

**GRADUATE SEMINAR DESCRIPTIONS  
2024-2025**

**AUTUMN QUARTER**

**PHL 410: Plato I [H-I]**

**The Ends of Democracy: From Plato's *Republic* to Derrida's *Rogues***

**Michael Naas  
Mondays, 3:00-6:15**

We will spend the first six or seven weeks of the seminar reading Plato's *Republic* as closely as we possibly can given the constraints of time. We will look at everything from the three definitions of justice in Book I to the construction of the city of speech in Book II and the education of the guardians, with its restrictions on poetry, in Book III and the provisional summary of the four virtues in Book IV. We will consider, albeit rapidly, the three waves of paradox in Book V, the divided line of Book VI, and the cave allegory along with the educational curriculum of the guardians of the *kallipolis* in Book VII. We will then turn to Socrates' account in Books VIII and IX of the degeneration of the ideal or aristocratic state (and individual soul) into timocracy, plutocracy, democracy, and, finally, tyranny. This will take us to the second or third week in October, at which point we will all be wondering whether Plato's account of democracy (and tyranny) has anything to teach us about our own political situation in the US. We will thus turn, for the next two to three weeks—including the class right before election day—to Derrida's reading of Plato in *Rogues* and his more general argument in that work regarding the "autoimmunity" of democracy and what he continued to call in 2002 "the democracy to come." What we do in the very final class, on November 11 (continue with Derrida's *Rogues*? return to the *Republic* for the myth of Er in Book X? join the protests in the streets?) remains, for the moment, radically undetermined.

**PHL 550: Heidegger [CE]**

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

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

This course will offer a selective reading of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, his magnum opus that was published in 1927 and instantly became the most influential text of twentieth century European philosophy. *Being and Time* presents Heidegger's hermeneutic inflection and appropriation of Husserlian phenomenology, taking up the radical potential of phenomenological seeing and transforming it in a strikingly original way. Heidegger's hermeneutic inflection not only transforms phenomenology, but challenges the very foundations of the entire history of philosophy since its Greek beginnings. In this course we shall try to read most of Division I of *Being and Time* and a few key sections from Division II. We shall do so with particular attention to methodological issues.

**PHL 515: Hegel I [H-II]**

**The Science of Logic I**

**Kevin Thompson  
Tuesdays, 3:00-6:15**

This is a two-quarter course that examines the central issues and ideas of Hegel's *Science of Logic* [1812/13, 1816]. In this work, Hegel presents the fundamental categories and structures of a post-critical metaphysics. Accordingly, we will explore the major topics of the work—being, essence, and concept—through a close reading of the text, with an underlying concern to set out and evaluate its overarching argumentative structure.

In the Autumn Quarter, we will read the Objective Logic: The Doctrine of Being and the Doctrine of Essence.

## WINTER QUARTER

### **PHL 400: Special Topics in Traditional Philosophers [H-I] Plato and the Feminists**

**Tuhin Bhattacharjee**  
**Wednesdays, 3:00-6:15**

In this seminar, we will study how feminist philosophy in the continental tradition has responded to the legacy of the Platonic dialogues, especially the *Republic* and the *Symposium*. We will read feminist texts that foreground the politics of sexual difference often buried and silenced in more traditional readings of Plato.

The importance of Plato for feminist scholarship and the study of sexuality is evident even if we focus just on a single year. In 1983, Julia Kristeva published *Tales of Love*, a psychoanalytic genealogy of love in the Western tradition, starting with Plato's *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. It was at the same time that Michel Foucault was completing the final draft of his *The History of Sexuality* (Volume 2), where he examined the politics of love in the *Symposium* and other ancient Greek texts. That same year, Luce Irigaray's analysis of the *Symposium* appeared in her book *The Ethics of Sexual Difference*. Each of these works were responding not only to each other but also to Jacques Lacan's seminar on psychoanalytic transference from more than twenty years earlier, which featured his reading of the *Symposium*.

Besides the *Symposium*, the cave allegory from the *Republic* has also been the subject of intense scrutiny by feminist philosophers. Luce Irigaray, for instance, in her astonishingly original reading of the allegory, argues that the maternal cave/womb/*hysterā* is relegated to a constitutive outside that nourishes and sustains the grounding of the masculine/phallic subject, without ever becoming a subject herself. As the material outside that guarantees the systematicity and organization of paternal law, the feminine is itself rendered invisible, even unthinkable.

Is the feminine then irrevocably lost in this exchange? Or can these ancient texts offer alternative articulations of the feminine that are otherwise than its phallogocentric appropriations? While investigating how Platonic philosophy is unsettled by feminist readings, our seminar will also consider how the Platonic texts themselves might displace and complicate the grounding principles of Western metaphysics—its categories, its dichotomic, hierarchical logic. This course will thus address Plato's profound dialogue with feminist and psychoanalytic investigations of power, politics, and sexual difference. Readings may include texts by Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan, Adriana Cavarero, and Judith Butler, among others. We shall also be reading selected passages from the Platonic dialogues. Some familiarity with the *Republic* and the *Symposium* is recommended but not required.

### **PHL 557: Topics in Continental Philosophy [CE] Three Faces of Freud: Jokes, Philosophy, Politics**

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

This course is meant to serve as a general introduction to the work of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and—hopefully—offer a little something for everyone (jokes, philosophy, politics). We will read three important and differently influential texts in the Freudian corpus, each of which is “canonical” in its own way. We will begin with what is definitely Freud's funniest book—namely, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). This book remains, according to Lacan, along with *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, one of the “three books that one might call canonical with regard to the unconscious” (*Écrits*). We will focus on Jewish jokes, hostile jokes, and the jokes of Heinrich Heine (among other things). We will then read two texts that were written in the immediate aftermath of World War I: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921). *Beyond* is certainly no joke; it is the most philosophical of Freud's texts: “Of all the writings of Freud,” writes Deleuze, “the masterpiece which we know as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is perhaps the one where he engaged most directly—and how penetratingly—in specifically philosophical reflection” (“Coldness and Cruelty”). Here we will look at how *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action, belatedness), repetition compulsion, and the death drive have been taken up by contemporary French psychoanalytic theory (Lacan, Laplanche) and continental philosophy (Deleuze, Derrida). Finally, given that 2024-2025 will be an election year, we will turn to the most political of Freud's texts, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. With Adorno, we will ask what it means for a “superego” to become the gathering place for the death drives, and for cruelty to align itself with the “herd instinct” (*Herdentrieb*).

**PHL 657: Topics on Social and Political Thought [NP]  
Sovereignty, Power, Violence: Benjamin and Schmitt**

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

This course will examine the concepts of sovereignty, power, and violence in the respective works of Benjamin and Schmitt by focusing on the written dialogue between them spanning from 1921-1940. The written dialogue begins with Benjamin's 1921 essay, "Critique of Violence" published in *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaften und Sozialpolitik* (Vol 47). In response, Schmitt publishes *Political Theology* in 1922 and in 1927 publishes *The Concept of the Political*, the latter publication in the same journal in which Benjamin published "Critique of Violence." In 1928, Benjamin responds to Schmitt in *Origin of the German Tauerenspiel*, in which he cites *Political Theology* in the context of Baroque sovereignty. Benjamin's essay, "The Concept of History" written in 1940 and published posthumously is also an implicit response to Schmitt's notion of sovereignty. Focusing on this written dialogue not only allows for a sharper understanding of how these three concepts are at work in each thinker but also how their engagement shapes the other's thinking. What is it about Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" that prompts Schmitt to write *Political Theology* in response? And how does Benjamin's engagement with Schmitt change his thinking on sovereign power and violence from the early to the later work?

**PHL 516: Hegel II [H-II]  
The Science of Logic II**

**Kevin Thompson  
Tuesdays, 3:00-6:15**

This is a continuation of the two-quarter course that examines the central issues and ideas of Hegel's *Science of Logic*. In the Winter Quarter, we will read the Subjective Logic: The Doctrine of the Concept.

## SPRING QUARTER

### PHL 601: Seminar on Aesthetics [NP]

#### Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art: From Henri Bergson to Michel Henry

Frédéric Seyler  
Wednesdays, 3:00-6:15

The purpose of this seminar is to deepen our understanding of the connection between aesthetics and life by putting into dialogue Bergson's philosophy of life and Michel Henry's phenomenology of life. We will start with Bergson's approach concerning the function of the work of art in the middle section of *Laughter* and then relate this approach to the Bergsonian concepts of intuition and life as *élan vital*. If art and aesthetic contemplation have the power to reveal reality as singular, one will have to ask if language (which is general by nature) can fulfill such a task. In other words, this will lead us to the question: how is poetic language possible? By contrast, this raises an additional question concerning the role of philosophical language: despite their obvious differences with poetic language, do philosophical texts have an aesthetic function? At first glance, Bergson seems to thematize such a difference when evoking two different methods of literary composition (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*). However, recent publications suggest that Bergson's writing is itself modelled according to his concept of intuition and the requirements pertaining to poetic language (B. Clément, *Henri Bergson, Prix Nobel de littérature*, 2021). We will then turn to the question of art and aesthetics in Michel Henry. Henry, himself a laureate of the Prix Renaudot, develops a phenomenological aesthetics according to which art and sensibility are, as we will see, an intensification of life (and, thus, provides a grounding in phenomenology for Nietzsche's concept of "will to power"). We will first turn to Henry's discovery of phenomenological life as fundamental mode of appearing, i.e., as power to reveal through immanent and affective experience or *épreuve*. In order to understand his thesis on the function of art, we will study his writings on Kandinsky, who, both as an art theorist and as an artist, has exerted a major influence on Henry's aesthetics (*Seeing the Invisible. On Kandinsky*, as well as a variety of articles, a good portion of them being available in their English translation). Like in the first part of our seminar, a particular attention will be given to the role of language and its revealing power in art, but also in phenomenology (for instance, through Henry's articles "Material Phenomenology and Language" or "Narrer le pathos").

### PHL 525: Nietzsche [H-II]

#### Nihilism, Will to Power, and the *Übermensch*

Sean D. Kirkland  
Thursdays, 3:00-6:15

In this seminar, I propose to explore some new territory together. In my previous work on this figure, given my background in the study of antiquity, just as the young Nietzsche himself, I have gravitated primarily toward the early period—the *Birth of Tragedy* through to the *Unfashionable Observations* (1869-1876). In the spring, I propose that we begin in the first session with a look at Nietzsche's theorization of his late-modern historical moment and its Greek inheritance (Socratism/scientism and the death of the tragic, primarily), but then we will move immediately to Nietzsche's late period, and indeed to his thoroughly planned and sketched, but never completed, volume, which he sometimes referred to under the title *The Will to Power*. We will look at the genesis of this dubious and much-maligned collection of aphorisms, including its editing and the involvement of his notoriously antisemitic sister, Elizabeth Förster-Nietzsche, taking seriously the criticisms of the collection as a whole. But we will then focus on these three concepts central to that collection of fragments—Nihilism (as the problem of historicism and thinking as historically determined, in his specific late-modern European historical moment), Will to Power (as, at least in some moments, Nietzsche's attempt at an ontology), and the *Übermensch* (the non-concept that Nietzsche hopes might ground, as an ungrounding force, the perpetual revaluation of values, i.e. the creation and holding of values in a new way). We will make a number of forays into the published texts of this period, *Gay Science*, *Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *Genealogy of Morals*, etc., but the *Will to Power* volume (as translated by Kaufman) will be our main point of discussion.

**PHL 656: Seminar on Social and Political Thought [NP]  
The Ethics of Liberation**

**Rafael Vizcaino  
Tuesdays, 3:00-6:15**

This course will be a careful reading of Enrique Dussel's *Ethics of Liberation in the Age of Globalization and Exclusion*. The *Ethics* is perhaps Dussel's boldest book as well as his most systematically rigorous. An instant classic of contemporary Latin American philosophy, our study of it is interested in asking what it means to place the praxis of liberation at the center of ethical inquiry. Students generally interested in ethics and the history of philosophy could also take this course as a survey of modern ethics, as a substantial portion of this text is an overview and assessment of the work of major ethical thinkers, such as Kant, Rawls, Habermas, Putnam, Luhmann, Hinkelammert, Marx, Adorno, Levinas, Freire, Bloch, and many more. Of course, we will follow Dussel by embarking on such an overview from the perspective of epistemic decolonization, in order to figure out what may be best to leave behind and what may be worthwhile subsuming in the interest of developing a critically decolonial ethics with universal validity worthy of our time.