FALL 2020

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Students may also take courses at other schools in the Interuniversity Doctoral Consortium. Choose a school from the list below to see the course schedule for the current semester (where available).

- Columbia University
In the PHILOSOPHY OF MOTION PICTURES we will canvass major topics in the field; these may include: the ontology of motion pictures (including television and video); the question of medium specificity; the objectivity of nonfiction cinema; the nature of the motion picture image; how emotions are conveyed and aroused in motion pictures (including the role of attention); motion picture narration; motion pictures and morality (including questions of race and gender, the attraction to villains and antiheroes, and the impact of violence); cultural differences in motion pictures; motion pictures as art; the philosophy of video games; the relation of philosophy and motion pictures; and evaluating the moving image. The course has no prerequisites. The course requirement is a research paper due at the end of the semester.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group C]
both Taxon Essentialism and Individual Essentialism we would have an answer to Essential Membership: an organism $O$ is essentially a member of a taxon $T$ iff an organism having the essence of $O$ entails its having the essence of $T$.

The Metaphysicians
These essentialism issues have been much discussed by metaphysicians in recent times. Thus, on Taxon Essentialism, Saul Kripke (1980), Hilary Putnam (1975), and David Wiggins (1980) have urged that the essence of a taxon, particularly a species is (at least partly) an intrinsic, underlying, probably largely genetic property. This view accords with common sense and has been widely accepted in philosophy. These authors also embraced Essential Membership. And, talking about the Queen in particular, Kripke has urged a view on Individual Essentialism: her origin in certain gametes from certain parents is essential to her. This "origin essentialism" has stirred controversy among metaphysicians (e.g., McGinn 1976, Salmon 1979, Forbes 1986, Robertson 1998). The methodology of the metaphysicians is to appeal to intuitions.

The Philosophers of Biology
What have philosophers of biology had to say on these issues? The contrast with metaphysicians could hardly be more stark. First, philosophers of biology (and biologists) are dismissive of the popular Kripkean view on Taxon Essentialism. The idea that a species has an underlying intrinsic essence is thought to smack of "Aristotelian essentialism" and reflect a naive and uninformed view of biology that is incompatible with Darwinism. Clearly, if the essence of a species is not intrinsic it must be relational (assuming that it has an essence at all). The consensus is indeed that the essence is relational: for an organism to be a member of a certain species, it must have a certain history. Second, until recently, the issue of Essential Membership had been largely ignored in philosophy of biology. Insofar as it has been addressed it has been rejected. Third, the issue of Individual Essentialism has been totally ignored in philosophy of biology. The methodology of philosophers of biology is to appeal to biological theory.

The course will consider these essentialism issues. It will use the methodology of philosophers of biology to argue against almost all of their consensus. So it will be arguing for positions akin to those of the metaphysicians, but without relying on intuitions. It will be organized around a draft of my forthcoming book, Biological Essentialism (Oxford University Press), which draws on several published articles.

If there is time the course will also consider some other issues in the metaphysics of biology. Are species, genera, families, etc. "real"? An answer to this needs to be very clear about what it is to be "real". Are species natural kinds or individuals? Does anything really hang on this question?

Anyone who is not a philosophy graduate student should consult with me before enrolling for this course.

Requirements
1. A brief weekly email raising questions about, making criticisms of, or developing points concerning, matters discussed in the class and reading for that week. 50% of grade.
2. (ii) A class presentation based on a draft for a paper (topic chosen in consultation with me). The draft to be submitted before Tuesday of the week of presentation. 20% of grade.
3. (iii) A 2,500 word paper probably arising from the draft in (ii). 30% of grade.

COLLECTIONS OF MANY IMPORTANT ESSAYS
- Ereshefsky, Marc, (ed.). 1992a. The Units of Evolution: Essays on the Nature of Species. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. [0-262-55020-2] (Sadly, this book is out of print but it may be possible to obtain second hand copies.)

HELPFUL READINGS
Phil 77500

Moral Responsiveness

Prof. Fricker

4 credits

Tuesday 11:45-1:45

Room TBA

This course is broadly in what is often loosely called moral psychology—the emotions and attitudes we engage in responding to others’ actions, perhaps especially wrongdoing, and indeed our own. We will discuss a range of readings that address normative dimensions of moral responsiveness, and the nature of the sensibility we cultivate as part of our moral formation—how it enables or cramps moral understanding, moral perception, moral argument. We will discuss topics such as the following: the nature of good and evil, the structure and function of blame, shame, contempt, guilt, agent-regret, remorse, apology, forgiveness, love, and (what Iris Murdoch calls) 'loving attention'. We will also consider how these different kinds of response construct our moral lives, and we will relate them to evolving notions of character, sensibility, virtue and vice that may be subject to empirical challenge.

By the end of the course you should have a good understanding of a range of central topics in normative ethics and moral psychology. And you will have thought deeply about a range of different, sometimes opposing, positions concerning these topics. My aim is to offer enough background as we go along, so that students with little prior grounding in normative ethics and moral psychology can take full part. There will be two required readings for each class session, and our collective discussion of each will be opened by a short student presentation.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group C]

[back to course schedule]
Phil 80100
MA Proseminar
Prof. Gilmore
4 credits
Weds. 11:45-1:45
Room TBA
Required of all first-year M.A. students in their first semester. Not open to any other students.

Phil 77700
Critical Social Theory
Prof. Gould
4 credits
Tues. 4:15-6:16
Room TBA
Theorists across various traditions have put forward critical perspectives to disarm or deconstruct oppressive modes of theory and practice. Constructively, they have sought forms of knowledge with an "emancipatory" dimension, which is in accordance with positive norms like justice or equal freedom and undistorted by the ideas and interests of powerful economic or social agents or institutions. However, the notion of what is "critical," or what is involved in offering an effective critique, has remained insufficiently analyzed. Efforts to embed knowledge and norms in social and historical contexts pose philosophical challenges of their own, such as how to avoid having normative critiques devolve into mere historicism or relativism.

This seminar will explore the notion of critique and attempt to achieve some clarity on the parameters of critical social theory: first, by considering the origins of this project in Marx’s dialectical method, its development in Lukacs and Gramsci (in regard to ideology and power), and in the critical theory of Horkheimer, Marcuse, and the early Habermas, and more recently in Jaeggi. We will go on to consider the distinctive approach to revolution and critique found in Arendt, and the original features introduced by feminist thought, especially by standpoint theory (Hartsock et al), along with the provocations of Foucault and the recent call to “decolonize” theory by Allen. Contemporary efforts in analytic political philosophy to appeal to nonideal theory instead of, or in addition to, ideal theory also bear scrutiny. As we proceed, we can consider some possibilities for integrating these diverse approaches in new ways. The course will then turn to a focus on how norms and forms of knowledge emerge and change with transformations in social practices (Wartofsky), as an enterprise of political and historical epistemology (beyond existing social epistemologies). Through all these various analyses, we will explicitly confront the questions of how normativity can persist without wholly devolving to social context, and also how we can develop critical perspectives while avoiding imperialist critiques from above.

Finally, the course will take up three current practical challenges as test cases for effective social theoretical response. The first concerns the need for a critical democratic theory that takes the political economy of capitalism seriously, investigating how economic and political power can distort or diminish democracy (Gould), and relatedly how to make room for oppositional consciousness (Mansbridge), counterpower, and resistance. The second challenge arises in regard to the cross-cultural understanding and critique of practices confronting women (from femicide to sex trafficking to the #MeToo movement), where deference to those affected is obviously important but insufficient for social and political transformation. A final issue is how to differentiate negative uses of solidarity, as in contemporary white supremacist and nationalist.
movements, from the constructive solidarities that may characterize liberatory social movements, as in the cases of mutual aid efforts in the United States and refugee support networks in southern Europe and elsewhere.

Throughout the seminar, students will be encouraged to relate the course materials to their ongoing research through an oral presentation and an analytical term paper and will be expected to be active participants in class discussions.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group B or C]

Phil 80200  
PhD Proseminar  
Profs. Khalidi & Vasilou  
4 credits  
Wed. 11:45-1:45  
Room TBA  
Required of all first-year Ph.D. students in their first semester. Not open to any other students.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group A]

Phil 80000  
The Adoption Problem and the Epistemology of Logic  
Prof. Kripke  
4 credits  
Wed. 2:00-4:00  
Room TBA

“Africana Philosophy” is the term that has been coined to designate philosophy in Africa and the African Diaspora (primarily the Caribbean and the two Americas, North and South, but in principle extending to Europe and Asia also), both in the pre-modern and modern periods. In modernity, this philosophy will be fundamentally shaped by the experience of transnational racial subordination: racial chattel slavery in the Atlantic world, colonialism, and then continuing diasporic racial oppression in nominally post-slavery and post-colonial societies. Thus, it is arguably in modernity that a subset of Africana Philosophy becomes “Black” Philosophy. As such, black philosophers have played a crucial role in pioneering what is now known as Critical Philosophy of Race: the philosophical examination of race from a “critical,” anti-racist perspective. This course
Phil 77000  
Central Topics in the Philosophy of Mind  
Prof. Montero  
4 credits  
Thurs. 4:15-6:15  
Room TBA  
The central question in philosophy of mind concerns the relationship between the mind and the body: What is the relationship between our mental states, such as our thoughts, perceptions, emotions, pains, and our physical bodies? Is the mind something distinct from the body and capable of existing without it? Or is the mind simply one component of the body, and, as such, necessarily ceases to exist upon bodily death? More generally, how does the mind fit into the material world? In this course, we will explore the mind-body problem as well as the nature of consciousness, the emotions, intentionality and artificial intelligence. The course is suitable for both those who have never studied philosophy of mind as well as for those who are old hands at it.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group C or D-Modern]

Phil 76100  
Hegel’s “System” of Philosophy  
Prof. Nuzzo  
4 credits  
Mon. 11:45-1:45  
Room TBA  
The course offers an introduction to Hegel's idea of philosophy as "system." We will study his "dialectic" as the "method" responsible for articulating the "system" of philosophy in the Logic, the Philosophy of Nature, and the Philosophy of Spirit. The course will be based on close readings of selections from the Phenomenology of Spirit, the Logic, the Philosophy of Spirit (Encyclopedia), and the Lectures on Aesthetics and the History of Philosophy.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group D-modern]
Phil 72000
Logic
Prof. Pappas
4 credits
Thurs. 11:45-1:45
Room TBA
This course is a philosophical introduction to classical symbolic logic. No prior background in logic is assumed. We will study propositional logic and first-order predicate logic. Topics to be covered include semantics, syntax, and proof procedures. We will also cover the metalogical concepts of soundness and completeness. The goal is to achieve both practical mastery and philosophical understanding of elementary logic.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group E]

Phil 76500
Logic
Profs. Priest & Varzi
4 credits
Tuesday 2:00-4:00
Room TBA
It seems clear that in some sense the world contains things that are: people and planets, societies and works of art, and maybe numbers and other abstract objects. Many philosophers have held that it contains, equally, things that are not (see below). But if they are not, how can such things be in the world? Indeed, does the notion of something that is not even make sense? This seminar will investigate. Some of the topics and philosophers we may meet include: Plato and Parmenides on non-being; non-existent objects (Meinong); negative facts (Russell); omissions, absences, and our perception thereof (Sartre, Nyāyā philosophers); nothingness (Heidegger, Nishida); holes, silences, pauses; the number zero, the square root of minus 2; negative epistemic states; the empty set, the empty world, the null mereological individual – and what-not.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group A]

Phil 76000
Epistemological Disjunctivism and the History of Philosophy
Prof. Vasiliou
4 credits
Tues. 2:00-4:00
Room TBA
This seminar will focus on the position in contemporary epistemology of perception known as epistemological disjunctivism. Recently, according to Duncan Prichard, epistemological disjunctivism claims to deliver the "holy grail" in epistemology by holding that our grounds for knowledge (for example, a perceptual appearance that p) can be both reflectively accessible to the subject and also factive, a position most contemporary epistemologists would reject as a non-starter.
We will examine what epistemological disjunctivism is, how it is distinguished from metaphysical or experiential disjunctivism, and arguments for and against it. We will also spend a significant amount of time on the application of disjunctivism to work in the history of philosophy. Despite its being a position that emerged in the later decades of the 20th century, epistemological disjunctivism is arguably a position that appears quite early in the history of western philosophy, particularly in ancient Greek philosophy. We will consider texts from Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics and perhaps later figures from the modern period in light of our understanding of the attractions and defects of epistemological disjunctivism in order to see how these historical views might usefully inform our contemporary perspective.

Students who are not graduate students in philosophy but are interested in taking this seminar should contact the professor (ivasiliou@gc.cuny.edu) before registering.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group B or D-Ancient]