

Ontology: Living Philosophy in Contemporary Times

HOW DO WE UNDERSTAND THE WORLD?

13 October 2019 at Carindale Library Meeting Room

The concept of the world enlarges our thinking on being, and by 'world' we are thinking on 'worlds'. From the question of personal identity, we very quickly try to understand others or the infamous 'Other'.

REFERENCES

(The works listed are not a complete coverage of the contemporary field but to provide the best known and most significant in contemporary discussions. Apologies if anything important has been missed)

The Key Texts

Alain Badiou. *Being and Event* (Bloomsbury Revelations, 1988).

Being and Event is the centrepiece of Alain Badiou's oeuvre; it is the work that grounds his reputation as one of France's most original philosophers. Long-awaited in translation, Being and Event makes available to an English-speaking readership Badiou's groundbreaking work on set theory - the cornerstone of his whole philosophy. This book makes the scope and aim of Badiou's whole philosophical project clear, enabling full comprehension of Badiou's significance for contemporary philosophy. In Being and Event, Badiou anchors this project by recasting the European philosophical tradition from Plato onwards, via a series of analyses of such key figures as Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hegel, Rousseau, and Lacan. He thus develops the basis for a history of philosophy rivalling those of Heidegger and Deleuze in its depth. This wide-ranging book is organised in a precise and novel manner, reflecting the philosophical rigour of Badiou's thought.

Alain Badiou. *Manifesto for Philosophy* (SUNY Press, 1989)

Contra those proclaiming the end of philosophy, Badiou aims to restore philosophical thought to the complete space of the truths that condition it.

Graham Harman. *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Open Court Publishing, 2002).

In this groundbreaking work, Graham Harman explains Heidegger's famous tool-analysis and then extends it beyond Heidegger's narrower theory of human practical activity to create an ontology of objects themselves. A welcome alternative to the linguistic turn that has dominated recent analytic and Continental philosophy, Tool-Being urges a fresh and

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concrete exploration into the secret contours of objects. Written in a lively and colorful style, it will be of interest to anyone open to new trends in contemporary philosophy.

Graham Harman. *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (Penguin, 2018)

Graham Harman lays out the history, ideas and impact of Object-Oriented Ontology, taking in everything from art and literature, politics and natural science along the way.

Ingvar Johansson. *Ontological Investigations: An Inquiry into the Categories of Nature, Man, and Society* (Routledge, 1989).

This volume is devoted to problems within analytic metaphysics. It defends an ontology and theory of categories inspired by Aristotle, but revised in such a way as to be compatible with modern science. The ontology of both natural and social reality is addressed, starting out from the view that universals exist but only in the spatiotemporal world (immanent realism). In attempting to bring Aristotle's ontology up-to-date, Ingvar Johansson relies very much on the thinking of Edmund Husserl, conceiving the cement of the universe as Husserlian relations of existential dependence and regarding intentionality as a non-reducible category in the ontology of mind. The work is thoroughly realistic in spirit, but large parts of it should nonetheless be of interest to conceptualists and nominalists, too.

Peter Simons. *Parts: A Study in Ontology* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

Although the relationship of part to whole is one of the most fundamental there is, this is the first full-length study of this key concept. Showing that mereology, or the formal theory of part and whole, is essential to ontology, Simons surveys and critiques previous theories--especially the standard extensional view--and proposes a new account that encompasses both temporal and modal considerations. Simons's revised theory not only allows him to offer fresh solutions to long-standing problems, but also has far-reaching consequences for our understanding of a host of classical philosophical concepts.

Barry Smith. *Building Ontologies with Basic Formal Ontology* (MIT Press, 2015)

In the era of "big data," science is increasingly information driven, and the potential for computers to store, manage, and integrate massive amounts of data has given rise to such new disciplinary fields as biomedical informatics. Applied ontology offers a strategy for the organization of scientific information in computer-tractable form, drawing on concepts not only from computer and information science but also from linguistics, logic, and philosophy. The work presents the core features of the Basic Formal Ontology (BFO), now used by over one hundred ontology projects around the world, and offers examples of domain ontologies that utilize BFO. The book also describes Web Ontology Language (OWL), a common framework for Semantic Web technologies. Throughout, the book provides concrete recommendations for the design and construction of domain ontologies.

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Amie Thomasson. *Ontology Made Easy* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

Reviewed by Matti Eklund, Uppsala University, in the Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews:

“Amie L. Thomasson lays out in a lively and clear fashion her preferred view on ontological questions, traces it back to Rudolf Carnap, and compares and contrasts the view with many competing views from the literature. The book is a continuation of earlier themes in Thomasson’s work, including her (2007) *Ordinary Objects*. But while she defends the same type of metaontological view here as in earlier work, there is not a huge amount of actual overlap, and Thomasson here discusses issues left open by, or only relatively briefly dealt with in, earlier discussions.... Here is Thomasson’s main argument and thesis in roughest outline. Ontological sentences — sentences about what there is — must in order to be meaningful be governed by rules of use. But if they are so governed then ontological questions are answerable either conceptually or empirically. Ontology is in this way easy: ontological questions can be answered by conceptual and empirical means. By means of “easy arguments” appealing to these rules of use one can reason one’s way from philosophically uncontroversial premises to the existence of what are otherwise seen as philosophically controversial entities.

And with important connections to other areas of philosophy:

[Ontology and Politics and Society](#)

Timothy Morton. *Ecology Without Nature* (Harvard University Press, 2007).

In *Ecology without Nature*, Timothy Morton argues that the chief stumbling block to environmental thinking is the image of nature itself. Ecological writers propose a new worldview, but their very zeal to preserve the natural world leads them away from the “nature” they revere. The problem is a symptom of the ecological catastrophe in which we are living. Morton sets out a seeming paradox: to have a properly ecological view, we must relinquish the idea of nature once and for all.

Timothy Morton. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013)

Having set global warming in irreversible motion, we are facing the possibility of ecological catastrophe. But the environmental emergency is also a crisis for our philosophical habits of thought, confronting us with a problem that seems to defy not only our control but also our understanding. Global warming is perhaps the most dramatic example of what Timothy Morton calls “hyperobjects”—entities of such vast temporal and spatial dimensions that they defeat traditional ideas about what a thing is in the first place. In this book, Morton explains what hyperobjects are and their impact on how we think, how we coexist with one another and with nonhumans, and how we experience our politics, ethics, and art.

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Jean-Luc Nancy. *What's These Worlds Coming To?* (Fordham University Press, 2014).

Our contemporary challenge, according to Jean-Luc Nancy and Aurélien Barrau, is that a new world has quietly cropped up on us and is, in fact, already here. We no longer live in a world, but in worlds. We do not live in a universe anymore, but rather in a multiverse. We no longer create; we appropriate and montage. And we do not build sovereign, hierarchical political institutions anymore; we form local assemblies and networks of cross-national assemblages and we do this at the same time as we form multinational corporations that no longer pay taxes to the State. In such a time as this, one of the world's most eminent philosophers and an emerging astrophysicist return to the ancient art of cosmology. Nancy and Barrau's work is a study of life, plural worlds, and what the authors call the struction or rebuilding of these worlds.