

Spring 2021 Course Descriptions & Distribution Areas

PHIL 407: Medieval Philosophy

Consciousness

Distribution requirement: Medieval

Dr. Peter Hartman

In this course, we will look at medieval views about consciousness. We will look at how medieval philosophers understood self-consciousness (i.e., an awareness of our soul or self) and how they understood state consciousness (i.e., an awareness of our own mental states). Our discussion will start with some basics about medieval theories of cognition (i.e., how we cognize external things like rocks), primarily looking at Aquinas's account. We will then look at a debate between Aquinas and Ockham, who hold different views on the issue of self- and state-consciousness. We will bookcase this discussion with earlier authors (Augustine and Aristotle), on the one hand, and later authors (Suárez and Descartes), on the other. We will also look at some contemporary views, e.g., Brentano, Kriegel, and Rosenthal. It is often claimed that medieval philosophers (following Aristotle) did not have a robust conception of consciousness. This course will at least rid of us of this notion. Latin is not required.

PHIL 416: 17th-18th Cent Philosophy

Religious & Moral Belief in Bayle

Distribution Requirements: Modern, Ethics/Social Political, Metaphysics/Epistemology

Dr. Kristen Irwin

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 438: Topics in Continental Philosophy

Methodologies in Critical Philosophy of Race: Between Ontology and Genealogy

Distribution Requirement: Continental, Ethics/Social-Political

Dr. Eyo Ewara

This course explores how 20th century continental philosophy has both involved concerns about race and racism in the development of key concepts, and has served to offer methodologies through which thinkers outside the explicitly philosophical world continue to theorize race and racism. In particular we will look to two approaches to thinking about race and racism drawn from the continental tradition and commonly deployed in contemporary work on race and racism: approaches that describe race through a

phenomenologically influenced language of *ontology* and approaches that work to understand race and racism through the production of *genealogies*. In the first half of the course we will engage the work of Martin Heidegger to see how his thinking on being is tied to his conception of a world and a *volk*. We will then see how this racialization of world and being is at work in thinkers like Frantz Fanon, shapes contemporary Afro-pessimist approaches to race as a problem of ontology, and influences conceptions of race as *techne* in thinkers like Camisha Russell. Our goal will be to both explore why contemporary thinking on race and racism has found resources in the language of race and world, race and being, and to see how – from its early deployments in thinkers like Heidegger – this language might avoid *biological* conceptions of race while re-entrenching other forms of racial essentialism.

In the second half of the course, we will look to the genealogical work of Michel Foucault, exploring both Foucault's own discussions of race and racism and how an investigation into the discursive and institutional transformations of race-thinking differs from and critiques an ontological approach. We will look to thinkers like Saidiya Hartman and Ladelle McWhorter who draw on Foucault's genealogical method to further question how racial formations are produced over time. That said, rather than simply valorizing genealogy, we will look to critiques of this method both in Foucault's work and in thinkers like Joy James, pointing to how genealogy's relationship to what Foucault calls the language of "race war" has led to its deployment in both racist and anti-racist movements. The goal of this course is not simply to claim that continental philosophers have provided the methodologies to be taken up and applied by contemporary thinkers. Rather, it is to examine how continental philosophers have had considerations of race and racism at work in the formation of their philosophical methodologies, how those considerations continue to shape strategic deployments of those methodologies, and how those methodologies are being challenged, stretched, and critiqued by a variety of different contemporary thinkers on race.

PHIL 451: Metaphysics

Badiou's Being and Event

Distribution Requirement: Continental, Metaphysics/Epistemology

Dr. Andrew Cutrofello

In this course we will examine the metaphysical system that Badiou develops in *Being and Event*. This system has two parts: a "general" metaphysics, or ontology, that Badiou identifies with set theory; and a "special" metaphysics of events. An event for Badiou is not an ordinary occurrence; it is a moment when something truly new happens. Prior to an event, everything that can be said about a situation (or world) can be found in a virtual "encyclopedia." After an event, those who bear witness to its occurrence summon forth a truth that has not been *added to* the encyclopedia but *subtracted from* it. Badiou thinks that such "truth procedures" can be found only in four specific regions of human existence: politics, art, science, and love. Thus his "special" metaphysics has four distinct zones. Our aim will be not just to understand Badiou's system (parts of which are extremely technical), but to question the numerous *decisions* Badiou makes in constructing it – decisions that often leave open unexplored alternatives. We will frequently refer to philosophers with whom Badiou himself engages, especially Plato, Kant, and Hegel, and we will occasionally comment on later modifications to his system in *Logics of Worlds* and *Immanence of Truths*.

PHIL 459: Philosophy of Law

Legal and Moral Issues of Economic Sanctions

Distribution Requirement: Ethics/Social-Political

Dr. Joy Gordon

This course will discuss economic sanctions in the contexts of international relations and global governance, looking closely at the issues of effectiveness and humanitarian impact. We will look at a number of sanctions regimes, such as South Africa, Cuba, Iraq, and Russia. We will also explore the issues of intent, consent, and moral agency in the context of economic sanctions. We will also look at a number of legal questions: whether sanctions come into conflict with international human rights law, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; the problem of extraterritoriality; and the cases that have come out of the European Courts on asset freezes, in particular the Kadi case and Bank Mellat.

PHIL 490: Current Philosophical Issues

Philosophical Perspectives on Climate Change

Distribution Requirements: Ethics/Social-Political, Continental, Epistemology/Metaphysics

Dr. Johanna Oksala

There exists extensive philosophical literature on climate change in the field of normative moral theory, but the implications of climate change for other areas of philosophy are still relatively undertheorized. In this course, we will investigate climate change as a philosophical problem focusing particularly on its existential, metaphysical, and political implications.

- We will investigate the difficulties people experience in orienting themselves existentially and in adjusting their basic lifeworld assumptions in the rapidly warming world.
- We will consider the ways that climate change is forcing philosophers to question deeply held metaphysical background beliefs about nature, politics, history, necessity, and freedom.
- We will study how climate change as a political problem is challenging many of our traditional liberal political ideals such as economic growth, individualism, human rights, and national sovereignty.

The texts studied will include some foundational texts in environmental philosophy, as well as a broad range of recently published philosophical articles and book chapters on climate change.