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The Tools of Scientific Metaphysics

SE, A, Je 16-18, B111

Modules: MA6, MA8

http://wuthrich.net/teaching/_MA6_ToolsSciMeta_2021.html

Primary reading: Sider, Theodore (2020). *The Tools of Metaphysics and the Metaphysics of Science*. Oxford University Press.

All other readings will be made available on moodle.unige.ch (ID 10966).

- 23.09. *Introduction to the seminar and the topic* (CW & AC)
 *Ladyman, James & Ross, Don (2007). *Every Thing Must Go: Metaphysics Naturalized*. Oxford University Press. Ch. 1, pp. 1-66.
- 30.09. *Neo-Aristotelian Metaphysics*
 Schaffer, Jonathan (2009). On what grounds what. In David Manley, David J. Chalmers & Ryan Wasserman (eds.), *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*. Oxford University Press. pp. 347-383.
- 07.10. *Against Metaphysics*
 Price, Huw (2009). Metaphysics after Carnap: the ghost who walks? In Chalmers et al. (eds.), *Metametaphysics*. Oxford University Press. pp. 320-46.
- 14.10. McKenzie, Kerry (2010). A curse on both houses: naturalistic versus *a priori* metaphysics and the problem of progress. *Res Philosophica* 97: 1-29.
- 21.10. *Postmodal Metaphysics and Structuralism*
 Sider, Ch. 1, §§1.1-1.9, pp. 1-23.
- 28.10. *Nomic Essentialism*
 Sider, Ch. 2, §§2.1-2.6, pp. 23-45.
- 04.11. *No seminar* (semaine de lecture)
- 11.11. *Individuals*
 Sider, Ch. 3, §§3.1-3.8, pp. 45-65.
- 18.11. Sider, Ch. 3, §§3.9-3.13, pp. 65-93.
- 25.11. Sider, Ch. 3, §§3.14-3.18, pp. 93-119.
- 02.12. *Quantities*
 Sider, Ch. 4, §§4.1-4.7.4, pp. 119-140.
- 09.12. Sider, Ch. 4, §§4.8-4.12, pp. 140-177.
- 16.12. *Equivalence*
 Sider, Ch. 5, §§5.1-5.6.4, pp. 177-201.
- 23.12. Sider, Ch. 5, §§5.6.4-5.8, pp. 201-215.

Readings marked with an asterisk (*) are not mandatory.

Course description

Meta-metaphysics deals with methodological and epistemological questions concerning the status of contemporary analytic metaphysics, such as whether metaphysics must be sensitive to results from the empirical sciences. The aim of the seminar is three-fold. First, to introduce the relevant background to do research in meta-metaphysics. Second, to give the students the instruments to craft a critical view on the status of metaphysics and its relationship to the empirical sciences. Third, to discuss some putative examples of metaphysical views which can be used as a tool to better understand scientific results.

Metaphysics -- the study of the fundamental structures of reality -- has been a central part of philosophy from its early day to our days. The focus of this semester's seminar will be the epistemological status of contemporary metaphysics. In particular, the aim of the seminar is to discuss whether metaphysics is a legitimate way of inquiring nature, and whether it must be related to empirical science in order to be epistemically justified.

In the introductory part of the seminar, we will read and discuss some of the most influential papers concerning the epistemic legitimacy of metaphysics. In the second part, we will focus on Theodore Sider's new book on the metaphysics of science. This book defends a view according to which contemporary analytic metaphysics is a necessary tool to understand the ontological content -- i.e. what they tell us about the world -- of our best scientific theories. In support of this view, Sider discusses several examples of currently open metaphysical debates which have direct impact on the philosophy of science and physics.

While some background in metaphysics and logic will be helpful, none is required to succeed in the seminar. This seminar will be in English.

Course requirements

For credit in philosophy:

- *MA6*: travail écrit de recherche avec soutenance (env. 25 pages, 50'000 signes)
- *MA8 (demi-module)*: travail écrit de recherche (env. 12 pages, 24'000 signes) ou présentation orale durant le séminaire

Contact us if you need credit in physics or in another programme.

Our expectation is that everyone prepares the assigned readings ahead of time, actively participates in the seminar (including those featuring a guest speaker), and accepts a reasonable share of presentation duties.

Seminar presentations

We expect everyone to do a brief presentation on one of the assigned readings. When it is your turn, please keep the following points in mind:

- While you will be the leader for the entire seminar on this day, including the discussion, the initial presentation should last (if given in one piece) about 15 to 20 minutes.
- Therefore, it is important to stick to the main points, the author's *main thesis* and their *main argument*, rather than to give a complete or chronological list of points raised in the article.
- We encourage you to use some *visual complement* (blackboard, powerpoint slides, handout), and to see this seminar as an opportunity to experiment with a format you have not yet tried.
- Make sure to read the article sufficiently ahead of time, so that we have time to make an appointment if you want to meet and discuss it before your presentation.
- Don't stress out if there is something in the article you don't understand after having made an effort to grasp it. In this case, try to articulate precisely what it is that you don't understand—and it may well become the topic of our seminar discussion.