

GRADUATE SEMINAR DESCRIPTIONS
2026-2027

AUTUMN QUARTER

PHL 520: Marx I [H-II]
Grundrisse

Richard Lee
Mondays, 3:00-6:15

Marx began studying political economy around 1844. From that time until the completion of Volume One of *Capital*, he continued to read classical political economists while at the same time working on a project that would be a critique of that science. In a feverish 8 months from 1857 to 1858 he put serious attention to this project, filling up a series of notebooks that were published for the first time in 1939 under the title *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*. The *Grundrisse* exhibits Marx at work attempting to not only present his critique of political economy and capitalism, but also attempting to figure out the most appropriate method of engaging in and presenting that critique. It is not only an important text for those attempting to understand the published *Capital*, it is also important in its own right. During this term, we will read through as much of this text as possible, paying close attention to method and how that relates to the content of Marx's critique.

PHL 515: Hegel I [H-III]
Hegel's Philosophy of Nature

Kevin Thompson
Tuesdays, 3:00-6:15

This course examines Hegel's philosophy of nature, the second part of his system as set forth in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* [1817, 1827, & 1830]. Our concern will be to develop a clear account of Hegel's distinctive and resolutely non-empirical approach to this crucial subject and to critically evaluate his claims to deduce such concepts as space, time, matter, the foundations of physics, the earth, the plant and animal kingdoms, and finally, the basic structure of living organisms.

PHL 561: Topics in Phenomenology [CE]
Phenomenology of Life – Phenomenology of Culture

Frédéric Seyler
Wednesdays 3:00–6:15

For Husserl, life is first and foremost the life of *consciousness*, i.e., of intentionality. Persons, therefore, are intentional beings endowed with spirit (*Geist*), which implies not only rationality, but also historicity and sociality. Thus, the Husserlian approach to *culture* is intimately tied to both *Geist* and “higher order persons” (States, institutions, etc.). In his *Vienna Lecture* as well as in *Crisis* (which develops Husserl's concept of the life-world – *Lebenswelt*) Husserl diagnoses a cultural crisis of the “European sciences” as they have become oblivious of their foundation in the life-world. The seminar's first part will introduce Husserl's approach through a reading of the *Vienna Lecture* as well as selected readings from other writings (e.g., *Crisis*, *Ideas II*).

A second part will be devoted to the phenomenology of life (and culture) *stricto sensu*, as developed by Michel Henry. Henry completes and radicalizes Husserl's critique of the modern sciences in his essay on *Barbarism*, which we will read extensively. In this essay, Michel Henry opposes “barbarism” to culture, while using an original concept of life understood as immanent affectivity or *pathos*. Through a critical discussion of Husserl (e.g., in *Material Phenomenology*), Henry establishes a phenomenological concept of *life as mode of appearing* that has to be radically distinguished from intentionality while being at the same time its foundation. Ultimately, it appears that culture is always a *cultivation of life*, whereas “barbarism” amounts to a de-vitalization engendered by the socio-historical triumph of techno-science. While reading *Material Phenomenology* we will also complete our understanding of communities as embedded in a wider community of the living (*communauté des vivants*) as affective, immanent and invisible.

PHL 550: Heidegger I [CE]
The Principle of Reason

Will McNeill
Thursdays, 3:00-6:15

In winter semester 1955-56 Heidegger delivered an entire lecture course on four words: *Der Satz vom Grund*. It was to be his final lecture course, delivered at the University of Freiburg where he was Professor Emeritus. *Der Satz vom Grund*, itself a translation of the *principium rationis* first explicitly formulated by Leibniz, is generally translated into English as “the principle of reason.” More literally, and strangely, the German means “the principle (or statement) of ground.” The lecture course is arguably the most important course of Heidegger’s entire career. While his previous course, *What is Called Thinking?* from 1951-52, identified the call or *Geheiß* that inaugurates Western philosophy as the call to think the twofold of Being and beings, the 1955-56 course traces how that call unfolds into a *demand*: the demand of the principle of ground that dominates modern thought and brings the history of Western philosophy to its consummation in modern science and technology. At the same time, the course examines the intrinsic historicity of the history of Western philosophy in terms of the “destining” (*Geschick*) of Being and of the transmission of history by translation.

Our course will engage in a close reading of Heidegger’s text with the aid of a new translation that renders *Der Satz vom Grund* as *The Principle of Ground*.

WINTER QUARTER

PHL 551: Derrida I [CE] Reading Derrida Reading Freud

**Elizabeth Rottenberg
Mondays 3:00-6:15**

In this class we will read Derrida reading Freud. Freud is, for Derrida, along with Heidegger, one of the “two great ghosts of the ‘great epoch’” (Derrida, *The Post Card*). But the reverse is also true: Derrida’s work has utterly transformed the way we read Freud today. This class will revolve around (at least) three moments of the Freudian encounter: writing, telepathy, and the uncanny. Though I have yet to finalize the reading list, texts will most likely include: Freud’s “A Note Upon the ‘Mystic Writing Pad’” (1925) / Derrida’s “Freud and the Scene of Writing” (1967); Freud’s “Determinism, Belief in Chance and Superstition” (1905), “Psychoanalysis and Telepathy” (1941 [1921]), “Dreams and Telepathy” (1922), “The Occult Significance of Dreams” (1925), “Dreams and Occultism” (1933 [1932]) / Derrida’s “Telepathy” (1981), “My Chances / Mes chances: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophonies” (1981); Freud’s “The Uncanny” (1919) / Derrida’s “Psychoanalysis in the Text” (1971).

PHL 557: Topics in Contemporary Philosophy [CE] Anti-Totalitarian Thinking: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marcuse

**Sean Kirkland
Tuesdays, 3:00-6:15**

In this seminar, we will read Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Marcuse as thinkers who agree that the most urgent task facing us in this late-modern or post-modern historical moment is to think conceptually in a non-totalitarian mode. That is to say, all three see the Western metaphysical tradition, beginning with the Pre-Platonic thinkers, Plato, and Aristotle, as largely guilty of a fundamental and obscuring bias—the world that confronts thought is assumed to be made up of entities that can be, in principle, exhaustively understood with our concepts, laid bare totally and mastered by our conceptual thinking, without significant remainder. This intellectual totalitarianism operates prior to and supports the more familiar use of oppressive and often violent political force that we associate with the term. Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Marcuse all aspire to think in a mode that recognizes an insuperable excess in Being, which even the perfectly successful use of concepts will not and cannot elucidate and master. With them, we will ultimately be asking what a non-totalizing conceptual thinking might look like? How are the concepts required for this different from traditional concepts? What do knowledge and truth mean for such thinking? Is falsifiability still possible? We will read Nietzsche’s *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* and selections from his *Gay Science*, Heidegger’s “Introduction” to *Being and Time*, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” “What Calls for Thinking?,” and “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” and selections from Marcuse’s *One-Dimensional Man*.

PHL 510: Kant I [H-II] *Critique of Pure Reason*

**Avery Goldman
Wednesdays, 3:00-6:15**

This course will undertake a close reading of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* with an emphasis on Kant’s developing critical vocabulary. We will read nearly straight through until the end of the Transcendental Analytic. We will then more selectively engage with the Transcendental Dialectic as we look to both Kant’s metaphysical predecessors and his 19th and 20th century successors.

PHL 657: Topics in Social and Political Thought [CE] Simondon and the Foundations of the Transindividual: Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information

**Peg Birmingham
Thursdays, 3:00-6:15**

This seminar will be devoted to a close reading of Gilbert Simondon’s magnum opus, *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*. Its dedication, “In Memory of Maurice Merleau-Ponty,” will serve as one of the seminar’s guiding threads as we attempt to grasp the way Simondon recollects or remembers Merleau-Ponty thought

in this book. More precisely, the seminar will ask how Simondon, in the memory of Merleau-Ponty, rethinks phenomenology, a phenomenology that does not begin with a subject or a field of consciousness but with “pre-individual Being” in its complex processes of transindividuation which Simondon thinks as thermodynamic metastable systems with different orders and tensions of potential energy that cannot be reduced to categories of stable and fixed identities. (We see here Deleuze’s tremendous debt to Simondon.) The book is divided into two parts: 1) “Physical Individuation” and 2) “Individuation of Living Beings.” (The long history of the publication of the book, with large portions of the first part published in 1964 and a version of the second part in 1989, will be discussed in the seminar.) In the first part of the book, Simondon offers what he calls “a new form of physicalism” that once went by the name “hylomorphism,” now radically rethought. The second part of the book continues this reflection on processes of individuation, beginning with the problematic of ontogenesis and “the limit of the individuation of the living.” In the second part, Simondon takes up the problematics of psychical individuation and collective/group individuation, concluding with “a transindividual theory of emotion.”

SPRING QUARTER

PHL 586: Levinas [CE]

Totality and Infinity

Rafael Vizcaino
Mondays, 3:00-6:15

This seminar will be a close reading of Emmanuel Levinas's *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. This text has influenced the phenomenological tradition, Jewish philosophy, deconstruction, continental philosophy of religion, and especially, Latin American liberation philosophy. This seminar will seek to fully immerse in Levinas's canonical text and, through it, to better understand the work of Enrique Dussel, the paradigmatic Latin American philosopher of liberation—though no prior background in Latin American philosophy is needed. We will read the book cover to cover, with occasional supplements from the available secondary literature.

PHL 420: Ancient Philosophy Revisited [H-I]

Sex and the Tragic in Ancient Greece and India

Tuhin Bhattacharjee
Tuesdays, 3:00-6:15

How did ancient Greeks and Indians understand the tragic? What fantasies of kinship, reproduction, and political origin imagine a community into being in ancient drama—and what must be displaced, repressed, or erased for such origins to appear coherent? In this comparative seminar, we will ask how Greek and Sanskrit plays stage the entanglement of erotic and political disasters, sexuality and sovereignty, kinship and violence. Particular attention will be given to the ways in which marriage, reproduction, infertility, and conflicts among kin become sites where the boundaries between oikos and polis, familial and political life, are negotiated and naturalized. While classical Greece is celebrated for the flourishing of tragedy at the festival of Dionysus, it is generally believed that ancient India did not have a concept of the 'tragic,' and that its vast literary and theatrical repertoire is marked by a conspicuous absence of tragedy. We shall critically examine—and contest—this claim, asking what it means to witness a tragedy and how Greek and Indian notions of the tragic overlap and differ. Readings will include works from ancient tragedy and philosophy alongside contemporary psychoanalytic and feminist interpretations.

PHL 517: German Romantic Philosophers [H-II]

Romantic Views of Nature

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

In this seminar we will study the role and meaning of nature in the work of the early German Romantics and in some of their contemporaries. We will begin with a discussion of Fichte's role in the development of early German Romanticism. Though Fichte's work and his philosophy of freedom influenced the work of Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel, both thinkers were strong critics of Fichte's approach to philosophy and his treatment of nature. We will contrast Fichte's view of nature to Goethe, Humboldt, Novalis, and Schlegel's. As Schiller wrote to Fichte on August 3, 1795: "We have lived during the same time, and the next generation will see us as contemporaries and neighbors, but how little did we unite" (*Wir haben in einer Zeit Gelebt, und die Nachwelt wird uns als Zeitgenossen zu Nachbarn machen aber wie wenig haben wir uns vereinigt*). In the rather small neighborhood (consisting mainly of Berlin, Jena, and Weimar) where German Idealism and early German Romanticism took root, we find an impressive diversity of philosophical views, views which do not lead to a single, unified system of philosophy. In the seminar, we will consider how a common view of nature united Goethe, Humboldt, Novalis, and Schlegel.

PHL 661: Topics in Feminist Theory [NP]
Feminist Phenomenology

Andreea Smaranda Aldea
Thursdays, 3:00-6:15

The course engages contemporary research approaches in feminist phenomenology through the lens of the classical phenomenological resources they rely on and further develop. With Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Beauvoir in the background, we will focus on topics such as lived experience, self-constitution, alterity, temporality, embodiment, spatiality, historicity, normality, and possibility-constitution. We will pay close attention to work on resistance (Mickaëlle Provost), vulnerability (Elodie Boublil), marginalization, exclusion, and oppression (Sara Heinämaa), temporality (Lanei Rodemeyer), institution and institutionality (Mariana Larison), domination (Paula Lorelle), surprise and phenomenology as embodied practice (Natalie Depraz), and normativity (Maren Wehrle). The course will also examine debates in the field regarding the critical dimension of phenomenology (Lisa Guenther, Alia Al-Saji, Johanna Oksala, Gayle Salamon, among others).