Fall 2015 Graduate Philosophy Department Courses

PHIL-GA 1000; Pro-seminar; Wednesday 4-7 ; John Richardson/Robert Hopkins

This course is for first year PhD students in the Philosophy Department only.

PHIL-GA 1102; Advanced Introduction to Philosophy of Language; Thursday 1-3; Stephen Schiffer

The seminar offers a high-level introduction to the philosophy of language whose aim is to bring graduate students as much up to speed in the subject as can be managed in one semester. We will of course study pivotal works by those who determined the issues that defined the philosophy of language during the past one hundred twenty-five years—Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Tarski, Carnap, Grice, Austin, Kripke, Lewis, Putnam, Davidson, Dummett, Kaplan, Chomsky, Montague, Quine and others, and the syllabus will include such (over-lapping) issues as:
• the relation between linguistic and mental intentionality, speaker-meaning and expression-meaning, speaker-reference and expression-reference, metasemantics and semantics, formal semantics (i.e. semantics for the formal languages of logical systems) and natural-language semantics
• propositions
• compositional semantics and our ability to understand previously unencountered sentences
• the form that a compositional meaning theory for a particular language should take
• the semantics/pragmatics distinction and the relevance of conversational implicature to the theory of meaning
• intention, convention & normativity in the theory of meaning
• inflationist vs. deflationist theories of meaning, truth & reference
• expressivist meaning
• the importance of the liar and other semantic paradoxes to natural language semantics
• the semantics and logic for vague language; how vagueness affects meaning

PHIL-GA 1103; Advanced Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind; Tuesday 4-6; David Chalmers/Ned Block

This course is a Small Discussion Seminar. Attendance is limited to NYU Philosophy Ph.D. and M.A. students only, except by permission of the instructor.

This course will focus on three areas of the philosophy of mind: consciousness, intentionality, and perception. In each area we will discussing one article by each of the convenors and some by other authors, starting with foundational readings and progressing to current work.

Course website: http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/courses/mind2015/

PHIL-GA 1177; Philosophy of Science; Monday 11-1; Laura Franklin-Hall

Philosophy of Biology

This course will survey core topics debated by philosophers of biology, including the structure of evolutionary and developmental explanations, the contingency of biological and cultural processes, the reduction of biology to lower-level sciences, and the nature of biological natural kinds.

PHIL-GA 1181; Philosophy of Mathematics; Tuesday 1:30-3:30; Cian Dorr/Hartry Field

This course is a Small Discussion Seminar. Attendance is limited to NYU Philosophy Ph.D. and M.A. students only, except by permission of the instructor.

Philosophy of Applied Mathematics

In science and everyday life, theories are often expressed using so-called 'mixed' predicates—predicates (or function symbols) which relate concrete objects or properties of concrete objects to mathematical objects such as natural numbers, real numbers, vectors at points, and co-ordinate systems. For example:

* We use natural numbers to talk about how many things there are of a certain kind, e.g. to say that the number of concrete objects of a certain kind is greater than seven, or even, or prime.
* We use real numbers to talk about quantities like mass, e.g. when we say that a material object has a certain mass in grams, or that the masses of two material object stand in a certain ratio.
* We use vectors to talk about quantities like velocity, e.g. when we say that a certain vector at a spacetime point gives the velocity of some fluid through that point.
* We use co-ordinate systems to talk about the geometrical structure of physical spaces, e.g. when we characterise the differential structure of spacetime in terms of a distinguished class of smooth co-ordinate systems.

These practices have prompted philosophers to engage in two kinds of reconstructive projects. The first project is to provide definitions of 'mixed' predicates in terms of 'pure' predicates all of whose arguments are concrete (like 'equally massive'), together with certain especially basic

mathematical predicates (like set-membership), thereby sustaining the natural thought that the relevant relations between the concrete and mathematical realms are explained by the intrinsic structure of the concrete world. The second project is to state theories entirely about the concrete world, which can in some way substitute for, or explain the efficacy of, theories expressed in the usual way using 'mixed' vocabulary and quantification over mathematical objects. In this course, we will discuss several possible motivations for engaging in projects of these kinds—including, but not limited to, the nominalist thesis that there aren't any mathematical objects. We will also delve in to some of the details about the execution of particular projects of these kinds, with particular attention to cases where the projects have been used to motivate controversial claims about the ontology of concrete objects, such as the existence of spacetime points.

The seminar will not presuppose any prior familiarity with the philosophy of mathematics, although some background in logic will be helpful. Its topics will overlap metaphysics and the philosophy of science as well as the philosophy of mathematics.

PHIL-GA 2285; Ethics: Selected Topics; Monday 4-6/Wednesday 12-2; Derek Parfit/Sharon Street

We shall discuss some conflicting views about what matters, normative reasons, how it would be best for things to go, population ethics, and the wrongness of acts. We shall also discuss some conflicting meta-ethical views about these views. The subjects discussed will partly depend on the preferences of those taking this course.

The first session will be on Wednesday, September 9th, and our last session will be on Wednesday, October 28th. We'll meet 14 times in total, from 4-6 on Mondays and 12-2 on Wednesdays.

PHIL-GA 2320-001; History of Philosophy; Tuesday 11-1; Don Garrett/Jessica Moss

Imagination and Belief in Ancient and Early Modern Philosophy

We will study the historical roots of the distinction between belief, understood as a state that somehow "aims at truth," and imagination, understood as a non-doxastic state that shares many of belief's functional roles. We will read selections from Plato, Aristotle, Ancient Stoics and Sceptics, Hobbes, Descartes, Spinoza, and Hume. Topics to be addressed: How is imagination connected to emotion, action, thought, and belief? How do mental images represent, and misrepresent? Are there non-imagistic modes of mental representation – purely intellectual ones? What is distinctive of belief? Is it voluntary? What is its special relation to truth?

PHIL-GA 2320-002; History of Philosophy; Tuesday 6-8; Marko Malink

Aristotle's Logic

This course will explore major topics in Aristotle's logic, with an eye to connections with his dialectic and theory of scientific demonstration. Readings will be drawn from Aristotle's Prior and Posterior Analytics. Topics to be covered include: syntax and semantics of Aristotle's assertoric syllogistic, proof by reductio, the dictum de omni, Aristotle's conception of deductive inference, petitio principii, fallacy of false cause, and elements of Aristotle's modal logic. We will also discuss Aristotle's account of scientific demonstration (apodeixis), circular proof, per se predication, the connection between essential predication and necessity in demonstrations, and Aristotle's arguments against infinite chains of demonstration and predication. No previous study of Aristotle or knowledge of Greek required.

PHIL-GA 3003; Topics in Epistemology; Monday 6-8; Jim Pryor

We'll be looking mostly at literature in epistemology (but some in ethics, or straddling these fields) from the past decade, addressinghigher-order norms, defeaters, akrasia, and disagreement. See the course website here: <http://akrasia.jimpryor.net>.

PHIL-GA 3005; Topics in Ethics; Thursday 7-9; Nic Bommarito

Understanding Evil

This seminar will focus on questions about our relation to radical immorality. We will begin by examining the nature of evil (Is evil a distinct category? Is it different in kind from everyday moral wrongs?) and immoral motivations (Can one be moved to act by what one takes to be bad?). Then we will take up questions about how we should relate to evil: Should we find evil to be fundamentally inexplicable? Does morality limit the extent to which we can empathize with those who do terrible things?

PHIL-GA 3302; Colloquium in Law, Philosophy, and Social Philosophy; Wednesday 2-4; Thursday 4-7; Samuel Scheffler and Jeremy Waldron

Enrollment in the Colloquium requires permission of the instructors. Those interested in registering should submit a request to Professor Waldron, via his assistant Lavinia Barbu (barbul@exchange.law.nyu.edu) by August 1st.

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, the Philosophy Department, and other departments of NYU, as well as 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 Waldron 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.

Speakers for next year's colloquium are: Stephen Holmes, John Gardner, Kenji Yoshino, Samuel Scheffler, Jane Mansbridge, Robert Post, Derek Parfit, Miranda Fricker, Adrian Vermeule, John Ferejohn, Danielle Allen, Katherine Strandburg, Martin Stone.

PHIL-GA 3400; Thesis Preparation Seminar; Wednesday 4-6; Stephen Schiffer

This course is only open to PhD students in the Philosophy Department.

BIOE-GA 1008/PHIL-GA 1008; Topics in Bioethics: Moral Indeterminacy; Monday 6:45-8:45; S. Matthew Liao

It seems impermissible to kill one innocent person to save five other innocent people from being killed. At the same time, many people have the intuition that it may be permissible to kill one innocent person to save, e.g., one million people. Suppose that there is something to these intuitions. Is there a precise threshold when the act of killing an innocent person changes from impermissibility to permissibility, or is the boundary fuzzy? Is the source of this indeterminacy due to semantic vagueness in the term 'permissibility' or lack of adequate knowledge about what counts as permissible? Or does the indeterminacy stem from vagueness in the world? What is the difference between vagueness and indeterminacy? How should we go about deciding what to do when faced with a case of moral indeterminacy? In this seminar, we shall, among other things, critically review some of the most popular philosophical approaches to vagueness including semantic, epistemological, and ontological approaches; consider whether

the source of moral indeterminacy may be different from non-moral indeterminacy; and apply these insights to normative issues such as the defensibility of threshold deontology and the problem of incommensurability in population ethics.

PHIL-GA 3305; Democratic Theory Seminar; Tuesday 2-3:50; John Ferejohn/Jeremy Waldron

Course website: http://its.law.nyu.edu/courses/description.cfm?id=15024