PHIL 459:
The Metaphysics of Social Collectivity

Spring 2024

Instructor:	Megan Hyska	**Time:**	Tuesdays 1-4
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Office Hours: Kresge 3-443, Thursdays 11-1 and by alternative arrangement.

Course Description: In this course, we will be drawing on work in social metaphysics to build out a taxonomy of different ways in which people can be said to constitute a collective. When we consider expressions like "women", "brown-eyed people", "the Republican Party", "the working class", and "the Civil Rights Movement," we see that each purports to refer to a single unit composed of multiple people—but in each case, what it is that binds the relevant people together such that they appear to us as a unified entity is plausibly different in kind. Some forms of collectivity require that all constituent individuals have some antecedent trait in common, while some unite erstwhile dissimilar individuals. Some depend on people conceiving of themselves as unified, while some do not depend on individuals' mental states at all. And determining which flavor of collectivity a given entity instantiates is important for answering further practically and philosophically important questions: is the collective the kind of thing that can bear duties, or to which it makes sense to have reactive attitudes? Is it the kind of entity that we should strive to create, or which will figure in the explanation of social change? Readings will include work on grouphood, collective intentionality, and the grounding of social facts, as well as discussions of both ontological and explanatory varieties of the individualism/holism debate.

Course Outline:

Note that I reserve the right to alter readings over the course of the quarter. If I do so, I will notify you by the class session prior to the one in which the altered readings are to be discussed, at the latest.

DAY	COURSEWORK
1, 04.02	Introduction, no assignments
2, 04.09	**How Individuals Make Up Groups** Katherine Ritchie, *The Metaphysics of Social Groups* David-Hillel Ruben, *Social Wholes and Parts* Katherine Hawley, *Social Mereology*
3, 04.16	**Holism and Individualism** Christian List and Kai Spiekermann, *Methodological Individualism and Holism in Political Science: A Reconciliation* Friedrich Hayek from *Scientism and the Study of Society*

4, 04.23	**Grounding and Anchoring**	

Brian Epstein, Chapters 3-9 from *The Ant Trap*

Luke Beesley, *Anchoring disablement: Social definitions & social ontology in Britain's disabled people's movement*

OPTIONAL: Jonathan Schaffer, *Anchoring as Grounding: On Epstein's the Ant Trap*

5, 04.30	**Collective Intentionality 1: Shared Goals, We-Intentions, Shared and Joint Intentional States**

John Searle, *Collective Intentions and Actions*

Margaret Gilbert, *Shared Intention and Personal Intentions*

Michael Bratman, *Shared Intention*

6, 05.07	**Collective Intentionality 2: Group Agency**

Christian List and Phillip Pettit, from *Group Agency*

Deborah Tollefson, from *Groups as Agents*

7, 05.14	**Collective Responsibility**

Stephanie Collins, from *Group Duties*

8, 05.21	**Decentering Collective Intentionality?**

Brookes Brown, *The Romantic Lie in the Brain: Collective Agency, Moral Responsibility, and the State*

Megan Hyska, *What is Social Organizing?*

Paper presentations

8, 05.29	**Special topic decided together: The idea of "the crowd"**

Gustave LeBon, from *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*

Elias Canetti, from *Crowds and Power*

Paper presentations

Final paper: All students enrolled for a grade will hand in a seminar paper by **Monday June 3rd, 12pm**. My expectations for your paper are as follows:

- The paper should be approx. 4000-5000 words.

- The paper should take up a question directly related to the subject matter of the course.

- This is an exercise in professional writing, so your paper should be formatted like a journal article of the kind we will read in class: it should be tightly focused, engage with a problem that is delineated as sharply as possible, and treat that problem in a way framed by debates in the secondary literature.

In-class presentation: All students writing a final paper will give an in-class presentation on their paper topic on May 14th, 21st, or 28th (sign-up available on Canvas on first class day). Presentation slots will be 10 minutes long, during which the presenter should speak for 5 minutes, leaving the additional 5 for responding to questions from their peers. Presentations are understood to be preliminary work, but must present material at a level of refinement where you have a) identified the question you want to ask and roughly the answer you want to give to it, and b) identified the texts that you will centrally engage with.

Participation: In addition to coming to each class with the readings completed and having prepared to engage in conversation, I am looking for you to be good interlocutors to one another. Among other things, this means participating in the Q&A period after your colleagues have presented their paper ideas.

Each student will also post a discussion question to Canvas each course day by 12pm (i.e. by an hour before seminar) concerning that day's readings. This will help me structure class discussion.

Use of Generative Artifical Intelligence: In this course, the use of generative AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT) is permitted for the following activities:

- Brainstorming and refining your ideas

- Fine tuning your research questions

- Drafting an outline to organize your thoughts

- Checking grammar and style

The use of generative AI tools is not permitted in this course for the following activities:

- Writing a draft of a writing assignment

- Writing entire sentences, paragraphs or papers to complete class assignments.

Any use of generative AI should be accompanied by a disclosure at the end of an assignment explaining (1) what you used it for; (2) the specific tool(s) you used; and (3) what prompts you used to get the results. Any use of generative AI beyond where permitted will be viewed as a potential academic integrity violation.