

On Founding Ontology as an Academic Discipline

The Case of Buffalo

Barry Smith



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Barry Smith (philosopher)

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1879

Wilhelm Wundt establishes the world's first psychological laboratory at the University of Leipzig

1883

The first laboratory of psychology in America established at Johns Hopkins

1892

The American Psychological Association
founded, with 42 members

1894

Carl Stumpf called to serve as professor of
philosophy in Berlin with the explicit task of
establishing there an institute of
psychology

Typical reasons for founding a new discipline (in accordance with the catherine-wheel effect)

feelings of chaos, deadendedness, triviality
(postmodernism ...) inside philosophy

new methods for tackling philosophical
problems

empirical results

increasing intersection with other disciplines

increasing need for cross-disciplinary
collaboration

Typical reactions to the founding of a new discipline

fearful / disdainful reaction from within
philosophy

struggle for resources

1913 "Erklärung von Dozenten der Philosophie
in Deutschland gegen die Besetzung
Philosophischer Lehrstühle mit Vertretern der
experimentellen Psychologie"

Carnap:

If one is interested in the relations between fields which, according to customary academic divisions, belong to different departments, then he will not be welcomed as a builder of bridges, as he might have expected, but will rather be regarded by both sides as an outsider and troublesome intruder.

"My Work in Philosophy Begins" (in the Carnap Schilpp volume).

Metaphysics (*phil.*)

The science of being

Ontology (*phil.*)

A theory of the types of entities existing in reality, and of the relations between these types

Ontologies (*tech.*)

Standardized classification systems which enable data from different sources to be combined

Ontology (*tech.*) often marked by intellectual confusions – above all by the confusion of use and mention

Gruber: ‘For AI systems what “exists” is what can be represented’

Microsoft Healthvault: ‘An allergy episode is ... a single unit of data that is recorded in Microsoft Healthvault’

Ontology (*science*)

is not a job for software engineers
but it is not a job for philosophers, either,
e.g. where ontology is playing an
increasing role in supporting
interdisciplinary communication between
human beings – for example in improving
communication between Federal
government departments

what is needed to found a new discipline

journals

conferences

institutes

societies

industrial applications

subject-matter

methods

cumulative results

teaching

career path (inside and outside the university)

Further details under each of these
subheadings

<http://tinyurl.com/yhygeke>

See also:

**An Introduction to Ontology: From
Aristotle to the Universal Core – Training
course in eight lectures**

at <http://ontologist.com>



International Conference on Biomedical Ontology

University at Buffalo, NY

Tutorials and Classes: July 25-28, 2011

Conference: July 29-31, 2011

<http://icbo.buffalo.edu>

typical reactions to the founding of a new discipline

struggle for resources

resistance from within philosophy

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Ontology at Buffalo

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Course Sched

- Fall 2006

News

October 2006:
[The Philosophy of](#)

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June 2006 :
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June 2006:
Jason Paget rece
[Mary C. Whitma](#)

BS teaching (examples)

Formal Ontology, 1991–92.

Metaphysics, 1992

Cognitive Metaphysics, 1995.

Law and Ontology, 1997

Problems in Ontology, 1999

Geographic Ontology, 2001 and 2002

Philosophy of Social Reality, 2001

Formal Ontology, 2002

Ontology, Bioinformatics and Life Sciences, 2006

Masters Degree (since 2000)

MA in Philosophy with a special focus on
Ontology

1 student completed the program (hired by
industry)

Doctoral Degree (since 2000)

PhD in Philosophy with a special focus on
Ontology

Multiple students completed PhDs – LTC Bill
Mandruck, *The Ontology of War*

Faculty recruiting

Neil Williams

Maureen Donnelly

Thomas Bittner (Philosophy and Geography)

The perils of the tenure process

An Experimental Antidote

Center for Brain and Behavior Informatics
(<http://cbbi.buffalo.edu>)

will be recruiting for an ontologist with philosophy as tenuring department, but using the clinical model of faculty tenure