

## **Philosophy 290: Why Is There Anything Except Physics?**

Spring 2018

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**Seminars:** 2-4pm, Tuesdays, Dennes Room

### **Readings:**

- All readings will be available on the bCourses site.
- Please read the articles assigned for each seminar before it begins and come to the seminar equipped with questions and/or comments for discussion.

**Assessment:** 5000-10000 word paper on a topic related to the theme of the class. Enrolled students should check in with us regularly over the semester to discuss paper topics and course materials.

### **Course Overview:**

High-level sciences like biology and economics study patterns in the arrangement of high-level properties, such as the distributions of genotypes in a population of organisms, or the prices of a range of commodities. But in a certain sense, patterns of properties are cheap: we can define up countless other high-level miscellany, such as the disjunctive property of being a boom economy or a butterfly. Is there anything special about the ones we actually focus on? In what sense is there anything other than the patterns of properties studied in fundamental physics? To examine this question we will discuss a range of literature from meta-metaphysics, philosophy of science, and cognitive science.

## Syllabus (subject to change)

\*\* indicates optional readings

- Jan 16**      **Introduction and naturalness**
- Sider, *Writing the Book of the World*, Chapter 1
- Jan 23**      **The problem of ontological trash**
- Shoemaker, "On What There Are"
- Jan 30**      **Robust Realism I: Metaphysics**
- Schaffer, "The Ground Between The Gaps"
- Feb 6**      **Deflationism I: Metaphysics**
- Sider, *Writing the Book of the World*, Chapter 7
  - Chalmers, "Ontological Anti-Realism", pp. 77-104
- Feb 13**      **Robust Realism II: Non-reductive physicalism**
- Loewer, "Why is There Anything Except Physics?"
  - Fodor, "Disunity of Science as a Working Hypothesis"
  - Kitcher, "1959 And All That: A Tale of Two Sciences"\*\*\*
- Feb 20**      **Deflationism II: Real patterns**
- Dennett, "Real Patterns"
  - Andersen, "Patterns, Information, and Causation"\*\*\*
  - Wolfram, "A new kind of science" chapter 10\*\*
- Feb 27**      **Deflationism III: Information processing**
- Shepard, "Perceptual-Cognitive Universals as Reflections of the World"
  - Gardenfors, "Conceptual Spaces and AI"
- March 6**      **Moderate Realism I: The mentaculus**
- North, "Time in Thermodynamics", pp. 1-24
  - Loewer, "David Lewis' Humean Theory of Objective Chance", pp. 3-10
- March 13**      **Moderate Realism II: The mentaculus continued**
- Albert, "Physics and Chance"
  - Wolpert *et. al.* "The Many Faces of State Space Compression", pp. 199-210

- March 20**     **Moderate Realism III: Degrees of freedom**
- Wilson, “Non-Reductive Physicalism and Degrees of Freedom”
  - Batterman, “Multiple Realizability and Universality”
- March 27**     **SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS**
- April 3**        **CLASS CANCELLED**
- April 10**      **Naturalness and Persons I: Personal Identity**
- Johnston, “The Personite Problem: Should Practical Reason Be Tabled?”
- April 17**      **Naturalness and Persons II: Consciousness**
- Lee, “Alien Subjectivity and the Importance of Consciousness”
- April 24**      **Laura Franklin-Hall visits!**
- Franklin-Hall, “Natural Kinds as Categorical Bottlenecks”