

**GRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
SPRING 2023**

Seminar in Continental Philosophy: Heidegger's Critique of Metaphysics

James Bahoh
PHIL 7030/8030
Thursday 2:30-5:30
<Theoretical>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar will focus on Martin Heidegger's critique of metaphysics. Heidegger portrayed metaphysics as a powerful but deeply flawed historical, conceptual, and programmatic framework, a framework in which all those under the purview of Western discourse live, act, and think. Philosophically, this portrayal defines a set of tasks he argues are necessary: to radically problematize the foundations of metaphysics, to rethink them in terms of a better-grounded ontology, and thereby to develop revisionist accounts of things like the nature of human existence, our social worlds, history, thought, death, time, being, ground, identity, and so on. His assessment of problems with metaphysics, moreover, has played a major role in shaping many philosophical ideas and goals at issue in a large section of continental philosophy from the 1920s to today. We will read and critically evaluate a variety of Heidegger's shorter texts and excerpts that address metaphysics, specific metaphysical concepts, or significant historical metaphysical systems. These texts will range from his early work in the 1920s to his late work in the 1960s and early 1970s. We will aim to gain clarity about (1) what exactly Heidegger means by the term "metaphysics," (2) some core problems with metaphysics that he identifies, and (3) the position of metaphysics relative to Heidegger's methodology. We will also (4) look a bit into Heidegger's approaches to solving some of these problems and (5) work to evaluate whether or not his critiques are convincing.

TEXTS

We will read a variety of roughly article-length texts and excerpts by Heidegger. I will post these on Canvas. Since it will be an important point of reference, I would recommend acquiring a paper copy of *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).

REQUIREMENTS

Class participation (includes preparing at least one protocol), a short paper due before the middle of the term, and a 5,000-8,000-word research paper. Protocols: on a rotating basis, each week one student will be tasked with writing a condensed two-page summary of our class discussion. The following week, this protocol will be read at the beginning of the session.

Philosophy of Mind

Shaun Gallagher
PHIL 4421/6421

Monday 2:30-5:30

<Theoretical>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course will cover some of the major issues and debates in recent philosophy of mind. We'll begin with some historical background and examine basic concepts and standard cognitivist views. Topics include reductive, non-reductive, and eliminative versions of materialism; functionalism; notions of representation; computational models; mental causation; action, free will, notions of self, and more recent 4E (embodied, ecological, enactive and extended) models of the mind.

Social/Political Philosophy: Social Identity, Phenomenology, and Liberation

Mike Monahan

PHIL 7/8541

Tuesday 2:30-5:30, CL 333

<Practical>

Current debates surrounding social identities tend to revolve around the relation between categories such as race, gender, or sexuality (among others) and the status of such categories as “natural.” Whether they are *natural* (often understood as biological) or a mere *social construct* sets the stage for much of the debates about the moral and political merits of social identities and their relation to oppression and projects of liberation. If they are natural, then they are mind-independent parts of the physical world, and if they are not, then they are cultural artifacts. Most of the current work on these topics deals with the implications of social identities being cultural constructions, and what this means for their role in our lives (both descriptively and normatively). Phenomenology, however, draws our critical attention to the unquestioned commitment to the nature/culture divide (Husserlian phenomenology, for instance, effectively begins with a “bracketing” of the “natural attitude”). In calling to account this neat division between the natural and the cultural, we unsettle the standard landscape of these political debates in a profound way. This seminar will explore the implications of this phenomenological approach by engaging with recent texts examining questions of oppression, social identity, and liberation using the resources of the phenomenological tradition.

TEXTS:

Sara Ahmed - *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006)

Linda Alcoff - *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self* (Oxford University Press, 2005)

Helen Ngo – *The Habits of Racism: A Phenomenology of Racism and Racialized Embodiment* (Lexington Books, 2017)

Mariana Ortega – *In-Between: Latina Feminist Phenomenology, Multiplicity, and the Self* (SUNY Press, 2016)

Additional texts by Alia al-Saji, Sonia Kruks, Lewis Gordon, and George Yancy, among others.

REQUIREMENTS:

Students will be assessed on class participation (including weekly online written responses to the reading), one class presentation, and a final research paper (15-20 pages).

Seminar in Major Figures: Kant's Practical Philosophy

Tom Nenon, Ph.D.

Phil 7020/8020

Mondays, 5:35-8:35 pm, Clement 333

<History>

This course will provide an introduction to and critical analysis of Kant's major works in moral philosophy, namely the *Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals*, *Critique of Practical Reason*, and *Metaphysics of Morals*, along with selected passages from *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*.

The primary work in the class will center around close readings and critical discussion of these works against the background of a few key interpretive issues raised in the secondary literature on them.

Texts:

No specific translations will be required. The three main texts are collected together in one volume as Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, translated by Mary Gregory in the Cambridge Edition. You may use any translation (or German edition) you choose as long as it has the Akademie-Ausgabe pages listed in the margins so we can literally get on the same page.

Course Requirements:

Regular attendance and extensive reading. A mid-term and a final paper, with the paper weighted slightly more highly than the mid-term. One in-class presentation as part of a team that will lead the discussion for one half session sometime during the second half of the semester.

Studies in Ancient Philosophy: Ancient Greek and Roman Moral Psychology

PHIL 4211/6211

Tim Roche

Tuesday and Thursday 1:00-2:25

<History>

Course Description

The course involves the study of the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic theories in moral psychology. We examine, compare, and contrast their views on such topics as desire for good, moral motivation, pleasure and pain, weakness of will, moral reasoning, moral decision, moral responsibility, moral identity, moral action, moral character, moral evil, moral development, moral emotion, division (or lack of division) of the soul, psychological and ethical eudaimonism, and the natures of happiness and unhappiness.

Texts

TBD.

Course Requirements

Regular attendance and participation in class discussions, a midterm paper (or class presentation), and a final research paper.

Cognitive Science Seminar - Agents: Why should they act?

Alistair Windsor

PHIL 7/8514

Wednesday 2:20-5:20

Title: Agents: Why should they act?

Description: In the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI), anything that can perceive its environment and act on that environment is called an *agent* (Russell & Norvig, 2020). In this view, humans, most living organisms, autonomous vehicles, and thermostats are agents. A key question to understand for the design of agent models is -- why do living organisms act? In AI, there are two leading theories that strive to answer this question: (1) to maximize expected reward (a.k.a. reinforcement learning), which is the dominant view in AI, and (2) to minimize the brain's prediction error (a.k.a. predictive coding or free energy principle). A number of other theories have been extensively researched in the natural and applied sciences. In this Cognitive Science Seminar course, we will discuss papers and invite speakers from AI, robotics, psychology, neuroscience, biology, and philosophy to understand the influential theories spanning over a century of research regarding why living organisms act.

Note: The course does not count as a class that fulfills Philosophy core course requirements.