

Fall 2022 Course Descriptions & Distribution Areas

PHIL 407: Medieval Philosophy

Islamic Philosophy

PhD/MA in Philosophy distribution area: Medieval, Metaphysics/epistemology

MA in Social Philosophy distribution area: Moral

Dr. Seyed N. Mousavian

Thursdays 10:00am-12:30pm

We will study three main figures in the history of classical Islamic philosophy: Avicenna, Al-Ghazali, and Averroes. Thematically, the course is centered around three philosophically significant, theologically controversial, and historically insightful issues in the Islamic tradition: (Q1) Is the world eternal? (Q2) Does God know particulars? And, (Q3) is the human soul immortal? We will start by reading parts of *The Book of Healing* (by Avicenna), which sets the stage by replying in the affirmative to (Q1) and (Q3), and in the negative to (Q2). We will go through Avicenna's arguments in detail and explore possible ways in which his answers to (Q1)-(Q3) can lead to profound doctrinal disagreements in Islamic theology. Then, we move to *The Incoherence of Philosophers* (by Al-Ghazali), which provides a series of detailed criticisms of Avicenna's position and arguments on (Q1)-(Q3). Al-Ghazali's systematic and principled analysis and rejection of Avicenna's reasoning had a long-lasting effect on the Islamic intellectual tradition. Last but not least, we will study parts of *The Incoherence of the Incoherence* (by Averroes), which critically examines Avicenna's and Al-Ghazali's arguments on (Q1)-(Q3). We will end by assessing Averroes's project, that is to provide a 'truly Aristotelian' reply to the questions under discussion and a new framework for reconsidering the relationship between philosophical reasoning and religious faith.

PHIL 416: 17th-18th Century Philosophy

Religious & Moral Belief in Pierre Bayle

PhD/MA in Philosophy distribution area: Modern, Metaphysics/epistemology, Ethics/social-political

MA in Social Philosophy distribution area: Moral, Social

Dr. Kristen Irwin

Tuesdays 10:00am-12:30pm

The nature and value of skepticism, the nature and grounds of faith, and the relationship between religious and moral beliefs were three of the hottest topics in 17th century French philosophy. Pierre Bayle sits at the intersection of these three debates, and is thus an excellent figure to guide our inquiry into early modern conceptions of the relationships between reason, religious beliefs, and moral beliefs.

This seminar will use Dr. Irwin's manuscript-in-progress both as a guide through the relevant primary sources, and as a jumping-off point for discussion and interpretation of the primary texts. Seminararians will also gain practical disciplinary skills, such as composing and revising a conference paper for submission to the APA; writing book-review style pieces; writing a referee report; and adapting one's teaching style to different audiences.

Reading knowledge of French will be helpful, but not at all necessary.

PHIL 380/454: Topics in Philosophy of Religion

Platonism and Catholicism

PhD/MA in Philosophy distribution area: Metaphysics/epistemology, Ethics/social-political

MA in Social Philosophy distribution area: Moral, Social

Dr. Naomi Fisher

Thursdays 4:15pm-6:45pm

In this course you will explore the Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions and the ways in which these traditions have been integral to Catholicism. This will provide a framework which can serve as a way of seeing and an approach to the Catholic intellectual tradition. We will begin with Plato and Neoplatonism, and then address medieval Christian Neoplatonism in figures like Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, and Eriugena before moving through Renaissance Neoplatonism (Nicholas of Cusa and Ficino) into some more contemporary, 20th century texts. You will come away from this course with a broad understanding of how Platonism has both influenced and been shaped by Catholic asceticism, mysticism, metaphysics, and doctrine.

PHIL 324/468: Topics in Ethics

Philosophical Questions in Human Rights

PhD/MA in Philosophy distribution area: Ethics/Social-Political

MA in Social Philosophy distribution area: Moral, Social

Dr. Joy Gordon

Mondays 7:00pm-9:30pm

This course addresses a variety of philosophical issues within human rights. We'll start with some texts that point to different approaches in conceptualizing human rights, as well as an overview of the major human rights instruments in international law and global governance. We'll look at such questions as the concept of rights, and its empirical and Marxist critics; the shift over the last decade in the ethical framework for understanding torture; hermeneutical issues that emerge in human rights treaties; the different ways that gender comes into play within human rights; the thorny problem of how to determine intent in cases of genocide; and issues of sovereignty when countries seek to assert extraterritorial jurisdiction over human rights violations that take place in other parts of the world.

PHIL 480: Social & Political Philosophy

Violence

PhD/MA in Philosophy distribution area: Continental, Ethics/Social-Political

MA in Social Philosophy distribution area: Moral, Social

Dr. Johanna Oksala

Mondays 4:15pm-6:45pm

The problem of violence remains the Archimedean point of political philosophy: it is the problem that political order is, in different forms according to different thinkers, understood to address. Whether this means forming a social contract in order to move from the state of primordial war to an ordered society or accepting violence as the irreducible essence of the political, violence is understood as the pivotal problem of politics.

In this course we will study seminal texts in the tradition of Continental political philosophy addressing the problem of violence starting from Walter Benjamin's famous essay "Critique

of Violence” (1921) and ending with Judith Butler’s recent book *The Force of Non-Violence* (2020). Other important thinkers will include Schmitt, Fanon, Sartre, Arendt, Foucault, and Agamben. We will chart both a strand of political thought that argues that we must accept the ineliminability of violence from the political domain and reflect honestly on its consequences for politics, as well as a strand that attempts to develop complex critiques of violence, even in the face of the unprecedented violence of the 20th century.

The course is intended for both students who are new to the topic, as well as for those already familiar with the work of some of the thinkers studied in it. It aims to offer a thorough and historically contextualized understanding of one of the central issues in Continental political philosophy, as well as to give students the ability to apply the different theoretical frameworks discussed in the course to their own analyses of contemporary forms of violence.

PHIL 490: Current Philosophical Issues

Continental Theories of History and Collective Memory

PhD/MA in Philosophy distribution area: Continental, Ethics/social-political

MA in Social Philosophy distribution area: Social

Dr. Jennifer Gaffney

Tuesdays 4:15pm-6:45pm

This course will survey the theme of historical memory and the fundamental role it has played in the development of continental thought. It will begin with a consideration of key figures who set the trajectory of this discourse such as Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger. It will then examine how this discourse has been challenged and expanded to address questions of collective responsibility, historical and systemic injustice, the politics of nostalgia, and the possibility for reconciliation with the past. Turning to figures such as Jacques Derrida, Édouard Glissant, Hannah Arendt, and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, the course will thus consider the implications of this central theme in the continental tradition for contemporary discourses concerning the relationship between history, memory, and political life.