Fall 2017 Graduate Philosophy Department Courses

PHIL-GA 1000; Pro-seminar; Wednesday 4-7; Dave Chalmers/Jane Friedman

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

PHIL-GA 1101; Advanced Intro to Formal Epistemology; Tuesday 10-12; Jim Pryor

A survey of basic methods and results in formal epistemology, in probabilistic, discrete, and modal forms. We'll also attend to some philosophical issues at the foundations of these approaches, such as when and why it's helpful to regard beliefs as deductively closed and always consistent, what are the relations between degrees of confidence and categorical attitudes like belief and agnosticism/suspended judgment, and what it means for something to be evidence for a hypothesis. We'll draw on some literature in decision theory, but that will not be our focus.

PHIL-GA 2283; Advanced Intro to Aesthetics; Tuesday 12-2; Rob Hopkins

Advanced Introduction to Aesthetics

This course provides a guide to some of the main issues in aesthetics and the philosophy of art. The issues fall into three main groups. First, what is art, and why does it matter? Does art offer us knowledge of a distinctive kind? Does it give voice to feelings and aspects of our lives we cannot articulate by other means? Does it reshape the way we see the world? More generally, does it offer a realm of value that is autonomous, or is the beautiful an aspect of the good or the true? Second, how do we engage with art? What is the role in that engagement for emotion, imagination, reason or experience? What role is there for knowledge or expertise, given that it is tempting to think judgements about art should be based on our own experience? Third, what is the nature and significance of certain of art’s key features, such as intention and meaning; matter, medium and technique; representation and expression; form and content; beauty and sublimity; style, genre and tradition?

We'll look at a range of literature, much of it contemporary, some classic (e.g. Kant, Collingwood, Langer and Goodman). Some of our discussion will apply to art per se, some will be limited to individual arts. And not everything we discuss will be art – some of the questions, and some of the possible sources of art’s value, have close parallels in things that are not art, or, at the limit, not even artificial.
Spinoza's Metaphysics

Spinoza’s metaphysics integrates substance monism (that there is only one substance), necessitarianism (that every state of affairs is metaphysically necessary), pantheism (that God and its states exhaust reality), incremental naturalism (that crucial explanatory aspects of human life such as intentionality and consciousness have a natural basis that is present at least in rudimentary form throughout all of nature), panpsychism (that everything has a mind), and the principle of sufficient reason (that there is a fully sufficient reason for every state of affairs). Even if one disagrees with his conclusions, Spinoza provides a helpful model for studying the interactions among these views, such as whether one can accept the principle of sufficient reason while rejecting necessitarianism, or whether one can accept incremental naturalism while rejecting panpsychism. Spinoza’s metaphysics also broadens our philosophical imagination by forcing us to engage with views that at first seem absurd but on closer examination are plausible and attractive, such as substance monism and panpsychism.

In this seminar, we will try to reconstruct Spinoza’s metaphysics in a systematic way accessible to those without a background in the history of philosophy. Towards this end, we will frequently compare Spinoza’s views to contemporary views. The primary text will be the first two parts of Spinoza’s Ethics (approximately 65 pages).

The seminar will meet at NYU for seven sessions and at Columbia for seven sessions. The exact schedule of Columbia meetings will be announced.

The first person

The central question under investigation in this seminar will be: what is self-consciousness, and how does it relate to our use, in language and in thought, of the first-person pronoun ‘I’? Readings will include recent and contemporary discussions of the first person in analytic philosophy of language and mind – by, for instance, Elizabeth Anscombe, Tyler Burge, Gareth Evans, John Perry, Sydney Shoemaker, or others – and readings in the history of philosophy, most centrally Immanuel Kant’s seminal discussion of the first person in two chapters of the Critique of Pure Reason: The Transcendental Deduction of the Categories and the Paralogisms of Pure Reason. We may also discuss selections from Sartre’s phenomenological account of consciousness and self-consciousness in The Transcendence of the Ego and Being and Nothingness.

Particular questions might include: what is the relation between self-consciousness and unity of consciousness? Between self-consciousness and consciousness of one’s own body? How does the traditional distinction (inherited from Kant) between consciousness of oneself “as subject” and consciousness of oneself “as object” relate to the more recent distinction (inherited from Wittgenstein) between use of ‘I’ “as subject” and use of ‘I’ “as object”? Does the first-person pronoun ‘I’ refer to a particular entity or does it have a different role altogether?
In appealing to different schools and different periods in the history of philosophy, we will try to clarify differences between philosophical methods and the types of results they may yield. Some previous knowledge of Kant or some previous knowledge of the relevant recent and contemporary literature are welcome but not required. The seminar will have the form of close reading and discussion of those different types of literature.

**PHIL-UA 3003; Topics in Epistemology; Monday 11-1; Dick Foley**

**Norms and Rationality**

The seminar will focus on the nature of epistemic rationality, the norms that govern it, and its relationship to practical rationality and ethical requirements.

Among the questions to be addressed are: what kinds of norms are appropriate for the regulation and evaluation of beliefs ---practical, ethical, or ones unique to beliefs? Are there a variety of legitimate epistemic goals? If so, what are they? Is it always inappropriate to believe something if one lacks sufficient evidence for it? What kind of control is it possible to exercise over one’s beliefs? What implications does the answer to this question have for the norms appropriate for belief? Do beliefs have fittingness conditions, and if so, how do they affect what one should believe?

Students will write either two medium-length papers (8--10 pages) or a single longer term paper (16-20 pages).

**PHIL-GA 3004; Topics in Metaphysics; Tuesday 4-6; Paul Horwich**

**Necessity**

Topics to be discussed include: (1) the various types of necessity and possibility (logical, metaphysical, nomological, normative, etc.); (2) relations between them; (3) whether some one of them is the fundamental notion; (4) whether a modal logic (and associated possible-world semantics) suffices to fully capture a notion of necessity; (5) the relationship between metaphysical necessity and conceivability; (6) other prospects for a reductive analysis of necessity; (7) the epistemology of necessity-judgments; (8) the function and meaning-constituting use of the word "necessary"; and (9) the existence, nature, and explanatory utility of possible worlds.

**PHIL-GA 3011; Topics in the Philosophy of Physics; Wednesday 2-4; Tim Maudlin**

**Gauge Theory**

The best theories of matter that exist take the form of gauge field theories. The “gauge” aspect of these theories in some cases refers to excess mathematical degrees of freedom, that is, the existence of multiple different mathematical representations of the same physical state. Surprisingly, demanding certain forms of gauge freedom also appears to lead to the prediction of new particles (“gauge bosons”), which suggests a physical content to gauge principles. Issues of
gauge also arise in one of the oddest physical phenomena, the Aharonov-Bohm effect. This class will try to sort through these various issues. We will read, inter alia, Richard Healey’s Gauging What’s Real.

PHIL-GA 3012; Topics in the Philosophy of Psychology; Thursday 11-1; Tuomo Tiisala

The Normal and the Pathological

This seminar inquires into the metaphysics of norms by critically examining the sustained attempt in the psy-sciences to produce knowledge about the norms of human life. Our guiding questions include: Are there biological norms? How might we be able to identify them (quantitatively, qualitatively, functionally)? Is the psychiatric distinction between the normal and the pathological epistemically independent of mundane, often implicit, normative attitudes of a culture? Does theoretical reasoning about human action limit the autonomy of human agents?

On the basis of our study of these questions, we will critically evaluate the epistemic credentials and ethical implications of the diagnostic practice of contemporary psychiatry as it is represented in the latest edition of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. We will do this with special attention to the metaphysics of human kinds.

Our readings will be key texts from the nascent field of the philosophy of psychiatry, together with Georges Canguilhem’s pioneering study The Normal and the Pathological.

PHIL-GA-3302; The Colloquium in Legal, Political, and Social Philosophy; Liam Murphy and Samuel Scheffler

The Colloquium in Legal, Political, and Social Philosophy was founded by Ronald Dworkin and Thomas Nagel in 1987. It is the original model for all of NYU Law’s colloquia. The Colloquium is now convened by Liam Murphy, Samuel Scheffler, and Jeremy Waldron, two of whom will host in any given year.

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. 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 posted at least a week in advance, and participants are expected to have read it.

The public sessions of the colloquium take place on Thursdays, from 4 to 7 pm, in the Lester Pollack Colloquium Room on the 9th Floor of Furman Hall, 245 Sullivan St (view campus map). Visitors’ papers will be posted in advance of each meeting on this page.
Students applying for credit:

Admission to the seminar is only by professor’s permission. Students wishing to take the colloquium for credit should send their applications (an e-mail letter with their background and interest in the colloquium) to Professor Murphy’s assistant, Lavinia Barbu, barbul@exchange.law.nyu.edu, between June 1 and July 31. Before you send your application, please check with Academic Services to see if you are eligible to apply. Students enrolled in the Colloquium meet separately with Professor Murphy 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.

Fall 2017

Professors Liam Murphy and Samuel Scheffler

Schedule of Speakers

The Conference for the Colloquium, September 7 and 8

September 7

4:30 – 6:30  Session One

Thomas M. Scanlon (Harvard)

Commentator: Samuel Scheffler (NYU)

September 8

10:00 – 12:00  Session Two

Frank Michelman (Harvard)

Commentator: Lawrence Sager (University of Texas, Austin)

2:00 – 4:00  Session Three

Seana Shiffrin (UCLA)

Commentator: Liam Murphy (NYU)

5:00 - 7:00  Session Four

Joseph Raz (King’s College London and Columbia)

Commentator: Jeremy Waldron (NYU)
September 14  
Daniel Viehoff, NYU

September 28  
Grainne de Burca, NYU

October 5  
Samuel Freeman, University of Pennsylvania

October 12  
Jerry Gaus, Arizona University

October 19  
Robert Gooding –Williams, Columbia University

October 26  
Susan Wolf, University of North Carolina

November 2nd  
Ekow Yankah, Cardozo University

November 9  
David Luban, Georgetown University

November 16  
Laura Valentini, London School of Economics

November 17  
Juliana Bidadanure, Stanford University

December 7  
Debra Satz, Stanford University

**PHIL-GA 3400.001; Thesis Research: Third Year Workshop; Thursday 4-6; Rob Hopkins**

This class, which runs fortnightly across both semesters, focuses on professional development. It has three main goals. First, to provide concrete help in thinking about certain challenges we face as teachers and researchers. There will, for instance, be classes on how to be an effective teacher, and how to ensure one’s teaching fosters inclusiveness and diversity. Second, to provide an opportunity to think about how to prepare for the job market. What, beyond the quality of his or her research, makes someone a valuable colleague in prospect, and how can you best demonstrate those virtues? We’ll address various issues, including (but not limited to) publishing, conference going, framing one’s work for those who are not expert in the field, and outreach beyond the discipline and even the academy. Third, to help third year students identify, and to make some progress with, a suitable prospectus topic.

On many of the issues in the first two groups, we’ll hear a variety of views. The class will involve many guest appearances, from colleagues in the department and the wider university, but also (if the opportunity arises) philosophers from other institutions who are passing through.
The class is open to all NYU Philosophy doctoral students, but some parts of it will be especially suited to the incoming third year. (There will, for instance, be sessions devoted to presentations of possible prospectus topics.) Others are welcome to dip into those classes most relevant to them.

**PHIL-GA 3400.002; Thesis Preparation Seminar; Thursday 1-3; Tim Maudlin**

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

**Cross-listed Courses:**

**PHIL-GA 1008; Topics in Bioethics: Nonconsequentialism; Monday, 6:45-8:45; Mathew Liao**

Nonconsequentialism is a type of normative theory according to which the rightness or wrongness of an act is not determined solely by consequences. In particular, it holds that even when the consequences of two acts are the same, one might be wrong and the other right. In this course, we shall examine factors (prerogatives) that permit an agent to act in ways that do not maximize the good, and factors (constraints) that limit what an agent may do in pursuit of the good. We shall discuss topics such as the moral difference between harming and not-aiding; intending and foreseeing harm, i.e., the Doctrine of Double Effect; whether constraints are absolute; and how nonconsequentialists should address issues such as aggregation and the so-called paradox of deontology. We shall also investigate how one might be able to provide a plausible, theoretical foundation for nonconsequentialism.