

**GRADUATE SEMINAR DESCRIPTIONS
2020-2021**

AUTUMN QUARTER

Philosophy 500: Special Topics in the History of Philosophy

Thinking from Elsewhere: Exile, *Transterrados*, and the Development of Latin American Philosophy

**Elizabeth Millán Brusslan
Wednesdays, 3:00-6:15**

We will take up our investigation of Latin American philosophy with the intellectual fruits born of the exodus that took place in the wake of the Spanish Civil War. The term *transterrado* was coined by the Spanish philosopher José Gaos to designate those intellectuals and artists who arrived in Mexico as a consequence of the fall of the Spanish Republic and the ascent of Francisco Franco's dictatorship. The Spanish language proved to be a valuable bridge that connected the intellectual tradition of Spain to many countries in Latin America. We will study the influence of the Spanish thinkers, José Ortega y Gasset and José Gaos on the development of Mexican philosophy. Then we will turn to some contemporary voices to trace the role of exiles and expatriation on the development of philosophy in Mexico. In an essay we will read during the second half of the quarter, Walter Mignolo claims that philosophy is located on the edge of colonial difference: "To think from the colonial difference means, today, assuming philosophy as a regional practice and simultaneously thinking against and beyond its normative and disciplinary regulations." In short, to "decolonize philosophy," we must think beyond Eurocentrism. So, while we shall begin in Europe, our investigation will not end there: we will always be pushing beyond any Eurocentric vision of philosophy and towards a sort of alibi philosophy or a philosophy from elsewhere.

Required Texts:

1. José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditations on Quixote* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000).
2. *Mexican Philosophy in the 20th Century. Essential Readings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
3. *Latin American Philosophy: Currents, Issues, Debates*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2003).

Recommended Texts:

1. José Ortega y Gasset, *Meditaciones del Quijote* (Madrid: Alianza, 2001).
2. Peter Burke, *Exiles and Expatriates in the History of Knowledge, 1500-2000* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2017).

**PHL 557: Topics in Continental Philosophy
Continental Philosophy of Science and Math**

**H. Peter Steeves
Mondays, 4:30–7:45**

Is science just one way—one narrative—for looking at the world, not inherently better or more correct than any other? Is there something about science's methodology, its assumptions, or even its ontological and epistemological commitments that gives it privileged status when it comes to finding the truth of the matter, especially concerning empirical claims? Does science progress, building on past truths, getting closer and closer to the truth? Does math unlock important facts about the world? Are all mathematical claims just fancy tautologies? When science discovers a law of nature and finds that the law can be expressed in an equation, what sort of necessity is at work in the scientific claim and the mathematical translation of that claim—and are these the same sort of necessity?

In this course we will investigate these questions, ultimately leading us to posit what, in general, might constitute a Continental philosophy of science. We will give special attention to what is meant by a "natural law," what sort of necessity such a law indicates, and whether or not science must always proceed accompanied by a naïve

realism. We will also, along the way, make some initial strides at describing a Continental philosophy of mathematics, thinking about how math (and geometry) play a role in the sciences and what sort of necessity is at work in truth claims that are mathematical (and geometric) in nature. [NB: If there is enough interest, I might offer a “Continental Philosophy of Math” course on its own in the future, then, since that topic will be a lesser part of this course this year.]

Because in some respects there very nearly isn’t such a thing as an established “Continental philosophy of science,” and because analytic philosophy has arguably made philosophy of science its model for doing philosophy in general, we will begin by taking a brief look at analytic approaches and then move to discuss why Continental philosophy has had less to say on the topic and why Continental philosophers have often been attacked (rightly or wrongly) when they do comment on science. Then, starting with Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations* and *Crisis of the European Sciences*, and moving to various shorter works by Merleau-Ponty and Derrida, we will try to flesh out the foundations for a thoughtful Continental philosophy of science in partnership with phenomenology and deconstruction.

Though we will question the ways in which biology, psychology, ecology, etc., are considered by many to be “a different sort” of science, it will be helpful to have specific scientific questions and methodologies in mind, thus we will be using physics as our general touchstone, especially turning to cosmology (investigating both the origin and ultimate fate of the universe) and the laws of thermodynamics as we proceed, reading some essays by scientists as well as philosophers. We will also have a guest lecture for half of one class by a working physicist who specializes in the search for dark matter.

In the end, we will have encountered and read Ayer, Popper, Kuhn, and other canonical thinkers, but always with an eye toward what phenomenology and deconstruction can add to a philosophy of science. Ultimately, it is hoped that we will have a broader understanding of the sort of necessity that supposedly founds a natural law and a mathematical truth, and that we will have arrived at a set of questions and methodologies that, moving forward, could point us toward a thoughtful Continental philosophy of science and math.

PHL 656: Seminar on Social and Political Thought
Agamben’s Concept of Life: Sovereignty, Political Economy, and Biopower

Peg Birmingham
Tuesdays, 2:45-6:00

This course will focus on the concept of life in three of Agamben’s major works in the nine volume *Homo Sacer* series: *Homo Sacer* (1), *The Kingdom and the Glory* (Appendix) (2.4) and *Use of Bodies* (4.2).

We will begin *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, focusing on Agamben’s claim that the original activity of sovereign power is the production of a biopolitical body or bare life, a production that begins by excluding the “living common to all beings” from Western political thought. We will follow closely Agamben’s thought through Part One, The Logic of Sovereignty, Part II, *Homo Sacer*, and Part III, The Camp as the Biopolitical Paradigm of the Modern. We will then turn to *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* in which Agamben raises the question of why sovereign power in the West is inseparable from an *oikonomia* or an economic theology that reaches its completion in Jean-Jacques Rousseau who, he argues, does not break from a transcendent political theology of sovereign power but instead completes it by linking it to an immanent popular sovereignty and a political economy that continues to reduce life to brutal forms of biopower. (Agamben reminds us that Rousseau wrote “Political Economy” for the Encyclopedia prior to writing *The Social Contract*.) Finally, we will take up Agamben’s concept of life as “form-of-life” in *Use of Bodies*, the final volume of the *Homo Sacer* series. Here Agamben asks of the possibility of deactivating the role of work, labor, and death in modern thought and political existence. Or, more precisely, he asks whether it is possible to think a concept of life as “inoperativity” in which a “properly human and political praxis will be able to appear in its own light” (Preface, *The Kingdom and the Glory*).

PHL 525: Nietzsche
Nietzsche: Sickness/Convalescence

Sean Kirkland
Thursdays, 3:00-6:15

This quarter we will be reading a number of texts written by Friedrich Nietzsche. Our focus will be the conceptual pair ‘sickness/convalescence,’ which together constitute a theme to which Nietzsche returns again and again in a

variety of contexts over the course of his brief (17-year) philosophical career. To be sure, one could explain Nietzsche's abiding interest in this theme by referencing his own ever-fragile health. It is, after all, true that throughout his life and with increasing severity, Nietzsche was plagued by frequent and recurring bouts of illness—migraines, nausea, exhaustion, immobility, and even blindness.

And yet, to reduce the theme of 'sickness/convalescence' to a matter of merely biographical interest would be to miss the ultimately foundational role this theme plays in Nietzsche's philosophy. Indeed, as we shall see, what presents itself experientially to Nietzsche, and to us he wagers, as the dynamic relation of sickness and convalescence may point to a usually unperceived but universal ontological condition, a quasi-Heraclitean ontology of Becoming, where things are not simply 'what they are,' persisting in a static condition of self-identity through time. Rather, beings accomplish their being, emerging into themselves, where this condition is not to be understood as in any way secondary, a merely transitional stage on its way to proper Being (à la Plato's *Philebus*). No, Becoming is here the proper mode of existence of everything—everything *exists* in the transition between not being and being, between absence and presence, sickness and health. If we can entertain such a thought, and see all things including ourselves as human beings, as situated *properly* within the dynamic of sickness/convalescence, many perplexing aspects and elements of Nietzsche's philosophical project and style begin to fall into place. Indeed, this dynamic ontology, understood as essentially relational, everything emerging into itself through the play of opposing forces, a complex of affections and quantitative differentials, is just what Nietzsche will eventually call 'will to power' And the proper way of inhabiting precisely this condition, a certain temporality as we shall see, is just what Nietzsche believes will be provoked by the thought of the "eternal recurrence of the same," the "heaviest weight" pressing on our decisions and actions.

We will read selections from *Birth of Tragedy*, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, the second *Untimely Meditation*, *Gay Science*, and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. There just may be no better companion for these strange and trying times than good old Fritz.

WINTER QUARTER

PHIL 661: Topics in Feminist Theory

Stranger than Other Strangers: Kristeva, Anzaldúa, Ahmed

Fanny Söderbäck

Tuesdays, 3:00–6:15

This seminar brings three thinkers together on issues having to do with otherness and foreignness: Julia Kristeva, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Sara Ahmed. All three inhabit—both in terms of their biography and in terms of their thinking—a space in the borderlands: between cultures, between languages, between racial and sexual identities, and between nations. And all three have written extensively on otherness and strangeness in this hybrid context, from a distinctly feminist perspective, but also from radically different locations, social status, and political orientations. We will be with these three thinkers for the duration of the quarter, critically exploring both the intersection between them and their differences.

PHL 590: Trends in Contemporary French Philosophy

Freudian Legacies: Trauma, Dissociation, Death Drive

Elizabeth Rottenberg

Mondays, 3:00–6:15

In this seminar, we will explore the secret affinity/proximity between trauma, cruelty, and the superego. We will focus on two of Freud's texts that were written in the immediate aftermath of World War I and the 1918 influenza pandemic: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, we will look at how notions of *Nachträglichkeit* (belatedness), repetition compulsion, and death drive are taken up by contemporary French psychoanalytic theory (Jean Laplanche, *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*) and continental philosophy (Jacques Derrida, *Life Death*). We will then turn to *Group Psychology* (in conjunction with "Mourning and Melancholia" [1917]) in order to understand what happens when a "superego" becomes the "gathering place for the death drives" and cruelty aligns itself with the "herd instinct" (*Herdentreib*).

PHL425: Aquinas

Agamben's Medieval Inheritance

Rick Lee

Wednesdays, 3:00–6:15

Initially, I thought this course would look at Agamben's reliance on medieval thought. I envisioned that we would look to his citations, uses, and reliances on medieval thinkers (and they are ubiquitous throughout his works). The more I read his work, the more I realized that a thorough understanding of these references, deployments, uses, and dependencies requires a more complete reading of medieval texts. I cannot hope to uncover all of them, but I think we can say that Agamben is situated between a reading of Aquinas and a reading of Duns Scotus. While I do not think we will make our way back to Agamben, I am fairly confident that he is drawing on a number of themes from medieval philosophy. In this course, we will investigate Aquinas's distinction between being (*esse*) and essence; his thoughts about what constitutes individuality or singularity; and his proofs for the existence of god. Then we will look at Scotus on these same questions. Only at the end, if we have time, will we come back to the ways in which Agamben takes up these issues.

**PHL 551: Heidegger
Heidegger's Nietzsche**

**Will McNeill
Thursdays, 3:00-6:15**

In his remarkably prescient lecture course “The Will to Power as Knowledge,” Heidegger, commenting on Nietzsche’s claim that truth is an illusion, remarks:

Truth, an illusion—that is a terrible proclamation, but not a mere phrase...; perhaps it is already history, our most actual history, not merely since yesterday, and not only for tomorrow.... If this is so, then not only is a boundless disturbance of all trust and trustworthiness sweeping across the globe—on the very basis of ‘trust in reason’—but we must also think to the dimension of things that are concealed. Not merely some specific truth has been shattered, but the very *essence of truth*.

The essence of truth and of knowledge is thought by Nietzsche, in his last works, as *will to power*. This thought, according to Heidegger, marks Nietzsche as the thinker of the consummation of metaphysics—of metaphysics not simply as a discipline of philosophy, but as “the history that we are,” and whose consummation is unfolding today before our very eyes in the form of global technicity. In this course we will read this last major lecture course of Heidegger’s on Nietzsche, delivered in 1939, following both Heidegger and Nietzsche in the attempt to understand the will to power as “the essence of all Being,” as Nietzsche puts it—as knowledge, art, and philosophy, yet also as the essence of the body and of life.

SPRING QUARTER

PHL 629: Seminar on Contemporary Problems The Decolonial Turn

Rafael Vizcaíno
Wednesdays, 3:00-6:15

This course offers an introduction into the decolonial turn across the humanities and social sciences, with a focus on the decolonization of philosophy. The seminar will question the methods and functions of knowledge production in the modern university, paying attention to how the legacies of colonialism are entangled in the creation of knowledge in the university. Alternative ways of producing knowledge are studied with the intent of transforming academic practice. We will conclude the seminar by examining several ongoing proposals to decolonize philosophy as a discipline and a practice.

PHL 529: The Philosophical Foundations of Bioethics

Kevin Thompson
Thursdays, 3:00-6:15

This course examines and critically assesses the conceptual foundations of bioethics. The course is divided into three parts.

Part I reviews the main Western ethical traditions—Utilitarianism, Kantianism, and Virtue Ethics—and discusses how they have laid the foundations for as well as challenged what have come to be the canonical principles of bioethics: non-maleficence, autonomy, beneficence, and justice.

Part II examines the core concepts that define, in many ways, the field of bioethical inquiry and the clinical encounter itself—health, disease, death, and dying—and also briefly considers the concepts that frame the practice of healthcare in society more broadly: race, class, gender, and culture.

Part III, finally, seeks to contextualize critically the conventional account of the discipline of bioethics explored in Part I by reviewing a number of theoretical approaches derived from the European philosophical tradition and beyond. Specifically, it investigates the use and significance of such methods as phenomenology, deconstruction, feminism, and biopolitical analyses for rethinking the clinical encounter, the meaning of new medical technologies, and the relationship between scientific knowledge and social and political power.

PHL 410: Plato I Cosmoi: Plato's Three Orders of Order

Michael Naas
Mondays, 3:00-6:15

Cosmos: at once *universe*, *order*, and *ornament*. Over the course of our ten-week seminar we will look at the ways in which these three meanings of this single Greek term intersect and overlap in Plato's thinking of the universe as a whole, the polis as the primary form of social organization and ordering within the universe, and the human as a rational, political, and ethical being within the polis. We will spend the first half of the seminar on the first of these three orders of order in Plato, that is, on the cosmology of the *Timaeus*, along with the linguistic and rhetorical orders that support and sustain the presentation of that cosmology. In the second half of the seminar, we will turn to Plato's thinking of ethics understood as lawful and orderly thinking, acting, and speaking, and we will focus on his criticism in the *Gorgias* of the unlawful, disorderly, and merely ornamental language of rhetoric. At the conclusion of the seminar, we will turn briefly to the ordering of the polis that is detailed in the *Laws*, an ordering that suggests a fundamental homology between law (*nomos*) and reason (*nous*) and a micro-cosmic/macro-cosmic relationship between the orders of the human, the city, and the universe.