

Philosophy Department

Graduate Courses Fall 2011

PHIL-GA 1000

Proseminar

Stephen Schiffer/Hartry Field

Thursday 11-2

For first year Philosophy PhD students only.

PHIL-GA 1009

Advanced Introduction to Metaethics

Sharon Street

Wednesday 4:15-6:15

This course will provide a high-level introduction to contemporary metaethics. The course's central question will be the nature of normativity and where to "place" it with respect to our scientific conception of the world. On the one hand, we regard ourselves as capable of recognizing, and being guided in our thought and action by, normative truths—truths concerning how there is most reason to live, what there is most reason to believe, what ways of life are good, valuable, morally required, and so on. On the other hand, we regard ourselves as part of the world of cause and effect—as beings whose evaluative states of mind are part of the natural order and subject to scientific study and explanation. It is not obvious how to fit these two understandings of ourselves together, nor even whether they are jointly tenable in the end. The course will survey some of the most prominent contemporary thinking on the matter. We will start with several texts that set the agenda for much of twentieth-century metaethics, and then we will examine four of the most influential going positions in metaethics: (1) naturalist realism; (2) non-naturalist realism; (3) expressivism and quasi-realism; and (4) constructivism. While many of the readings will be focused on the phenomenon of normativity as it arises in a specifically moral context, throughout our interest will be in the nature of normativity more generally, including the domain of epistemic reasons. Readings will include works by Moore, Ayer, Mackie, Railton, Sturgeon, Dworkin, Nagel, Parfit, Scanlon, Blackburn, Gibbard, Korsgaard, and others. The course is open to NYU Ph.D. and M.A. students in philosophy; all other students must receive permission from the instructor to audit or enroll.

PHIL-GA 1175

Life and Death

William Ruddick/Dale Jamieson

Monday 6-8

In this seminar we will discuss a range of questions about the value of both human and non-human life, the morality of causing humans and non-humans to exist or not to exist, and what makes the lives of humans and non-humans better or worse.

Specific topics include: respect for nature and human life; the harms and benefits of human and non-human existence, of family and single life; assisted reproductive technologies, contraception, abortion, and infanticide; the moral weight of environmental concerns in individual procreative decisions and state population policies.

PHIL-GA 2320

History of Philosophy: Selected Topics: Hegel

Rolf-Peter Horstmann

Monday 4-6

Hegel is famous (or rather infamous) for entertaining and endorsing startling and obscure claims like 'Contradiction is the rule of truth', 'The Truth is the whole', 'What is rational is real, and what is real is rational'. Before one is in the position to evaluate, to criticize (and to dismiss) these claims one has to become familiar with their philosophical background. The aim of the seminar is to find out what is meant with claims like these and why Hegel thought of them as reasonable. In order to achieve this aim one has to get acquainted with the basic metaphysical assumptions of his philosophy and with the problems these assumptions are supposed to solve. The seminar will focus primarily on some of Hegel's early Jena writings, his Phenomenology of Spirit, on passages from different versions of Hegel's Logic and (maybe) on aspects of his Philosophy of Right. Topics that are dealt with include: (1) Hegel's conception of philosophy, (2) the development of his system, (3) the problem of an introduction to his system (Phenomenology of Spirit), (4) Hegel's criticism of traditional metaphysics, (5) his notion of a 'concept' (Begriff), his theory of the Idea. Other topics might become of interest as well.

PHIL-GA 3001

Topics in Philosophical Logic

Hartry Field/Graham Priest

Tuesday 4:15-6:15

Especially since the rise of non-classical logics in the 20th century, there has been much debate about whether logic can be revised. This is the question which our course will address. It quickly resolves into many different questions: What does this mean? Can it indeed be done? Can it be done rationally? If so, how? If so, when and why? These will all come in for scrutiny. The course will engage us in fundamental questions in logic, semantics, epistemology (and maybe metaphysics).

We will be looking critically at some well known views on the matter, and attempting to develop a new and more adequate understanding.

PHIL-GA 3004

Topics in Metaphysics: Metaphysics and Metaphilosophy

Peter Unger

Thursday 2-4

During the last sixty years or more, mainstream academic philosophy – in a phrase, analytic philosophy - has sought to offer, almost without exception, very novel, philosophically interesting, and quite general, necessary truths, often regarded as conceptual truths. Largely for that reason, it will be argued in the seminar, this philosophy has offered hardly any philosophically interesting thoughts as to the general character of concrete reality. Quite dramatically, that contrasts with a great deal of earlier philosophy.

For example, in earlier philosophy, there were advocated at least these three prominent mutually competing ideas about the general nature of concrete reality: Entity Materialism (as with Hobbes), Entity Dualism (as with Descartes and Locke), and Entity Idealism (as with Berkeley and Hume). Each of these three highly general thoughts is a contingent proposition, each offering a view of all (actual) concrete reality that conflicts with the others.

One aim of the course will be to search for other (likely lesser) reasons for the great discrepancy between the evidently general and substantial character of much earlier philosophy and, on the other side, the (at least relative) emptiness of, and the parochiality of, contemporary mainstream philosophy. A more ambitious aim will be to formulate novel proposals as to the general nature of concrete reality.

For making progress on these aims, one thing we'll do is read and discuss much of Professor Unger's book-in-progress, *Beyond Emptiness*, almost all available on his NYU Webpage. As well, we'll read and discuss published writing of philosophers from the last four decades, representing much of mainstream philosophy's "analytic core". That will include work by Saul Kripke, David Lewis, Hilary Putnam, Donald Davidson, Derek Parfit, David Armstrong, Kit Fine, Stephen Schiffer and Ted Sider.

To gain credit for the course, students will first write a short paper, on a topic saliently discussed, due about two-thirds of the way through the semester. Depending on how the professor views a student's paper, the student will then write either (i) an improved and expanded version of the first paper, or else (ii) another short paper, on another topic discussed in the course. Whether it's in the form of (i) or of (ii), the second paper will be due within a week of the last class session.

PHIL-GA 3009

Topics in Philosophy of Science: Explanation

Michael Strevens

Tuesday 2-4

In the first part of the class, we will study various approaches to explanation in the philosophy of science, in particular, expectability, unificationist, and causal approaches. Special attention will be given to the role of dependence, abstraction, and idealization in explanation. In the second part of the class, we turn to explanation in areas other than science: mathematics, metaphysics, ethics, and perhaps aesthetics, looking for differences and especially similarities to scientific explanation.

PHIL-GA 3302/ LAW-LW 10596

Colloquium in Legal, Political, and Social Philosophy

Thomas Nagel/Ronald Dworkin
Thursday 4:00-7:00
Wednesday 2:00-4:00

Enrollment in the Colloquium requires permission of the instructors. Those interested in registering should submit a request to Professor Dworkin, via his assistant Lavinia Barbul: barbul@exchange.law.nyu.edu

Each week on Thursday a legal theorist or moral or political philosopher presents a paper to the group, which consists of students, faculty from the Law School and other departments of NYU, and faculty from other universities in/or close to New York. The choice of subject is left to the paper's author, within the general boundaries of the Colloquium's subjects, and the discussions are therefore not connected by any structured theme for the term as a whole, though in past years certain central topics were canvassed in several weeks' discussion. The Colloquium aims, not to pursue any particular subject, but to explore new work in considerable depth and so allow students to develop their own skill in theoretical analysis. Each week's paper is distributed at least a week in advance, and participants are expected to have read it.

Students enrolled in the Colloquium meet separately with Professor Dworkin for an additional two-hour seminar on Wednesday. One hour is devoted to a review of the preceding Thursday's Colloquium discussion, and one hour in preparation for the Colloquium of the following day. Students are asked to write short papers weekly, and each student is asked to make two or more oral presentations to the seminar during the term. Each student is asked to expand one of his /her weekly papers, or oral presentations, for a final term paper.

PHIL-GA 3400
Thesis Preparation Seminar
David Chalmers
Thursday 12-2

Open only to Philosophy PhD students.

Bioethics Courses

BIOE-GA 1005 Advanced Introduction to Bioethics

O'Neil. 4 points.

This course explores a range of concepts and principles for framing and addressing moral questions in both medical and environmental practices. Combining these two areas broadens bioethics to include and connect individual, public, and global health issues. Topics include respect for life and nature; comprehensive concepts of health, disease, and cure; autonomy and rights to life and health care; ethical principles of medical care, research, and environmental “stewardship”; population and environmental constraints on creating and extending human lives.

BIOE-GA 1008/PHIL-GA 1008 Topics in Bioethics: Neuroethics

Liao. 4 points.

Neuroethics has two branches: the ethics of neuroscience and the neuroscience of ethics. The former is concerned with ethical issues raised by the development and use of neuroscientific technologies. The latter is concerned with how neuroscientific technologies might be able to shed light on how we make moral judgments. In this course we will examine both branches of neuroethics. Topics include pharmacological and genetic technologies for the enhancement of human traits; “mind-reading” technologies; borderline consciousness; free will and addiction; and neuroscientific and evolutionary models of morality and decision-making.