Metaphysics, we are told, is about the fundamental structure of the world. But it is also about the ways in which the fundamental generates the nonfundamental… and thus perhaps certain nonfundamental matters might be properly metaphysical as well. At least, that is a question that will arise in this seminar.

We will start by talking about what I call building: the ways in which some states of the world arise from or are settled by others. Such issues are central to philosophy, and unsurprisingly, we have a lot of ways of talking about them. We invoke relations like grounding, realization, determination, composition, supervenience, etc. All of this talk is intended to make claims of relative fundamentality: some states of the world are more fundamental than others.

But what exactly does this mean? What different notions of fundamentality are kicking around in the literature, and how do they relate to each other? For which chosen values of ‘fundamental’ is it plausible to think that the world bottoms out in the absolutely fundamental? Are any or all relations of relative fundamentality (or perhaps building relations in particular) well-founded? And can any or all building relations themselves be fundamental? In what sense?

In the latter part of the term, we will move to what might initially seem a side topic: coming-to-be and creation. We certainly talk as though things come into and go out of existence, and, indeed, as though we ourselves sometimes cause them to do so: we make and destroy things. But is this really the case? Does anything really come to be or pass away? What views must we hold in order to validate our ordinary talk of creation and destruction? Or, to put the same question differently, what views undercut that talk—what views (about, say, composition or persistence or time) entail that nothing ever comes into nor goes out of existence? If coming-to-be is possible at all, is it only possible for nonfundamental entities? So how does coming-to-be relate to building? Can reflection on coming-to-be teach us anything about the philosophical value (or lack thereof) of the nonfundamental?

Assignments: you can receive credit for this course in either of two ways.

1. Two shorter papers of 12-15 pages. The first is due 10/27, and the second due 12/15.
2. A 30 page seminar paper in two drafts. The draft is due 11/15, and the final version due 12/15. Note that a “draft” might be a complete draft, an outline, or some combination.

You just need to give me enough to give you useful feedback and direction.

Because I am only visiting NYU for the semester, I cannot accept incompletes that roll over into next term.
Tentative schedule of readings:

*Introduction, building*

9/8 no reading assigned
Optional: “Construction Area”, available on my website

*Fundamentality 1: what are the different notions in play?*


*Fundamentality 2: are any building relations fundamental? In what sense?*

Schaffer, from “Grounding as the Primitive Concept of Metaphysical Structure” (ms)

10/13 Armstrong, selections from *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction*
Nolan, “What’s Wrong with Infinite Regresses?” (2001)

*Fundamentality 3: are relations of relative fundamentality well-founded?*

10/20 Schaffer, excerpt from “Monism: the Priority of the Whole” (2010)

10/27 Cameron, “Turtles All the Way Down: Regress, Priority, and Fundamentality in Metaphysics” (2008)

*Creation*

11/3 Aristotle, excerpt from *On Generation and Corruption* (3rd century BCE)

11/10 continued; van Inwagen, “Artifacts”, from *Material Beings* (1990)

Sider, excerpt from *Four-Dimensionalism* (2001)
Optional: Koslicki, “The Crooked Path From Vagueness to Four-Dimensionalism”, Varzi, “Change, Temporal Parts, and the Argument from Vagueness”

11/24 no class (Thanksgiving)
12/1  van Inwagen, (different) excerpt from *Material Beings* (1990)

12/8  continued/TBA

Remember, the University runs a *Monday schedule* on 12/15, so we don’t have class.