
- In other words, it's required that you jump into the fray, and at the same time not violate the norms of constructive conversation.

Paper:

- In addition to the reaction papers, there will be one final paper of 15-20 pages, due at the end of the term.
- The topic should be of your choosing, though I'll be happy to give guidance or ideas. It should conform closely to the topics discussed in class, and deal with a specific (and reasonably narrow) part of the literature. Meet with me partway through the term to approve and help refine your topics.
- The paper should be a tightly argued piece of philosophy, with a specific claim, situated in the literature, arguments for the claim, and consideration of objections. The quality and precision of argumentation will be a principal criterion for the grading.

Blackboard:

- Readings will be posted on Blackboard, well in advance of the class session. (www.learn.vt.edu).
- Also, keep checking Blackboard for announcements, and changes to the syllabus. This syllabus is only preliminary, and is guaranteed to change as the term proceeds.
- We can start up a discussion board on Blackboard, if people are interested.