

GRADUATE SEMINAR DESCRIPTIONS 2019-2020

AUTUMN QUARTER

PHL 411: Plato: Plato's *Cosmos* and the *Laws*

Michael Naas

This seminar has several aims, the first of which is simply to read closely and in its entirety the *Laws*, Plato's longest dialogue and, according to the tradition, his last. We will attempt to address all the major issues raised by the dialogue but will concentrate on just a few (e.g., the place of written law in the state, the double-method of legislation, the relationship between (Athenian) freedom and (Persian) slavery, the place of poetry and music in the state, the hierarchical relationships between the gods and humans, humans and animals, and men and women, the role of nature—as opposed to law or convention or art—in human affairs, and, finally, and especially, the relationship between order in the human soul, order in the polis, and order in the cosmos).

The seminar will thus focus primarily on Plato's *Laws*, but since this dialogue treats in some fashion almost all the themes and questions of Plato's other works, we will constantly look back at earlier dialogues to ask whether and how Plato's thinking on law or writing or language or nature or the cosmos might have changed or developed over the years. We will thus look back, for example, at *Gorgias* to see whether the critique of rhetoric and persuasion and, especially, the relationship between order in the human soul and order in the cosmos may have changed in Plato's thought, at *Alcibiades I* to see whether Plato's early treatment of the soul's relation to the body and the tension between freedom and slavery might have shifted, at the *Statesman* to see whether the importance of written law in relation to spoken law may have evolved in the course of Plato's work, and, of course, at the *Republic* to see how the relationship between philosophy and politics may have been rethought by Plato between the two dialogues.

By looking both at the *Laws* and at passages or excerpts from several of Plato's earlier dialogues, we should arrive at a fairly comprehensive view of Plato's overall thinking on a number of crucial issues. Though it will not be our intention to arrive at the end of the seminar at anything like a single picture of "Plato's philosophy," we should have a pretty good sense of Plato's *method*, that is, of the way Plato approached philosophical questions, how he framed them by means of a series of consistent and well-established categories, hierarchies, and relationships, and how this approach to thinking—rather than something like a doctrine of the forms or anything else of the kind—is what warrants gathering all these very different dialogues under the same signature.

PHL 550: Heidegger I: *Being and Time*

Will McNeill

This course will offer a careful study of this seminal philosophical text of the twentieth century, one that profoundly altered the philosophical landscape and prepared the way for existentialism, deconstruction, and postmodernism. Particular attention will be paid to the radical phenomenological understanding of human existence, the overcoming of subjectivity, the undermining of the privilege of the theoretical, and the questioning of the understanding of Being as presence that has implicitly dominated the history of philosophy. Our reading of *Being and Time* will be supplemented by readings from lecture courses of the same period, especially *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (1927) and *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (1928), as well as other relevant texts.

PHL 557: Topics in Continental Philosophy: Joking Around, Seriously

Elizabeth Rottenberg

This class will begin at the end: why is the essay "Humor" (1927) Freud's last word on the theory of jokes and the comic? That is, when it comes to jokes and the comic, why does humor have the last word? The class, though it will begin with "humor," will spend the bulk of its time on the question of jokes and laughter (texts will include Baudelaire's *Essence of Laughter* [1855], Bergson's *Laughter* [1900], Freud's *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* [1905], sessions from Lacan's *Seminar V: Formations of the Unconscious* (1957-1958), Kofman's *Why Do We Laugh?* [1986]). None of this, however, is meant to suggest that humor is all fun and games. For, if there is one thing that Freud's "Humor" essay makes clear, it is that humor must be taken seriously if we are to understand the workings of the critical agency known as the "superego." Thus, in conclusion, the class will turn to Freud's most elaborate discussion of the superego in *The Ego and the Id* (1923).

PHL 570: Sartre I

Frédéric Seyler

The seminar will focus on two major works by Jean-Paul Sartre: *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936), Sartre's first major phenomenological writing, and *Being and Nothingness* (1943), perhaps Sartre's most important book and main contribution to existentialist philosophy. Sartre's essay on *Baudelaire* (1947) will also be of interest here, since it provides a concrete illustration of most of the main theses of *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre is both the founder of French existentialism and a thinker schooled in the phenomenological tradition. Studying Sartre's existentialism is hence a good opportunity to discuss a variety of phenomenological concepts introduced by Husserl and Heidegger, for instance. It is also an opportunity to pursue the dialogue between existentialism and other important philosophers, Hegel, Kant and Descartes in particular. The goal of this seminar is to elaborate a rigorous analysis of the above-mentioned texts while further investigating concepts such as the relationship to others, the body and the problem of values.

WINTER QUARTER**PHL 400: Special Topics in Traditional Philosophers: Aristotle and Hegel on Comedy**

Rick Lee

It is not immediately obvious that philosophers need to speak of comedy nor, more fundamentally, that comedy yields itself to philosophical analysis. Yet throughout the history of philosophy, thinkers have turned frequently to a philosophical analysis of comedy. Aristotle has some brief, if telling remarks in *Poetics* that launch a story about a lost or unwritten second part of that text. Hobbes, Descartes, and Spinoza all speak about either comedy, jokes, or laughter. Hegel, however, provides the most extensive account of the mechanisms that comedy uses, its place in the philosophical system, and its role in social structures.

In this course, we will read Aristotle's *Poetics* in order to see where Aristotle "locates" comedy among what he calls "the mimetic arts." We will focus on the social and economic terms Aristotle uses in relation to both tragedy and comedy. Our guiding question will be "Why does Aristotle see a need to speak of comedy at all?"

We will have a brief interlude, looking at the "Tractatus Coislinianus," thought by some to be the "missing book" of Aristotle's *Poetics*, as well as some brief passages in Hobbes and Descartes.

Our investigation will culminate with a reading of sections from Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Fine Art*, focusing most intensely on his extended discussion of comedy at the end of that course/text. Here, we will be interested in, among other things, the social power of comedy and the role of comedy as the "end" (in multiple senses) of art.

Throughout the course, we will look at some examples of comedy in relation to the theories we are investigating. Among these will be Aristophanes "Lysistrata," The Marx Brothers "A Day at the Races," *The Big Lebowski*, and several standup comedians.

PHL 500: Special Topics in the History of Philosophy: Divergent Modernity: The Case of Latin American Philosophy

Elizabeth Millán Brusslan

Our focus will be on the modernizing, "civilizing" projects developed by 19th century Latin American philosophers. We will begin with a study of Julio Ramos' seminal work on the problem of modernity in the Latin American context, entitled, *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in 19th Century Latin America*. We will use that study to frame our explorations of the work of three important Latin American philosophers and statesmen: Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (Argentina, 1811-1888), Andrés Bello (Venezuela, 1781-1865), and José Martí (Cuba, 1853-1895). Then we will venture into the 20th century with an essay that thematized the problem of modernity in Latin American, José Enrique Rodó's, *Ariel*.

As we explore writing in the Latin American context as a form of political practice, a kind of ordering of "barbarism," a tool for the transformation of the public sphere, we shall note the unique merging of borders between the literary, the philosophical, and the political. This blending of borders is most fitting for a region haunted by the problem of *mestizo/a* identity, a problem that we shall discuss within the context of writings by Linda Martín Alcoff, Ofelia Schutte, and Gloria Andaluza.

In the SQ, we will turn out attention to how the modernizing projects impacted the aesthetic tradition in Latin America.

Required Texts:

Alcoff, Linda Martín. Selected articles on reserve.
Anzaldua, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera. The New Mestiza*.
Bello, Andrés. *Selected Writings of Andrés Bello*, ed. Ivan Jaksic (Oxford).
Martí, José. *Selected Writings*, ed. Roberto González Echevarría (Penguin Books).
Ramos, Julio. *Divergent Modernities. Culture and Politics in 19th Century Latin America* (Duke University Press).
Rodó, José Enrique. *Ariel*, prologue by Carlos Fuentes (University of Texas Press).
Sarmiento, Domingo Faustino. *Facundo or Civilization and Barbarism* (Penguin).
Schutte, Ofelia. Selected articles on reserve.

PHL 551: Heidegger II

See PHL 550, WQ Description

PHL 590: Trends in Continental French Philosophy: Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*

Kevin Thompson

This seminar is a close reading of Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (1968). It explores this work's central ideas and arguments and examines, in particular, its proposal for an "ontology of pure difference" and a new "image of thought."

SPRING QUARTER

PHL 511: Kant II: *Critique of the Power of Judgment*

Avery Goldman

This course will undertake a close reading of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. While addressing the influential 20th Century interpretations of Arendt, Lyotard, Derrida, and others, the course will focus on an attempt to interpret the book as a whole. The question that will guide the course concerns how we can conceive of a book that begins with an investigation of the beautiful, develops into a discussion of the biological, and concludes with a foray into the political. The answer will need to clarify Kant's conception of reflection, the varied forms of reflective judgment that animate the book's divisions. In the attempt to integrate the varied topics of the book, the course will situate these discussions in relation to Kant's other works, the works of his contemporaries, and the tradition of German Idealism that followed.

PHL 522: Social and Political Philosophy: Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*

Peg Birmingham

Following Kevin Thompson's winter graduate course on *Difference and Repetition*, this spring quarter graduate course will undertake a close reading of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. The plan is to read it in its entirety. As the text is composed of 15 chapters, each seminar meeting will cover about one and a half chapters. During each meeting, I will lecture for the first hour and a half. After the break, there will be a student presentation on a section(s) of the chapters under discussion.

PHL 629: Seminar on Contemporary Problems

See PHL 500, WQ Description