

Philosophy 741

Seminar: *Things and Stuff*

Ned Markosian
Department of Philosophy
University of Massachusetts Amherst
markosian@umass.edu
Spring 2024

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 1:00pm-2:00pm. South College E421.

Course Overview

This is a seminar on the metaphysics of material objects and the matter that constitutes them. We will read and discuss works by a variety of philosophers, and in addition I will present material from a book manuscript titled *Things and Stuff*. Among the main topics we'll focus on are (1) the difference between physical and non-physical objects; (2) the mereology of physical objects; (3) the nature of fundamentality; (4) the difference between things (also known as objects) and stuff (also known as matter); (5) the choice between a thing ontology, a stuff ontology, and a mixed ontology of things and stuff; (6) the mereology of stuff; (7) the question of whether physical objects and portions of matter should be thought of as having temporal parts; and (8) some of the consequences of having a dualist ontology of the physical world that posits both fundamental things and fundamental stuff.

Course Requirements

- ❖ **Two short (10-minute) class presentations** (each worth 10% of final grade).
- ❖ **Ten weekly papers** (collectively worth 30% of final grade).
- ❖ **One term paper** (worth 50% of final grade).

About Presentations

Each of your presentations should be about 10 minutes long, and should feature a 1-page handout. You are not expected to summarize the reading. Instead, you should select one main point or argument from the reading (ideally this will be one of the two or three most

important things in the reading), and present your own response to that point or argument. (You may have to coordinate with whoever else is presenting on the same day to avoid overlap with respect to the content of your presentations.) After your presentation you will conduct a 10-minute Q&A.

Our schedule for presentations will be worked out on the first day of class.

About Weekly Papers

For each day when there is a reading assignment and you are not giving a presentation (there will be 10 days like that), you will be required to turn in a weekly paper on that day's readings. A weekly paper is a (roughly) 3-page paper in which you do the following: (i) summarize the main content of that day's reading, (ii) raise some substantive question or objection concerning that content, and (iii) articulate your own solution to the main philosophical problem addressed in the reading.

Your lowest weekly paper grade will be dropped, and the remaining nine grades will be averaged to determine your overall weekly paper grade.

Weekly papers are due at noon on the day of a given reading assignment, and must be submitted using Turnitin on Moodle. Late papers will be penalized 10 points (out of 100) per day. Extensions may be granted, but only to students who arrange them with me ahead of time.

About Term Papers

Your term paper must be on an approved topic, and should be approximately 5,000-6,000 words (15-18 pages) long. It must be submitted using Turnitin on Moodle. Late papers will be penalized at the rate of one letter grade per day, but extensions are available to those who request them ahead of time.

Required Readings

- Kleinschmidt, Shieva, "Some Things About Stuff," *Philosophical Studies* **135** (2007), pp, 407-423.
- Koslicki, Kathrin, *The Structure of Objects* (Oxford University Press, 2008), Chapter VII.

- Markosian, Ned, "Simples, Stuff, and Simple People," *The Monist* 87 (2004), pp. 405-428.
- McTaggart, John McTaggart Ellis, *The Nature of Existence* (Cambridge University Press, 1927), Volume II, Book V, Chapter 33. Reprinted as "Time" in Richard M. Gale (ed.), *The Philosophy of Time* (Macmillan Press, 1968), pp. 86-97.
- Parsons, Josh, "Theories of Location," in Dean Zimmerman (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, Volume 3 (Oxford University Press, 2007).
- Sider, Theodore, "Four-Dimensionalism," *Philosophical Review* 106 (1997), pp. 197-231.
- Steen, Mark, "[The Metaphysics of Mass Expressions](#)," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2022).
- Van Inwagen, Peter, *Material Beings* (Cornell University Press, 1990), Sections 1-3, 6, 8-9, 12-13.

Schedule (*subject to change*)

Date	Topic/Reading Assignment	Presenter
Feb	7 Course intro No reading	
	14 The Physical and the Non-Physical Van Inwagen, <i>Material Beings</i> , Sections 1-3	
	21 Simple Things Van Inwagen, <i>Material Beings</i> , Sections 6, 8, & 9	SS
	28 Mereological Mayhem I Van Inwagen, <i>Material Beings</i> , Sections 12-13	KM
Mar	6 Mereological Mayhem II Koslicki, <i>The Structure of Objects</i> , Chapter VII	EJM
	13 A Spatial Approach to Mereology I Parsons, "Theories of Location," Sections 1-4	KH
	20 <i>Spring Break</i>	

	27	A Spatial Approach to Mereology II Parsons, "Theories of Location," Sections 5-8	SS
Apr	3	The Case for Stuff Kleinschmidt, "Some Things About Stuff"	KM
	10	The Mereology of Stuff Steen, "The Metaphysics of Mass Expressions"	KH
	17	Persistence Sider, "Four-Dimensionalism"	EW
	24	Time McTaggart, "The Unreality of Time"	EJM
May	1	Stuff Is Not Enough Markosian, "Simples, Stuff, and Simple People"	
	8	Things and Stuff TBD	
	15	Term papers due at 5PM	