

Graduate Course Descriptions 2014-2015

AUTUMN QUARTER 2015

PHL 415: Aristotle and the Emergence of *Ousia*

SEAN D. KIRKLAND

Our concepts too have histories. Hidden away in their depths as they function to render our experience intelligible is the complex record of each given concept's historical development. If we do not strive to become aware of that potent history, if we presume that our own concepts are transparent and exhaustively present to our own intellects, then those concepts will exert their influence on our thought according to that long and complex history without our knowing it. In short, to fully understand a concept for us is impossible without understanding the history that has delivered it to us. Finally, the most vital moment in that prior but still effective historical development is often the moment of that concept's inception, its emergence and initial articulation, for that moment of emergence is usually subject to energetic contestation, contestation that a given thinker simultaneously confronts and overcomes through the inaugural articulation of the concept. This is the basic posture our class will assume with respect to the emergence of the concept *ousia*, 'substance' or more literally 'beingness,' as it is articulated and made central to the subsequent tradition in the works of Aristotle.

We will be take a 'phenomenological' approach, which means nothing terribly technical, abstruse, or mysterious. Indeed, it means simply that we will take Aristotle at his word, which is to say, as a practitioner of *dialektikê* and thus as a student of *endoxa*, these being understood as the ways a given subject matter will *dokein* or 'appear' to everyone, to most, or to the wise. Indeed, Aristotle's confidence in this philosophical method indicates that these are taken as always the appearances of *something*. In other words, there are no 'mere appearances,' and no quasi-Cartesian subject/object relation that brings with it the possibility of radical subjective deception or isolation from 'what is.' For Aristotle, the site of appearance is where we begin when we seek to understand our world, and this alone shows him to be a thinker of a (to us) unfamiliar stripe—a distinctly pre-modern thinker. As we read and attempt to think along with him, we will remind ourselves of this fact, and thus of the intellectual distance that both separates us from and (via the tradition we inherit) still binds us to Aristotle today. We will hope to avoid thereby the anachronism of those interpretations that presume to find Cartesian and post-Cartesian problems in Aristotelian philosophizing. To be sure, it is precisely by getting back to an original and emphatically ancient Aristotle that we will discover a thinker with some illuminating contributions to make to contemporary philosophical discussion.

As for the emergence of the concept of *ousia*, we will begin with Aristotle's earlier ontology in the *Categories* and then move to his later ontology in the *Metaphysics*. We will be asking, on the one hand, how does Aristotle define *ousia* in these texts and is he consistent over the course of his career? On the other hand, what is his justification or what evidence does he give for claiming a given definition of *ousia* to be true? Where and how does it appear to us so that we can say, with Aristotle, *this* is what we mean when we say '*ousia*.' We will proceed simply by reading these two texts from beginning to end.

PHL 522: SOCIAL/POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: HISTORY OF SOVEREIGNTY

KEVIN THOMPSON

This seminar is an examination of one of the central concepts in modern political philosophy: sovereignty. Its approach is both historical and systematic. It studies the modern origin and the central problems in the development of this concept and, in doing so, it explores the questions of the justification and nature of the sovereign authority of the state.

Sovereignty, at its core, is the supreme authority of the state to rule over its citizenry within a set of declared territorial boundaries. The concept initially took shape in sixteenth century European thought, principally in the work of Jean Bodin. Over the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, two issues propelled its development:

the question of its justification, whether it required appeal to some transcendent foundation or merely to society itself, and the question of its structure, that is, is it necessarily one or is it divisible.

The seminar is divided into four parts, the first three serving to set up the more focused study of the final section. Part I examines the historical roots of the concept of sovereignty in the work of Jean Bodin. Part II briefly reviews the absolutist tradition as it is embodied in the thought of Thomas Hobbes and Samuel Pufendorf and the mixed constitutionalist tradition as it was articulated by John Locke, Charles-Louis Montesquieu, and James Madison. Part III notes the decisive role that Jean-Jacques Rousseau played in this history. And Part IV concludes the seminar with an exploration of an important case study where both the justification and nature of sovereignty are at stake: the political theories of German Idealism in the work of Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and the early (unpublished) political commentary of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

PHL 557: Topics in Continental Philosophy: Freudian Legacies
ELIZABETH ROTTENBERG

Is there such a thing as an accident in psychoanalysis or does everything have psychical meaning? This seminar will begin by showing that there was always, from the very beginning, a radical thinking of the accident in Freud. We will begin with early Freud and his thinking of the accident in the late 1890's looking not at the erogenous body but at the traumatized body. We will turn, then, to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where, in the wake of World War I, we get a fully developed thinking of the accident (if we have time, we might even look at some 1915 texts on the war neuroses). We will look at how the notion of *Nachträglichkeit* is taken up by contemporary French psychoanalytic theory on the one hand (Lacan, Laplanche), and by continental philosophy on the other (Derrida, among others) and why, for example, someone like Catherine Malabou avoids it in her thinking of the "traumatic event." We will also spend some time on the anti-psychiatry movement in order to understand Michel Foucault's interesting but symptomatic disavowal of Freud and psychoanalysis in his work (we will look in particular at *Psychiatric Power* and *History of Sexuality I*).

PHL 629 Seminar on Contemporary Problems: Human Being, Animal Being, Plant Being
H. PETER STEEVES

This class is a phenomenological investigation into the assumed ontological distinctions drawn among different forms of life, especially human and animal, but also plant and animal. We will be looking at how life appears, doing a phenomenology, that is, of life. But in many respects, the course could be said to fall under the domain of philosophy of science—specifically, a philosophy of biology, as we will spend a good deal of time investigating the question of species classification and the nature of animal language (and animal consciousness) theories and experiments. Looking at a wide variety of texts, we will come to focus on a handful of core key questions that will help us get at what it means to be human, animal, and plant—what it means, that is, to be a living thing. (With, perhaps, one brief foray into the ontology of rocks, because, well, YOLO.)

WINTER QUARTER 2015

PHL 500: Special Topics in the History of Philosophy: Metaphysics in Scotus and Avicenna
RICK LEE

The idea of a science of being as such, being without qualification goes back to Aristotle. This science comes to be called "metaphysics." As a science, however, metaphysics is something that "happens" in the soul. Therefore, implicit in this characterization of metaphysics is a relation between soul and world. This relation led many later medieval thinkers to insist that metaphysics deals with the concept of being and not being itself. In this course, we will look at the arguments of Ibn Sina and Duns Scotus on the nature of metaphysics and the role of the concept in metaphysics and beyond.

PHL 525: Nietzsche
WILL MCNEILL

This course will offer an introduction to Nietzsche's thought. We will read selections from most of the major works, from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *Ecce Homo*. Themes covered will include: Nietzsche's overcoming of Platonism; the will to power; the eternal recurrence of the same; the death of God and European nihilism; history and genealogy. We will also look at some of Nietzsche's most influential interpreters from the continental tradition, including Heidegger, Deleuze, Foucault, and Klossowski.

PHL590: TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH PHILOSOPHY: Badiou and Laruelle, Ontology and Politics
BILL MARTIN

This course will mostly be about Badiou, in that the Laruelle material we will read is a critique of Badiou. Thematically, the course will be in five parts: 1) What is Badiou doing with mathematics, and what *can* he do? 2) How does this allow Badiou to formulate a "post-Maoist communist" conception of the "condition" of politics? 3) How is it that a mathematical (set-theoretical) conception of the conditions of philosophy can also be called a "materialist" conception? 4) Laruelle's *Anti-Badiou*, in which Laruelle criticizes "the introduction of Maoism into philosophy." 5) Possibilities of a Badiouean, "classical" (or "neo-classical") and "formalist" response to Laruelle's "non-philosophy."

The Badiou material will be taken from several sources: *Being and Event*, *Number and numbers*, *Metapolitics*, *Theoretical Writings*, *The Adventure of French Philosophy*, and *Logics of Worlds*.

We will probably read Francois Laruelle's *Anti-Badiou* in its entirety, and we will read an additional essay on the idea of "non-philosophy."

We will also use some material from Bruno Bosteels' *Badiou and Politics*.

PHL 656 (WQ) & PHL 657 (SQ) JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU: THE SUBJECT OF POLITICS
PEG BIRMINGHAM

This graduate course (which will continue through spring quarter) will examine several works of Rousseau's including *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, *On the Origin of Language*, *Emile*, *The Social Contract*, in an attempt to grasp Rousseau's understanding of the subject of politics in the double sense of the nature of the political and the nature of the political subject. Most generally, the course will trace Rousseau's analysis of desire as it moves from the *amour-de-soi* to the *amour-propre*. Understanding this movement of desire is central to understanding Rousseau's political project generally and his understanding of the political subject specifically, insofar as it is his claim that the perversion of the *amour-propre* underlies all political and social disorder, leading to the corruption of both the individual and the society. In other words, it is the perversion of desire—at both the level of politics and of the individual—that for Rousseau has the potentiality to give way to the most horrible states of violence. Indeed, Rousseau argues that Hobbes begins with a notion of a perverted notion of desire and builds a political philosophy on it. Against Hobbes, Rousseau claims the possibility of recovering a non-perverse *amour-propre*—a recovery through the art of politics of what was once by nature. Through the lens of Rousseau's understanding of the play of desire and recognition, we will examine the perennial political questions of sovereignty, law, language, democracy with its twin claims of liberty and equality, and the nation-state.

SPRING QUARTER 2015

PHL 470: LATER PHILOSOPHY OF LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN
PATRICIA WERHANE

One of the seminal thinkers in Anglo-American philosophy of the 20th century was the Austrian-British philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein started his philosophical career as a logician. But it is his later work, exemplified in his book, *Philosophical Investigations*, that is most commonly cited. In that work he criticizes most of traditional Anglo-American philosophy including his earlier writings in logic. His non-systemic approach to philosophical problems and his preoccupation with the centrality of language in human thinking and philosophical arguments are ideas for which he is best known. In this seminar we will focus on this later work and the innumerable secondary sources on his thinking. We will also take time to compare his thinking to some important thinkers in continental philosophy.

PHL 589: PHILOSOPHY, LITERATURE, COMMUNITY: Narratives on Community: Nancy, Esposito and Agamben
MARÍA DEL ROSARIO ACOSTA LÓPEZ

In this seminar, we will explore the different ways in which a certain trend in contemporary political philosophy—the so called “impolitical” or “inoperative” communitarianisms, represented mainly by J.L. Nancy, R. Esposito and G. Agamben—has attempted to rehabilitate the question of community as a central question for re-thinking the political today. We will study how, for these authors, “community” must be thought anew in the light of a critical revision of the Western philosophical tradition and its metaphysical categories. According to these authors, such categories permeate the way we conceive and define the political today. Moreover, the persistence of these categories in our political thinking leads ultimately to a totalitarian practice of the political which has not only pervaded the experience of totalitarianisms in the XXth century but also grounds our current conceptions of democracy. We will read in detail Jean-Luc Nancy’s *The Inoperative Community*, Roberto Esposito’s *Communitas* and (if time permits) Giorgio Agamben’s *The Coming Community*, along with a selection of chapters and papers published more recently by each of them. Participants will be asked to reflect on the appeal in these texts for a rehabilitation of community as an interruption of what they describe as the “violence” of metaphysical Modern Western thought. We will also explore the limits and possibilities involved both in this way of reading the history of (political) philosophy and in the attempt to point to a “way out” of this history through an ontological rethinking of community.

PHL640 PROBLEMS IN ETHICS: Towards an Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature
ELIZABETH MILLÁN

In the seminar we will focus on the sublime and the idea of freedom that informs the work of Alexander von Humboldt (*Views of Nature*, 1807), Schiller (*On the Sublime*, 1801), Goethe, Schlegel and Novalis (selections to be determined). In particular, we will look at how these thinkers present nature. Our approach will be framed by some insights on natural beauty that Adorno articulates in his final work, *Aesthetic Theory* (written 1961-69). For each of these thinkers, a scientific understanding of nature is only half the story of nature’s meaning; for the whole story to emerge, we must step aside from mastery of nature, and learn to appreciate nature. Appreciation takes us to the realm of the aesthetic.