### Philosophy Courses

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Decolonial Feminist Ethics and Epistemology
Profs. Alcoff & Khader
4 credits
Mon. 4:15-6:15
Room TBA

This course explores the influence of regimes of colonization, racialization, and imperialism on conceptions of gender justice. It begins from the understanding of decolonial feminist philosophies as including both critical and constructive projects: the former involve exploring the ways Western concepts and histories promote a congruence between Western feminism and Western imperialism, and the latter involve constructing alternative visions of solidarity, as well as local and global gender justice.

Developing feminist solidarity and coalition requires an analysis of epistemic justice, or the roadblocks to mutual engagement with respect and reciprocity between differently situated groups. Feminist solidarity also requires thinking through the narrow definitions of rationality found sometimes in the West, in which, as an example, secularism is assumed to be more rational in an a priori way, and the political history and economic context of scientific inquiry are ignored. Hence, this course will pursue both epistemological and ethical aspects of transnational feminism.
We will also discuss and analyze links between gender formations and colonial conquest and settlement, changing patterns of violence against women, and racializing discourses and knowledge regimes, to challenge dominant understandings of knowledge and law, agency and politics. We will also explore the philosophical theories for pluralizing a vision of women’s liberation. Some of the topics we will discuss include: the influence of the concept of modernity on conceptions of transnational justice and gender justice, the role of the concept of culture in feminist discourses, the difference between decolonial, postcolonial, and transnational feminist theoretical approaches, how to overcome racist and sexist patterns of epistemic prejudice, the idea that gender itself is a colonial imposition, and the ideal/non-ideal theory distinction.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group B or C]

As in virtually every other area of philosophy, in aesthetics certain topics dominate the spotlight while others are neglected. Among the arts literature, music, and perhaps film receive the lion’s share of attention, while architecture, dance, theater, and television are discussed less. In terms of genre, tragedy is pre-eminent, while horror, melodrama, and comedy remain more in the shadows. And so on. This course will explore a selection of certain of these less examined topics.

For roughly the first half of the semester, discussion will be led by the instructor who will introduce classes on humor, theater, dance, and architecture. The second half will involve student presentations on neglected topics drawn either from a menu of suggested topics or on topics of the student’s own interests in consultation with the instructor. The course requirements include a participation in discussion, a class presentation, and a final paper that may be based on the class presentation or a topic of the student’s own design in consultation with the instructor.

Warning: the course will be highly disjunctive; there will be no overarching thesis knitting all the topics together. There are no prerequisites.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group C]
An exciting development in recent philosophy of language has been the debate surrounding “linguistic pragmatism” and “linguistic contextualism”. Paul Grice is the founding father of this movement. Its seminal work is Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson’s *Relevance*. Contributions to the debate to be examined in the seminar include those by Kent Bach, Robyn Carston, François Récanati, John Searle, Stephen Neale and others. The course aims, first, to look critically at competing methodologies at work in the debate, and second, to tackle substantive issues about the semantic properties of a range of linguistic expressions and constructions.

The folk distinguish what a person says in uttering something from what the person *means*, from the *intended message*. Almost everyone thinks the folk are on to something with this distinction. Grice’s distinction between *what is said* and *what is implicated* is based on it, as is Sperber and Wilson’s distinction between *explicature* and *implicature*. And there are other similar distinctions. These distinctions raise many questions. What is the principled basis for putting something on one side rather than the other? Is it appropriate to rely on intuitions in making judgments of this sort? If not, what? Is a distinction of this sort to be found in nonlinguistic communication? How much truth is there in claims that *what is said* constituted by things other than linguistic convention—for example, context, common ground, conversational maxims, nonlinguistic norms, and the contents of beliefs and intentions relevant to resolving potential lexical, structural, referential, and anaphoric ambiguities and potential cases of underspecification? What substance is there in the claim made by some pragmatists that “truth-conditional semantics” should be replaced by “truth-conditional pragmatics”? What hangs on this difference between “pragmatics” and “semantics”? Most important of all: *Why is any distinction in question theoretically interesting?* What role does it play in theoretical explanations of linguistic phenomena?

This is not an introduction to the philosophy of language. Anyone wishing to enroll who is not a philosophy graduate student or who is new to the philosophy of language should consult with me beforehand.

**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. A class presentation based on a draft for a paper (topic chosen in consultation with me). The draft to be submitted by the Monday prior to the presentation. *20% of grade*.

3. A 2,500 word paper probably arising from the draft in (ii). *30% of grade*.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group A]

[back to course schedule]
Many meta-ethical questions might be brought under the headings of the metaphysics and epistemology of value. Under the first we find questions about how far ethical values are real, as opposed to a cultural construction whose authority is strictly relative; how far ethical values are objective features of what there is, or more subjective, for instance a construction out of human sentiment. Under the second we find questions like ‘can there be ethical knowledge?’, or ‘are ethical statements truth-apt?’ (cognitivism), and we might wonder how far there can be reasoned ethical arguments as opposed to mere exchanges of moral cultural taste. This question might lead us to think in turn about the nature of moral concepts (‘thick’ and ‘thin’).

Besides the metaphysics and epistemology of value, meta-ethics incorporates other fundamental questions such as how far there is freedom of the will, what a moral reason for action consists in, what its authority is, and how such practical reasons relate to moral motivation. (These questions will lead us to read along the way some Hume, some Smith, some Kant, and some virtue ethics, and to consider how these approaches differ, but also how they overlap.) Inquiries into the nature of moral reasons and motivation also raise questions about whether moral reasons are necessarily impartial, or whether they inevitably, and properly, grow out of manifestly partial reasons—such as reasons of love and friendship. We will think together about how different answers to these philosophical questions cluster to indicate quite different conceptions of ethical life, with implications for what makes life meaningful.

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

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group C]

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Phil 77000
Noncanonical Thought: Structure and Processes
Prof. Mandelbaum
4 credits
Mon. 11:45-1:45
Room TBA
This class will examine thought in dark places. We'll start with some canonical modes of thought, and then focus on the patterns of deviation, investigating how thought and reasoning works in infants, animals, and the unconscious mind. Topics include reasoning in chimps, baboons and parrots; signaling in whales, dolphins, monkeys, and bees; the question of plant cognition; the evolution of reasoning and higher order thought; tool use in birds; honeybee navigation and math; the role of phonetics in expressing meaning in slurs and in the evolution of language; the role of thought under duress; unconscious belief acquisition and propaganda transmission; and unconscious logic and economic behavior. Readings will be taken from philosophy, cognitive psychology, comparative psychology, evolutionary and developmental psychology, psycholinguistics, and social psychology. In the end we should have a firmer grasp on the nature and structure of our concepts, beliefs, and supposedly dumb System 1 faculties, as well as a fuller understanding of the cognitive achievements of our evolutionary ancestors.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group B]

[back to course schedule]
Phil 76600
Philosophical Issues in Archaeology
Prof. Neale
4 credits
Mon. & Tues. 4:15-6:15
Room TBA
[NOTE: This course meets twice a week for half the semester, from January 27 to March 16.]

Work in archaeology and palaeoanthropology raises questions in the philosophy of science, metaphysics, epistemology, cognitive science, linguistics and the philosophy of language, aesthetics, ethics, law, and political theory. These include questions about archaeological evidence, inference, explanation and interpretation; scientific realism; laws and generalizations; notions of artifact, context, site, archaeological record, and culture; typology and classification; chronology, measurement and calibration; the emergence of intentional, symbolic, and communicative behavior; looting, dealing, and collecting; ownership, cultural property and public policy.

Even with a good spread of topics, we can address only a few of these in one semester and for the second half of the semester the topics selected will depend upon the composition of the class. In the past, enrollment has been split evenly between philosophy and archaeology PhD students, and the (revisable) starting assumption will be that students are not well-versed in one another’s fields.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group B or C]
The philosophy of causation is changing fast. The new "interventionism" promises to
dissolve many long-standing problems. Based on the work of Judea Pearl, and
transmitted to philosophy by Jim Woodward, interventionism builds a bridge between
the philosophical analysis of causation and techniques used in empirical causal modeling.

In this course we shall look at these new developments and consider their implications
for a range of issues including: free will, mental causation, agency theories of causation,
evidential versus causal decision theory, counterfactuals, correlations and causes, the
epistemology and metaphysics of causation, the relata of causation, and the direction of
time. A number of invited speakers will contribute to the course. (Initial reading:
Woodward’s *Stanford Encyclopedia* article on "Causation and Manipulability" is as good a
place to start as any. Pearl's popular *The Book of Why* is readable, though historically
unreliable.)

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group A or B]
[back to course schedule]
insights, the second part of the course will discuss where and how we might go to produce a more rational, more humane, society. This part of the course draws on, as well, some aspects of anarchist thinking.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group C]

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Phil 77200
Emotion
Prof. Prinz (with Arnaud)
4 credits
Tues. 2:00-4:00
Room TBA
This seminar investigates the nature and the roles of emotions from an interdisciplinary perspective.

The first unit surveys competing theories of emotion, including biologically-based theories, embodied theories, cognitive theories and constructionism. Through this unit, we will also consider the question of the status of emotions as natural kinds.

The second investigates work on specific emotions. We will consider emotions that are thought to play roles in evaluative contexts, including morality and art, emotions alleged to be culturally specific, and some neglected emotions, ones that play epistemic roles such as doubt, interest, boredom, confidence, and wonder.

The third unit examines ways in which emotions can be assessed: Are emotions ir/rational? Are they appropriate or not? And according to what criteria? Should some emotions be abandoned (such as shame and anger), regulated, and how? How long should they last?

The fourth unit questions the relationships of emotions with other cognitive states. Are emotions some types of perception? What is the intentionality of emotions? Are they always directed at objects? Of what kind? Are they always conscious? What would be an unconscious emotion?

The final unit examines emotional deviance and psychopathology. We will consider several possible ways in which some emotional processes can qualify as pathological, including emotional disorders, such as phobias, post-traumatic stress, depression, and social anxiety. as well as conditions that have been characterized as involving emotional deficits such as psychopathy and autism. Though this lens, we will explore processes of emotion recognition, emotional understanding, emotion regulation, and emotional consciousness.

Though philosophical readings will outnumber the rest, we will also read perspectives from several other fields including, psychology, neuroscience, and sociology.

This seminar will be conducted together with Sarah Arnaud, an emotion researcher and postdoc in the Philosophy Program.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group B]

[back to course schedule]
Phil 77900
Ethical Issues in Clinical Research
Profs. Rhodes (CUNY) & Moros (Mt. Sinai)
4 credits
Tues. 5:30-7:00
Room TBA
This seminar will explore the complex issues raised by human subject research. The seminar will begin with a review of some history of human subject research, landmark cases of unethical use of human subjects, policies that shape our current understanding of the ethical conduct of research, and mechanisms for research oversight that have been instituted. Then, through reading a broad selection of seminal articles and papers from the recent literature, we shall engage in a conceptual analysis of controversial and pressing issues. We shall be discussing the moral and public policy aspects of topics such as research design, risk-benefit assessment, informed consent, the use of vulnerable subjects, confidentiality, inducements, conflicts of interests, and international research. In addition to exploring the moral landscape of this rich and provocative domain, the seminar will clarify and inform participants’ understanding of basic moral concepts such as autonomy and justice. It will also serve as a model for approaching other issues in applied ethics.

Readings available at: https://learn.mssm.edu

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group C]

Phil 78500
Thought, Speech, and Content
Prof. Rosenthal
4 credits
Thurs. 2:00-4:00
Room TBA
Much mental representation consists in the intentional content of thinking, wondering, doubting, expecting, and similar states, content that can be captured by a ‘that’ clause or other sentence nominalization. One can think, expect, assume, or suspect that the door is open, and doubt or wonder whether it is. Those states have in common the intentional content that the door is open, differing in the mental attitude held toward that content.

We describe speech acts in a parallel way. One can assert or guess that the door is open, ask whether it is, command or request that it be, and so forth. The speaker’s meaning of each speech act here corresponds to intentional content of a suitable mental state, and the illocutionary force of the speech act--asserting, asking, commanding, requesting, and so forth--arguably corresponds to the mental attitude of the relevant intentional mental states.

We’ll focus on issues that arise in giving a satisfactory account of the intentional content and mental attitude of intentional mental states and, correspondingly, the speaker’s meaning and illocutionary force of speech acts. And we’ll explore ways in which we
might extrapolate from one set of properties to the other set to arrive at a sound theoretical understanding of both.

For intentional states, we’ll focus the logical properties of ascriptions of such states; whether the sentence-sized content of such states is built up from concept-sized parts or whether, instead, concept-sized parts are abstractions from sentence-sized intentional states; whether the content of each intentional state is fixed independent of all others and if so how; whether if content is not fixed in that way it’s fixed holistically and, again, how; what all that tells us about referring; whether content is best understood as being in some way linguistic.

We’ll also focus on the relation of intentional states to speech. Is the intentionality of thinking prior to the speaker’s meaning of speech acts? If so in what way? Causally? Conceptually? In some other way? Is the intentionality of thinking a property of a different kind from the speaker’s meaning or content of speech acts? Is our conception of the intentionality of thought independent of the way we conceive of speaker’s meaning. If so what basis could there be for how we conceive of mental intentional content? Anything other than first-person access? Is speaker’s meaning determined by the speaker’s communicative intentions? Or instead by an expressing relation between intentional states and meaningful speech acts?

Among other related topics we’ll hope to address are why it’s absurd to say, e.g., ‘It’s raining, but I don’t think it is’ (Moore’s paradox); the indirect reflexive (how referring to oneself simply as oneself differs from referring to oneself descriptively or by name); the nature of inference; whether consciousness has a special relation to speech; whether thinking depends on or requires the ability to use language; and why children up to around 3 seem to fail the verbal false-belief task, seeming to assimilate what others think to what is actually the case.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group A or B]

[back to course schedule]
Phil 76000
Aristotle and Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics
Prof. Vasiliou
4 credits
Mon. & Tues. 4:15-6:15
Room TBA
[NOTE: This course meets twice a week for half the semester, from March 23 through May 12.]

According to most standard accounts, modern virtue ethics begins with Elizabeth Anscombe's essay "Modern Moral Philosophy" in 1958 and develops over the second half of the twentieth century as an alternative to deontological and consequentialist moral theories. Rather than obligation as the centerpiece of moral theory, it is commonly held that virtue ethics focuses on human flourishing and the virtues of character that constitute it. Aristotle is the patron saint of this movement. Over the last twenty years, some have begun to question what virtue ethics is, how and whether it differs from other types of ethical theory, and even to what extent Aristotle should be called a virtue ethicist. Some now avoid the term "virtue-ethics" and prefer to speak instead of "Neo-Aristotelian" ethics; under this label one might include the work of Julia Annas, Phillipa Foot, Rosalind Hursthouse, Alasdair MacIntyre, John McDowell, Martha Nussbaum, and Michael Thompson. While all of these philosophers discuss virtue, only some would identify their positions as belonging to "virtue ethics."

We shall examine what sort of ethical theory contemporary Neo-Aristotelian ethics is and how it fits with what we actually find in Aristotle. What does it say about the relationships between agents and actions? How does it contrast with deontology or consequentialism? What does it mean for ethics to be "virtue-based", "character-based" or "agent-based/centered", as opposed to "rule-based" or "act-based/centered"? What is the role of (human) nature in Neo-Aristotelian ethics? Does practical reason operate differently in Neo-Aristotelian ethics than in other types of ethical theory?

We will do a close reading of major parts of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, including his discussions of eudaimonia, the virtues of character, practical reason, moral psychology, decision and deliberation, voluntary action, and the unity of virtues. We will interweave this with readings from secondary literature on the Ethics as well as from the "Neo-Aristotelians" mentioned above.

It will be important for us to work from the same translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For various reasons, we shall use Terence Irwin's translation, second edition, Hackett Press; I ask you all to acquire a copy. We will also consult the Rowe/Broadie translation from Oxford, and the "Revised Oxford Translation" by Ross and revised by Urmson, published in the *Complete Works of Aristotle* (ed. J. Barnes, Princeton University Press). Please read Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* for the first class. **First class will meet on 3/23, not 3/17** (there will be a make-up class, TBA). Philosophy students wishing to satisfy Distribution Area D-ancient with this seminar must write a term paper that focuses on Aristotle’s ethics.

[Counts towards course satisfaction of Group C or D-Ancient [see note above].]