

**GRADUATE SEMINAR DESCRIPTIONS
2023-2024**

AUTUMN QUARTER

PHL 411: Plato II [H-I]

Plato's Frenemies II: Rhetoric, Writing, and Poetry from the *Phaedrus* to the *Pharmacy*

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

This seminar will be a continuation of the exploration we began last spring of "Plato's Frenemies." It is not at all necessary, however, to have taken last year's seminar in order to take this one. Whereas we looked last year at Plato's critique and subsequent appropriation of poetry in the *Ion*, *Republic*, and *Laws*, and his critique of rhetoric in the *Gorgias*, we will turn in this quarter's seminar to Plato's critique of writing and rhetoric in the *Menexenus* and the *Phaedrus*. Our reading of this latter will be guided by Jacques Derrida's now classic essay of 1968, "Plato's Pharmacy," a work that begins by looking at Plato's critique of writing in the *Phaedrus* but that goes on to offer a reading of Plato's dialogues more generally.

Our working hypothesis this quarter, like last, will be that in the dialogues of Plato philosophy not only defends itself against the discourses of rhetoric and writing (in the form of, for example, speechwriting), but also actually defines itself in opposition to them, often using the very terms of rhetoric and writing in order to distinguish itself from these other discourses. We will thus see Plato in the *Menexenus* and the *Phaedrus* distinguishing philosophy from rhetoric, and speech from writing, only in order then to reform, remark, and reinscribe these latter within a philosophical register of language where, for example, the "writing in the soul" brought about through philosophy becomes the only true form of writing and philosophy becomes the only true form of rhetoric. We will thus conclude that rhetoric and writing present at once two of the greatest threats to Plato's philosophical ambitions and two of the greatest opportunities for them.

PHL 415: Aristotle I [H-I]

Aristotle: On Why Natural Beings Perish

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

In this seminar, we will begin by reading selections from the *Categories*, *Physics*, and *Metaphysics*, in order to acquaint ourselves with the fundamentals of the most influential ontological theory in the Western philosophical tradition: Aristotelian substance ontology. After spending a few weeks with Aristotle's notion of οὐσία or 'substance, being-ness,' we will then turn to the question of why a certain kind of substance, namely φυσικά or 'natural, living, material beings,' ceases to exist, in the *Metaphysics* and in *On Generation and Corruption*. We will ask, if natural beings are constituted as a soul joined to a material body that is maximally suited to live the life of that being, why would they by nature and inevitably cease to exist? I will introduce a concept here that I have termed "ontological weariness," which we can locate in the Aristotelian text with some close interpretive work. We will spend the last couple weeks thinking about the implications of this metaphysical finitude for Aristotle's thinking of one particular φυσικόν, the ζῷον λόγον ἔχον or 'the animal with *logos*,' i.e., the human being, in his *Ethics* and *Politics*.

PHL 559: Foucault [CE]
Foucault: On Method I

Kevin Thompson
Thursdays, 3:00-6:15

This seminar is an examination of Foucault's distinctive historical method. All of Foucault's major works are undoubtedly histories, but they are all just as undoubtedly unconventional histories. What makes them unique is their object of investigation. They seek to uncover a stratum of experience that eludes those concerned solely with what has been said, what has been done, and what has been endured, the collection of arbitrary facts we typically call human history. Foucault designated the stratum that he sought to explicate with a variety of terms or phrases throughout his career: the concrete a priori, the epistème, the historical a priori, the dispositif (deployment, apparatus), the form of problematization, and the game of truth. Yet he consistently defined it as the historically changing requirements that forms of knowledge and ways of acting had to fulfill in order to be counted as valid instances of knowing and acting and that the objects and events involved in these modes of knowledge and action had to meet in order to be counted as existing entities and occurrences at all. In this sense, what Foucault's historical studies tracked were the necessary structures by virtue of which thinking, doing, and being become possible. In a word, then, the rules that Foucault sought were transcendental.

But to say that a set of structures is transcendental has traditionally meant that the conditions in question are not only necessary, but universal and timeless as well. Foucault's coupling of the terms 'a priori' and 'historical' thus appears to render his central methodological concept self-contradictory. How, then, can a set of conditions be at once the boundaries of acceptability for what is knowable and doable and yet be mutable? That is to say, how can they be at once transcendental and historical and how can they be grasped as such?

The seminar will explore this fundamental problematic and the central questions of historiography that it raises. In the Autumn Quarter, we will read Foucault's principal methodological statements from his published corpus.

WINTER QUARTER

PHL 400: Special Topics in Traditional Philosophers [H-I or H-II] **Francisco Suárez**

Rick Lee
Tuesdays, 3:00-6:15

Suárez (1548-1617) was a towering figure in a movement that can be called neo-Scholasticism. His *Disputationes Metaphysicae* not only gathered together the contributions of medieval thinkers but pushed beyond them in ways that fundamentally altered the philosophical terrain. His work had a tremendous influence on his contemporaries and subsequent generations. This influence includes the Jesuits at La Flèche, where Descartes was a student. It is impossible to fully understand modern philosophers like Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz without understanding the contributions of Suárez. In this course we will read selections from the *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, including questions concerning the subject matter of metaphysics, causation, the existence of God, and the various modes of “being.”

PHL 500: Special Topics in the History of Philosophy [CE] **Heidegger: Introduction to Philosophy**

Will McNeill
Fridays, 10:00-1:30 (online)

This graduate seminar offers a close study of Part Two of Martin Heidegger’s 1928-1929 lecture course titled *Introduction to Philosophy (Einleitung in die Philosophie)*. This remarkable and highly influential lecture course was attended by such prominent figures of twentieth century philosophy as Emmanuel Levinas, Eugen Fink, and Jean Wahl, all of whom appropriated and further developed key themes from Heidegger’s course. We shall examine Part Two of the course, which deals with the over-arching theme of the relation between philosophy and Weltanschauung. Topics include: Weltanschauung and the concept of world; Kant’s concept of world; being-in-the-world and transcendence; the transcendental play of world; Weltanschauung and mythic Dasein; philosophy as a distinctive and exceptional Weltanschauung. Heidegger’s *Introduction to Philosophy* proceeds not simply as a lecture course *about* philosophy, but as an initiation into philosophical thinking through the practice of philosophizing. We learn what philosophy is by learning to philosophize. Although the English translation of this lecture course will not be published until April 2024, an advance copy of the translation will be made available to students taking the seminar. This course will be online synchronous.

PHL 590: Trends in Contemporary French Philosophy [CE] **Foucault: On Method II**

Kevin Thompson
Thursdays, 3:00-6:15

In the Winter Quarter, the seminar will examine Foucault’s distinctive methodology in action through a close reading in tandem of two of his major works: *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [1966] and *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975]. Foucault indicates very clearly that these works seek to demonstrate that the history of the human sciences and the history of penal law derive from a ‘common matrix’: man. In the opening of the nineteenth century in Europe, man is invented, Foucault argues, as, at once, the ultimate object of knowledge and of punishment and as the authoritative subject of both as well, which is to say, man was born here as the final standard and purveyor of truth. This reading will thus bear out the fruits of Foucault’s historiography and also allow us to grapple concretely with the central question of this discipline: what does it mean to do history for Foucault?

PHL 601: Seminar on Aesthetics [NP]

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

Frédéric Seyler
Mondays, 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 661: Topics in Feminist Theory [NP]

The Body in Feminist Thought

Tuhin Bhattacharjee
Wednesdays, 3:00-6:15

This seminar examines the ways in which feminist philosophy not only enables us to see the world differently but also transforms the modalities of our being in the world. What is it about feminism that helps us make sense of our desires, fantasies, and bodily comportment towards things? How are phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and queer theory enfolded into a feminist reading of texts? How are bodies fashioned by institutions such as the family, the school, the prison, medical discourse, and their entanglements in capital and spectacle? How have feminist voices from the margins challenged hegemonic understandings of the raced and sexed nature of embodiment? In investigating these questions, this seminar will argue that feminism offers us a radical critique of our situatedness in the world and reorients our relationship to other bodily beings. Authors we may discuss include Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Laura Mulvey, Iris Young, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, Anne Fausto-Sterling, Gayle Salamon, and Saidiya Hartman.

SPRING QUARTER

PHL 511: Kant II [H-I]

Critique of the Power of Judgment

Avery Goldman
Tuesdays, 3:00-6:15

In this class we will be undertaking a close reading of (almost) all of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. We will be guided by three questions: the first is the obvious one; what is Kant claiming about beauty, sublimity, biology, and teleological inquiry more generally? The second follows from these inquiries; how are these topics connected, and so how does Kant's account of reflection, as an inductive form of judgment, hold the disparate halves of the book together? This is a question that will lead us to investigate what Kant describes as the regulative principle of "purposiveness [*Zweckmäßigkeit*]" that all such disparate reflection requires. And finally, how does this account of reflection relate to the rest of Kant's transcendental system, filling a "gap [*Lücke*]" in the account of the cognitive faculties, as he writes in the first introduction to the book?

PHL 535: Husserl I [CE]

Phenomenology as Critique – Historicity, Normativity, Teleology and Husserl's Personalist Ethics of Renewal

Smaranda Aldea
Mondays, 3:00-6:15

The seminar will trace the development of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology by paying close attention to the different types of reductions as well as the methods of eidetic variation and self-variation in texts such as the *Logical Investigations*, *Ideas I* (Husserliana III/1), *First Philosophy* (Husserliana VII-VIII), *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (Husserliana XVII), *Phenomenological Psychology* (Husserliana IX), *Experience and Judgment*, *Cartesian Meditations* (Husserliana I), and *Zur Lehre vom Wesen und zur Methode der Eidetischen Variation* (Husserliana XLI). We will likewise closely examine his late generative and historical methods of *radikale Besinnung* (radical reflection) and *radikale Selbstbesinnung* (radical self-reflection) in the *Formal and Transcendental Logic* (Husserliana XVII) and the *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Husserliana VI). In so doing, we will focus on historicity, normativity, and teleology understood as core structures of experience coupled with a close investigation of Husserl's synthetic-genetic and generative concepts of passivity (in his *Analyses of Passive Synthesis*: Husserliana XI and *Ideas II*: Husserliana IV), communalization, sedimentation, sense-formation (*Sinnbildung*), and sense-institution (*Sinnstiftung*) in research manuscripts such as *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität* (Husserliana XIII-XV), *Grenzprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Husserliana XLII), and *Studien zur Struktur des Bewusstseins* (Husserliana XLIII-XLV) as well as the *Crisis*.

We will ask how these complex, decades-long analyses informed the development of Husserl's transcendental methods, especially his late method of historical reflection (*Besinnung*), which nevertheless retained its central transcendental-eidetic commitments. In closing, we will consider whether, and if so, how Husserl's development of his personalist ethics of renewal in the *Kaizo Articles* (Husserliana XXVII) and in his lectures on ethics, namely, his *Vorlesungen über Ethik und Wertlehre* (Husserliana XXVIII) and *Einleitung in die Ethik* (Husserliana XXXVII), informed the development of his late historical-critical method of radical reflection understood as a distinctive kind of responsible, generational, and self-justifying critique. Time-permitting, we will engage, toward the end of the seminar, current debates in critical and political phenomenology that seek to challenge and/or further develop these Husserlian methods of investigation. The seminar will provide a rigorous foundation for those who wish to delve deeper into these contemporary debates.

Note on texts, reading approach, and scholarly literature: students will need to secure the *Ideas I* (Dahlstrom translation), *Cartesian Meditations*, and *Crisis* English translations. All other Husserl texts will be provided in PDF format in both English and German (German for all excerpts, English translation if available). The German version for key sections of *Ideas I*, *Cartesian Meditations*, and the *Crisis* will likewise be provided. Our approach will involve a close reading and intensive discussion, so text excerpts will not be very long but rather laser-focused on the issue at hand. Each student will likewise give a presentation on both an assigned Husserl passage and on a

relevant journal article or book chapter they hope to engage in their final paper argument.

**PHL 557: Topics in Continental Philosophy [CE]
Gadamer's *Truth and Method***

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

Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) opens his 1960 *Truth and Method*, with lines from the poet Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1929), “[s]olang du Selbstgeworfenes fängst, ist alles/Geschicklichkeit und lässlicher Gewinn—;/erst wenn du plötzlich Fänger wirst des Balles,/den eine ewige Mitspielerin/dir zuwarf, deinen Mitte, in genau/gekonntem Schwung, in einem jener Bögen/aus Gottes grossem Brückenbau:/erst dann ist Fangen-können ein Vermögen,-/nicht dines, einer Welt.”

Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is/mere skill and little gain;/but when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball/thrown by an eternal partner/with accurate and measured swing/towards you, to your center, in an arch/from the great bridgebuilding of God:/why catching then becomes a power--/not yours, a world's.

In these lines we find many key elements of hermeneutics that Gadamer will spend great time and energy analyzing in the pages that follow. We see at once Gadamer's allergy to subjectivization; his concern with a dialectic, and the central place of history and the horizon of history in which we humans find ourselves. Coming to an understanding is one of life's most important tasks, and we will discuss what this task involves. Given the current re-reading of certain aspects of our constitution, understanding what it means to understand a text has never been more important. Our focus will be on Gadamer's text, and it is my hope that you will use your new hermeneutical skills to look more critically at some of the texts that shape our society.

We will read through the entirety of *Truth and Method* in its English translation. If you can read German, I encourage you to bring the German original to class, as I will refer to the German at times when the translation into English makes a more careful look at the German necessary.

We will analyze and discuss the main parts of Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics and the historical context of Gadamer's approach.

**PHL 629: Seminar on Contemporary Problems [NP]
Hannah Arendt's Concept of the Political**

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

This course will focus on Hannah Arendt's concept of the political. We will begin with Arendt's *Life of the Mind, Thinking*, her last work in which she gives her most developed account of her phenomenology of appearance or better, her phenomenology of life, which at once extends her account of appearance in the *Human Condition* and clarifies her account of both the *life* of action (*vita activa*) and the *life* of thinking. The seminar will then turn to *The Human Condition*, which I will argue harbors no nostalgia for the Greek concept of the political, let alone seeks its recovery, but instead is a critical diagnosis of the modern age which, she argues, ends with the dropping of two nuclear bombs on two heavily populated Japanese cities. (She claims that our present conjunction does not yet have a name.) The seminar will conclude with a close reading of *On Revolution*. Written five years after HC, Arendt begins *On Revolution* with her critical diagnosis given at the conclusion of the earlier text: action's capacity for new beginnings has turned deadly and the plurality of worlds on a common earth now stand under the threat of total annihilation. Not even Hobbes, likening the war of all against all to storm clouds on the horizon, could have imagined the catastrophic end of all life on earth. Facing up to this threat, Arendt turns to modern revolutions to examine the resources they might provide for a new concept of the political, no longer Greek or Roman, but instead, emerging from the modern age itself. In the seminar's reading of *On Revolution*, we will focus on Arendt's controversial distinction between the social and the political, the role of violence in her concept of the political, and her critique of the political-theological which for her is implicitly tied to a notion of sovereign political authority. Implicitly agreeing with critiques of secularism as a hegemonic European project (for example, Talad Asad and

William Connelley), Arendt develops by contrast a notion of “secularization” that animates her concept of the political.