

DVPR 46400
The Status of Universals:
Realism and Nominalism in Comparative Perspective

Winter Term, 2010
Swift Hall, 208
Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:00-11:20

Instructor: Dan Arnold

Office hours: Swift 401A, Wednesdays, 3-4:30 (or by arrangement with instructor); for appointments during regular office hours, contact instructor's secretary, Susie McGee (Martin Marty Center)

E-mail: d-arnold@uchicago.edu

Phone: 702-8276

Objectives of the Course:

This course will consider the perennially vexed question of the ontological status of universals or abstract objects – the question that exercised generations of Medieval scholastics who upheld variously “realist” and “nominalist” positions, as well as generations of classical Indian philosophers. That the questions in play are not, however, as arcane and antiquated as the foregoing statements imply is clear, we will see, from the extent to which the same issues remain very much play in the modern and contemporary periods. In this regard, particular attention will be paid to the continuing significance of these issues with respect to philosophy of mind.

Required readings:

The following titles are available at the Seminary Coop Bookstore, and on reserve at Regenstein Library:

Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*
Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*
Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*

All other readings should be available on e-reserve through Chalk (<http://chalk.uchicago.edu>). Some of these readings are from books that are readily available, and that you may want to procure on your own; these include:

Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*
Parimal Patil, *Against a Hindu God: Buddhist Philosophy of Religion in India*
Peter Scharf, *The Denotation of Generic Terms in Ancient Indian Philosophy*
(which, constituting the entirety of Vol. 86, No. 3 of the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* [new series, 1996], can be downloaded from JSTOR)

Course Requirements:

It is my hope that this course will involve, for at least one session a week, class-wide discussion. In addition, then, to regular attendance and spirited participation in the conversation, there will be one written exercise – specifically, a paper of 10-15 pages

(on a topic developed in consultation with the instructor), **due on Wednesday, March 17**. Late papers will not be accepted without prior notice.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Week 1 (Mon., 1/4; Wed., 1/6)

Course introduction: What are “universals,” and in what kinds of problems do they figure? **Reading** (for Wed.): Gilbert Ryle, “Are There Propositions?” (e-reserve); Gottlob Frege, “The Thought: A Logical Inquiry” (e-reserve)

Week 2 (Mon., 1/11; Wed., 1/13)

More on what we might (or might not) mean by “universals”: A perhaps counter-intuitive reading selection by way of getting clear. **Reading:** Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*

Week 3 (Mon., 1/18; Wed., 1/20)

Being as the universal, par excellence. **Reading:** Etienne Gilson, “On Being and the One,” in Gilson’s *Being and Some Philosophers* (e-reserve; those who wish might also read further in Gilson’s lucid but dense book)

Week 4 (Mon., 1/25; Wed., 1/27)

Are universals necessarily involved in saying anything about God? **Reading:** Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*

Week 5 (Mon., 2/1; Wed., 2/3)

Turning to the issue of universals in Indian philosophy: The realism of Brahmanical schools of thought. **Reading:** Peter Scharf, *The Denotation of Generic Terms in Ancient Indian Philosophy: Grammar, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsā*, pp.151-261 (e-reserve); Will Rasmussen, “The Realism of Universals in Plato and Nyāya” (e-reserve)

Week 6 (Mon., 2/8; Wed., 2/10)

Introducing Buddhist critiques of universals: Dignāga and the *apoha* doctrine. **Reading:** Richard Hayes, “Principled Atheism in the Buddhist Scholastic Tradition” (e-reserve); Shoryu Katsura, “The *Apoha* Theory of Dignāga” (e-reserve); John Dunne, *Foundations of Dharmakīrti’s Philosophy*, pp.113-44 (2.4, “Universals”; e-reserve)

Week 7 (Mon., 2/15; Wed., 2/17)

More on Buddhist critiques of Brahmanical realism: Dharmakīrti and subsequent thinkers. **Reading:** Parimal Patil, *Against a Hindu God*, pp.195-247 (“The Theory of Exclusion, Conceptual Content, and Buddhist Epistemology”; e-reserve), pp.248-278 (“Ratnakīrti’s World: Toward a Buddhist Philosophy of Everything”; e-reserve); Mark Siderits, “Is Reductionism Expressible?” (e-reserve)

Week 8 (Mon., 2/22; Wed., 2/24)

Back to a twentieth-century debate on universals: Russell and Quine. **Reading:** Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, pp.91-110 (“The World of Universals,” “On Our Knowledge of Universals”; e-reserve); W. V. O. Quine, “On What There Is” (e-reserve)

Week 9 (Mon., 3/1; Wed., 3/3)

The question of universals and “the religious roots of our ostensibly godless age”: On the possible significance of our issues for understanding modernity. **Reading:** Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity*

Week 10 (Mon., 3/8; Wed., 3/10)

Wrapping up: Let’s see what we still have to talk about at this point.

Final papers due Wednesday, March 17!