

Medieval, Early Modern, and Contemporary Work on Substance

Shamik Dasgupta (Princeton)

John Morrison (Columbia)

Cross Listed as

Columbia: G9515 Topics in Metaphysics

Princeton: PHI 540 Metaphysics

Course Description

There has traditionally been much interest in the notion of substance. Substances are often said to be *fundamental*, *independent*, *unified*, and the *bearers of properties*. But the very notion of substance has raised many questions through the medieval, early modern and contemporary eras. For one thing, there is little agreement as to whether substances have all these characteristics. For another thing, there is little agreement about which things are substances (particles? rocks? organisms? God?) And some have even questioned whether the notion of substance is intelligible.

In this seminar we will discuss major works from each of these eras. Our goal is to understand how authors such as Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham, Descartes, Spinoza, Locke and Lewis thought about the notion and then to discuss the bearing of their work on contemporary metaphysics. Readings will be from primary and secondary sources, including several chapters from Robert Pasnau's recent book *Metaphysical Themes: 1274-1671*. We will have several guests to the seminar including (in chronological order) Marilyn Adams, Wolfgang Mann, Dan Garber, Martin Lin, and Robert Pasnau.

The seminar will be a graduate-level introduction to the issues. No prior work in metaphysics or history will be assumed. We will meet on Friday afternoons (1-3.50), alternating between Columbia and Princeton (see schedule below, note that we will meet at Princeton whenever there is a Princeton colloquium following the seminar).

Syllabus

Students interested in the class are encouraged to read R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 1: "Introduction", as a general background.

* = optional reading

**Feb 8th Introduction to substance and prime matter
Princeton**

Guest: Marilyn Adams

Readings:

- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 2: “Substratum”
- M. Adams, *William Ockham*, pp. 633-647 of chapter 15: “The Metaphysical Structure of Composite Substances”
- *Aquinas, *On the Principles of Nature*

Feb 15th Substantial form
Columbia

Guest: Wolfgang Mann

Readings:

- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 24: “Substantial Form”
- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 25: “Unity and Dualism”
- M. Adams, *William Ockham*, pp. 647-667 of chapter 15: “The Metaphysical Structure of Composite Substances”
- *Ockham, *Summula I*, chs. 1-14

Feb 22nd Accidents
Princeton

Readings:

- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 10: “Real Accidents”
- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 11: “Inherence”
- D. Armstrong, selections from *A World of States of Affairs*.
- *A.S. Maurin, “Bradley’s Regress”, *Philosophy Compass* 2012

March 1st Essence and mind
Columbia

Readings:

- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 16: “Mind and Extension”
- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 27: “Real Essences”
- *Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Question 76

March 8th Descartes
Princeton

Guest: Dan Garber

Readings:

- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 8: “Cartesian Substances”

- D. Garber, “Understanding Interaction: What Descartes Should Have Said to Elisabeth”
- Descartes, *Meditation 6*

**March 15th Identity and persistence over time
Columbia**

Readings:

- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 28: “Permanence and Corruption”
- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 29: “Identity over Time”
- *R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 18: “*Entia Successiva*”
- *P. King, “The Problem of Individuation in the Middle Ages”, *Theoria* 2000, 159—184.

SPRING BREAK

**March 29th Spinoza
Columbia**

Guest: Martin Lin

Readings:

- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 13: “Modes”
- M. Lin, “Substance, Attribute, and Mode in Spinoza”, *Philosophy Compass* 2006.
- Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I, Propositions 1-15.

**April 5th Empiricist challenges to scholastic conceptions of substance
Columbia**

Readings:

- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 7: “The Veiled Subject”
- Dasgupta, “Individuals: An Essay in Revisionary Metaphysics”

**April 12th Lewis and the scholastics
Princeton**

Guest: Robert Pasnau

Readings:

- R. Pasnau, “A Lewisian History of Philosophy”

- K. Koslicki, *The Structure of Objects* chapter 2: “Ordinary Objects as Mereological Sums”
- *K. Koslicki, *The Structure of Objects*, pp 9-17

**April 19th Material constitution
Columbia**

Readings:

- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 26: “Parts and Wholes”
- K. Fine, “Things and their Parts”, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 1999
- K. Kosliski, *The Structure of Objects* chapter 4: “A Different Kind of Whole”
- K. Kosliski, *The Structure of Objects* chapter 7: “Objects as Structured Wholes”

**April 26th Persistence
Princeton**

Readings:

- R. Pasnau, *Metaphysical Themes* chapter 18: “*Entia Successiva*”
- K. Kosliski, pp. 122-128 of “The Crooked Path from Vagueness to Four-Dimensionalism”, *Philosophical Studies* 2003.
- S. Haslanger, “Persistence Through Time”
- *T. Sider, selections from *Four Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time*
- *J. Thomson, “Parthood and Identity Over Time”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 1983.

**May 3rd TBD
Princeton**