

GRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS 2016-2017

AUTUMN 2016

PHL 415 Aristotle I: Matter and Temporality (AQ)

Sean Kirkland

Thursdays, 3:00-6:15

In his *Physics*, Aristotle famously defines time as “a number of motion in accordance with the before and after (τοῦτο...έστιν ὁ χρόνος, ἀριθμὸς κινήσεως κατὰ τὸ πρότερον καὶ ὕστερον)” (*Phys.* IV.219b1-2). In undertaking to interpret this definition, scholars almost invariably begin by approaching Aristotle’s discussion of time in *Physics* IV.10-14 as a more or less independent treatise or essay on time, abstracting it from its context in the *Physics* or even from Aristotle’s philosophy as a whole. We will do very much the opposite. Indeed, we will begin with Aristotle’s discussion of (what is often referred to as) the “unmoved mover,” in *Physics* VIII and *Metaphysics* A and take up the mode of being proper to this entity as not subject to time, because not subject to movement, and not subject to movement because not composed of matter. We will allow this fundamental contrast to guide our reading of Aristotle on time, i.e. the contrast between the unmoved mover’s immaterial mode of being and the materiality of natural or sublunary things, which is to say, between the pure *energeia* or ‘actualization, being-at-work’ of the unmoved mover and the actualization or being-at-work of *dunamis* or ‘potency’ that is the manner in which natural things accomplish their being. And we will then trace Aristotle’s analysis of natural moveable being through the three conceptual vocabularies he sets out in the *Physics*, namely the opposites and *hupokeimenon* or ‘underlying thing’ of Bk. I, the fourfold causation of Bk. II, and finally the *energeia* of *dunamis* of Book III. Only then will we approach Aristotle’s definition of time in Book IV.

What we will find, I believe, is that, contrary to many readings that focus on the punctuated temporality some find indicated in Aristotle’s discussion of the ‘now’ moment, Aristotle is not a thinker constrained by the metaphysics of presence. Rather, the mode of being that belongs natural, material things is a certain way of being stretched out beyond their present into their past and future. In being what they are, natural things are potentially in time, a potency that is only actualized when their movement or rest is counted by an experiencing rational soul. At the very end of the quarter, we will turn to Aristotle’s discussion of *genesis* and *phthora*, or ‘coming-to-be’ and ‘passing-away’ (in the work named for those terms), and we will think together about how that discussion relates to what we have come to understand concerning natural, moveable, material being in the *Physics*. This is the arch we will trace over these ten weeks.

PHL 516: HEGEL II: HEGEL’S PHILOSOPHICAL SCIENCE OF RIGHT (AQ)

Kevin Thompson

Tuesdays, 3:00-6:15

This seminar examines the central issues and ideas of Hegel’s philosophical science of right—that is, his moral, legal, social, and political philosophy—through a close reading and critical discussion of the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821) and related passages from the first edition of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* (1817).

It focuses specifically on the set of concepts that constitute Hegel’s unique contribution to moral, legal, social, and political thought: freedom, objective spirit, and ethical life. We begin, however, with a discussion of the methodology Hegel employs throughout his mature work as this lays the foundation for his distinctive approach to the central issue of the science of right: the sovereignty of the state. The ultimate task of the seminar is thus to come to an understanding of how this distinctive method serves to justify Hegel’s normative claims regarding the institutional structure of a genuinely rational social order.

AUTUMN 2016 - continued

PHL 522: SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: BADIOU: MATHEMATICS, POLITICS, ONTOLOGY, MATERIALISM (AQ)

BILL MARTIN

WEDNESDAYS 6:00-9:00 PM

The aim of this seminar is three-fold: 1) to give you a general introduction to the philosophical contributions of Alain Badiou (1937-); 2) to study the special role that mathematics plays in Badiou's work; 3) to explore how the ontological turn (or "re-turn"--to Plato) connects with Badiou's political ideas, encapsulated in the term, "the communist hypothesis."

If you do not feel entirely comfortable with mathematics, please do not let that deter you. The instructor has done a great deal of work in the last few years getting on top (or somewhere close to it) of what Badiou is doing with mathematical ideas; having gained a decent sense of these ideas, the instructor also has a good feel for how these ideas connect with other questions in Badiou's philosophy, in particular those of materialism and politics. In order to carry forward this project, it will be helpful to have a general overview of Badiou's work. There are many good introductory books on Badiou's philosophy, most of which I have read. For our purposes, and most purposes, the book of conversations that Fabien Tarby did with Badiou, *Philosophy and the Event* is really good. If you can read this book before we start the class, we can discuss it at the first meeting, and we'll all be up to speed for the more difficult stuff.

PHL 434 Hobbes: *De Corpore* (AQ)

Rick Lee

M 3:00-6:15

Relatively early in his philosophical career, Hobbes projected a three part work called *The Elements of Philosophy* that he envisioned as beginning from questions of method and proceeding to a philosophy of nature (Part I: *De Corpore*). That would provide the philosophical principles for an investigation into what it is to be human (Part II: *De Homine*). These two parts would then provide the ground for his investigation into politics to be carried out in Part III: *De Cive*. As it happens, Hobbes published the third part first, owing, as he says, to the political circumstances in England at the time. From the moment of the publication of *De Cive*, Hobbes became associated with political philosophy, particularly in his unique version of "social contract theory," and his defense of absolute sovereignty. However, for most philosophers of the period—Descartes, Mersenne, Malbranche, to name a few—Hobbes was most known as and respected for being a natural philosopher.

In this course, we will read significant portions of the first part of the project Hobbes originally envisioned, i.e., his *De Corpore*. In particular, we will focus on his discussion of method and logic, his rethinking of metaphysics, and his philosophy of nature. We will be particularly interested in two questions: (1) what relation does Hobbes' logic and philosophy of nature have to his political philosophy—is it an operation of "back-filling," as Leo Strauss argues, or is it the essential grounding—and (2) to what extent is Hobbes a "materialist," and, if he is, what does "materialism" mean for him?

Our sole text this quarter will be Hobbes' *De Corpore*. We will read his entire discussion of logic, first philosophy, and a great deal of his notion of "nature."

WINTER 2017

PHL 400 Special Topics in Traditional Philosophers: Leviathan, DeCive, Elements of Law (WQ)

Peg Birmingham

TH 3:00-6:15

Following Rick Lee's course on Hobbes' *De Corpore*, this course will focus on Hobbes' political thought (*De Corpore Politico*), taking its departure from Carl Schmitt's well-known claim, "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts..." While it would seem that Hobbes' political thought, with its theological imagery of the modern state as Leviathan and a mortal god, is no exception to Schmitt's claim, I will argue in this course that Hobbes' concept of the political is not rooted in the theological and this because he breaks with an eschatological concept of history, the latter a condition for Schmitt's claim that all modern concepts of the state are secularized theological concepts. In other words, when Hobbes claims there is no good or evil in the state of nature he is signaling his break from a secularized eschatology with its concern for the problem of evil and suffering. Again, contra Schmitt, Hobbes' break with a secularized eschatology means that his political thought marks a radical with a pre-modern theory of the state. Issues of the course include: 1) Hobbes' concept of history; 2) his engagement with theology, especially Books Three and Four of *Leviathan*; 3) the issue of violence, which for Hobbes cannot be reduced to the problem of evil and suffering; 4) Hobbes' concepts of power and law; and 5) his theory of the state, sovereignty, and political subjectivity.

PHL 661 Topics in Feminist Theory: Irigaray's Philosophy of Sexual Difference (WQ)

Fanny Söderbäck

T 3:00-6:15

In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, Luce Irigaray famously stated that, "sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age. According to Heidegger, each age has one issue to think through, and one only. Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through."

In this course, we will try to make sense of and provide a context for this radical and perplexing claim. Starting with early works such as *Speculum of the Other Woman*, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, and *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, we will examine Irigaray's philosophy of sexual difference as primarily a critical project meant to *deconstruct* and turn at its head a philosophical canon arguably blind to the issue of sexual difference. Turning to later works such as *To Be Two* and *The Way of Love*, we will scrutinize her attempt to *construct* a culture of two sexes, and look at some critical questions and concerns that have been raised by contemporary feminist theorists in response to this project.

The course is meant to provide a solid foundation for students interested in feminist thought in general and French feminism in particular. The question of sexual difference will be examined in relation to language, subjectivity, time and space, love and desire, ethical relations, birth, embodiment, racial and other differences, and culture.

WINTER 2017 - continued

PHL 590: Trends in Contemporary French Philosophy: Gergson: Authenticity, Morality, Religion (WQ)

Frédéric Seyler

W 3:00-6:15

The recent publication of the first critical edition of Bergson's works at *Presses Universitaires de France* marks an important step for the renewal of Bergson studies. This year's seminar will take advantage of the new critical edition, in particular with regard to two major books: *Time and Free Will* (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, 1889) and *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (*Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, 1932), that is, Bergson's first book and its last, thus encompassing the beginning of his philosophy as well as its mature form.

While *Time and Free Will* develops a concept of "authenticity" based upon the distinction between a deep seated self and a superficial self, it seems to imply an ethics that goes beyond, and even sometimes opposes, conventional norms and their habitual enacting in social interactions.

More than 40 years later, the *Two Sources* renew this critique by opposing moral obligation and "static religion", on the one hand, to moral progress and "dynamic religion" on the other. However, and as we will have to study in detail (through the analysis of both the English translation and the critical edition in French), the concept of authenticity seems to have evolved: anchored in the deep seated self or in personality and its history as a whole in *Time and Free Will*, it is now (in the *Two Sources*) thought of in terms of divine life and its manifestation through the actions of the mystic.

Graduate student papers will have the opportunity to enrich this study by combining it with other angles on Bergson's philosophy, for instance its reception by Deleuze.

SPRING 2017

PHL 416: Aristotle II: Practical Judgment, Choice and Responsibility in the Ancient World (SQ)

Daryl Koehn

W 3:00-6:15

The ancients understood action, practical judgement, choice and responsibility differently than we do today. For example, neither Aristotle nor Plato have the concept of the "will", and some Roman philosophers tied the notion of responsibility not to autonomy or responsiveness but to the notion of "office". This course will examine key ethical ancient concepts such as action, judgement, practical wisdom, choice and responsibility in detail. We will compare and contrast the various views while identifying strengths and weaknesses with each approach. We will examine (tentatively):

1. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* on choice and akrasia (Books 3, 6 and 7)
2. Plato *Charmides*
3. Epictetus
4. Seneca
5. Cicero
6. Plutarch (4 lives from his ancient Greek and Roman lives)

SPRING 2017 - continued

PHL 550: Heidegger I: Heidegger, *Being and Time* (SQ)

Will McNeill

TH 3:00-6:15

This course will present a condensed, thematic approach to the study of this central text of 20th century European philosophy. We will encounter the text through a sequence of inter-related yet distinct themes such as: the phenomenological method; the ontological difference; being-in-the-world and the problem of world; subjectivity and singularity; Care and the unity of Dasein; the deconstructing of truth; the problem of foundations; being-toward-death and authenticity; ekstatic temporality; historicality and *Destruktion*. Students will be expected to read the entire text in advance, and we will use these themes as lenses through which to enhance our understanding of the central argument and its complexities.

PHL 500: Special Topics in the History of Philosophy: Naturphilosophie: Post-Kantian Conceptions of Nature (SQ)

Elizabeth Millán Brusslan

W 3:00-6:15

In his *Ideen zu einer Geographie der Pflanze*, Alexander von Humboldt, claims that his goal is to get at a view of nature that will include its inner workings (*ihrem inner Zusammenwirken*). In expressing this goal, Humboldt makes reference to Schelling, Humboldt hopes that his work will demonstrate that it is possible to:

Present canvasses of nature of a completely different and at the same time higher kind, in a *naturphilosophisch* (nature-philosophical) way,...Not entirely unacquainted with the spirit of Schelling's system, I am far from the opinion that nature-philosophical study harms empirical investigation and that empirical philosophers and *Naturphilosophen* must be engaged in eternal battle

What kind of battle is there between empirically driven scientists and *Naturphilosophen*? In the seminar we will explore several post-Kantian contributions to *Naturphilosophie*, and attempt to gain a clear understanding of what the term means and what its implications for a study and appreciation of nature are. We will read texts from Goethe, Humboldt, Schelling, Novalis, and Hölderlin.