

UW

PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM

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Friday, May 10, 2019

Time: 3:00 pm

Location: BEH 217

Department of Philosophy, University of Manitoba

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E \nrightarrow N

This talk is based on work done with Joshua Spencer of UW-Milwaukee. What is the relationship between essence and necessity? A popular thought was that they amount to the same thing, or are, at least, materially equivalent. But Kit Fine (1994) convinced many that this isn't so; there can be necessary facts pertaining to you (e.g., you're a member of your singleton), that aren't correspondingly essence facts (supposing your essence is silent on whether there are sets). In slogan form, we can think of Fine as arguing for N \rightarrow E.

We want to argue that the relationship between essence and necessity is even more complicated: we argue for E \rightarrow N. That is, there can be essence facts pertaining to a thing that aren't correspondingly necessary facts. Some x can figure into the essence of y, but without it being the case that, necessarily, y exists only if x does. We consider a range of metaphysical views that we see as committed to E \rightarrow N. But the bigger point, for us, is that E \rightarrow N should be endorsed regardless of your stance on those metaphysical views. For an account of essence should not decide seemingly independent and substantive metaphysical debates by fiat.