

Spring 2011 - CAS Department of Philosophy Graduate Courses

<http://www.philosophy.buffalo.edu/courses>

PHI 531 PROBLEMS IN ONTOLOGY: BASIC FORMAL ONTOLOGY - Prof. Dipert

Tu/Th 11:00-12:20 pm Park 141 [415614](#)

This will be a graduate-level, introductory survey of contemporary ontology. Ontology is the theory of what basic kinds of things exist, and what relationships these kinds have to each other. The notion of a “thing” (entity) is very broad – roughly, whatever we need to suppose exists in order for most sentences we hold to be true to be literally true. One major proposed distinction is between abstract and concrete entities. Conjectured abstract entities include numbers, properties, sets, properties, and natural laws. Among the concrete, physical entities (that nevertheless aren’t material) are events, shadows, holes, surfaces, volumes, locations, and tropes – they *are* in space and/or time. Then there are good old ordinary physical objects like people’s bodies, tables, rocks, and so on. But even some of them aren’t that ordinary: artifacts like tables have purposes (rocks don’t), and peoples’ bodies are organisms, with parts such as the heart that have functions. In the first third of the course we will be reading a broad survey, such as E.J. Lowe’s *Survey of Metaphysics*. In the second third of the course we will read contemporary articles on identity and composition, and on “unusual” entities such as shadows, holes, artifacts, truthmakers, and events. In the last third of the course we will study a product of Buffalo’s own Department, the Basic Formal Ontology (BFO), and its motivations – including criticisms of it and alternative proposals. This will include reading on what a *formal* ontology is, and the role that mereology plays in an ontology of concrete entities.

PHI 556 EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY BEFORE KANT: FROM HOBBES TO ROUSSEAU - Prof. Lawler

TH 13:00-15:00 pm Park 141 [032199](#)

The course examines the early modern philosophies before Kant in two parts: the British philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Adam Smith, and the Continental orientation of Descartes, Leibniz, and Rousseau. The key to the interpretation of this history is provided by remarks of Kant regarding the previous conflicts of empiricism and rationalism in philosophical methodology, and materialism and spiritualism in metaphysics. For Kant it was above all important to recognize in the conflicting and interweaving evolution of the preceding philosophies the emergence of a critical morality and a non-sectarian and non-dogmatic spirituality in harmony with the new sciences.

The primary theme of the metaphysics of matter and spirit is integrated with its implications for epistemology and methodology of science, for moral, social, and political philosophy, and for the philosophy of religion. Comprehensive views of the philosophers are organized and compared within the framework of the battle between opposing metaphysical options, which

are seen to permeate the philosophers' thinking on all subjects. Thus while the matter-based orientation stresses individualism and culminates in the free-market orientation of Adam Smith, the spirit-based orientation stresses the values of communication and sharing in Descartes' agenda for a science-based ethics and culminates in Rousseau's call for an authentic social contract based on the general will.

When contemporary philosophers describe their standpoint as "post-modern" they presuppose a concept of modernity. The modernity of modern philosophy is explained first of all in relation to the new revolutions in the sciences of the seventeenth century, beginning with the heliocentric astronomy of Copernicus and the new physics of Galileo. Hence Kant describes his own goal as consisting in a Copernican revolution in philosophy. The modern philosophers of both British and Continental streams ponder the revolutionary implications of the new sciences in relation to the traditional philosophy of Greek and Roman antiquity and the European middle ages. The course therefore begins with an outline of this traditional philosophy, represented especially by the philosophy of Aristotle, as background for highlighting the originality of the modern perspectives.

The textbook is James Lawler, *Matter and Spirit: The Battle of Metaphysics in Modern Western Philosophy before Kant*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006.

PHI 564 ARISTOTLE - [Prof. Yu](#)

T 15:00-17:00 pm Park 141 [351195](#)

The objective of this seminar is to acquire a critical understanding of Aristotle's Metaphysics. We will read the key sections of the Metaphysics and other treatises which are essential for our grasp of Aristotle's theory of being and substance. I will begin with an introduction to Aristotle's works and Aristotelian studies, and then cover the following major topics. The Nature of Metaphysics (Metaphysics I. 1-2, II. 1, III.1); Category and Being (Categories 1-5; Topics I, 9; Metaphysics V. 7), Being qua being and Substance (Metaphysics Metaphysics IV, 1-2; VII. 1-2, 3), Substance, Essence, and Form (Metaphysics VII. 3-16); Change, Cause, Nature (Metaphysics VII. 17, Physics I-II); Potentiality and Actuality (Metaphysics VIII, IX), Theology (Metaphysics XII 6-10), and the unity of Aristotle's metaphysical project (Metaphysics vi.1-2)

The course is to be a combination of lectures, student presentations, and class discussions. I will go through the key passages, explain main linguistic and philosophical issues, introduce influential debates and up-to-date interpretations on these texts.

Texts: The Basic Works of Aristotle, R.McKeon (ed.), Random House. If you can afford, The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation (ed. By J. Barnes, Princeton, 2 vols.) is surely better. If you have Greek, consult Oxford classical texts or Loeb.
Required readings: One or two articles are chosen for each session. They are intended to help you (a) to understand the text(s) under discussion, and (b) to serve as an example of how to write an academic research paper.

PHI 575 INTRO TO COGNITIVE SCIENCE - [Prof. Rapaport](#)

MWF 10:00-10:50 am Clemens 322 [339426](#)

An introduction to cognitive science, an interdisciplinary approach to the computational study of human cognition. Methodology, assumptions, and research problems of cognitive science and such cognitive-science disciplines as anthropology, artificial intelligence, linguistics, neurosciences, philosophy, psychology, etc. Emphasis will be placed on joint efforts of these disciplines in investigating issues in the nature of the mind, intelligence, language, perception, memory, etc. Students will be encouraged to participate in colloquia sponsored by the Center for Cognitive Science.

PHI 604 TEACHING PHILOSOPHY - [Prof. Baumer](#)

M 15:00-15:50 pm Park 141 [489087](#)

This course is designed to prepare students for their first teaching responsibilities. Texts, issues and approaches to the various introductory courses will be discussed in the first part of the course. The second part will be devoted to partial examination of some of the relevant literature (mainly found in *Teaching Philosophy*). No papers will be assigned.

PHI 634 CONTEMPORARY DEBATES IN EPISTEMOLOGY - [Prof. Beebe](#)

W 13:00-15:00 pm Park 141 [237981](#)

This course will cover the major debates and theories within contemporary epistemology. Topics include epistemic internalism and externalism, skepticism and contextualism, experimental epistemology, the epistemological challenge of disagreement, the nature of testimony.

PHI 634 TIME, TENSE & TEMPORAL PERSPECTIVE - [Prof. Donnelly](#)

M 12:00-14:00 pm Park 141 [168807](#)

In this class, we will focus on the debate in the philosophy of time between detensors (or, B theorists) and tensers (or, A theorists). Very roughly, tensers hold that times/events have *changing* 'A properties' (pastness, nowness, futurity) which can be captured only by tensed claims like 'It is (now) September 20, 2010', 'Barack Obama was elected president of the U.S. two years ago', or 'Andrew Cuomo will be elected governor of New York'. Detensors deny this, holding in that all objective facts about temporal position reduce to *unchanging* ordering relations between events or between events and times.

We will spend part of the semester looking at some influential arguments for and against tensed or tenseless theories of time. In particular, we will look at McTaggart's early argument for the incoherency of changing A properties, along with contemporary assessments and developments of McTaggart's argument. We will also look at Prior's 'Thank goodness that's over' argument for A properties (along with more recent developments of and responses to it). But the main focus of the class will be on getting a feel for what tensed or tenseless theories might look like...what, in particular, they might say about how the world is structured. To this end, we will read most of Mellor's *Real Time II* and Craig Bourne's *A Future for Presentism* as examples of,

respectively, tenseless and tensed theories of time, along with some other representations of tensed or tenseless theories.

Grading for this class will be based on short written assignments, one class presentation, and one final paper.

PHI 634 **DISPOSITIONS AND POWERS – [Prof. Williams](#)**

F 13:00-15:00 pm Park 141 [077410](#)

Causal powers are of great importance, and have been described as “perhaps the most important issue in metaphysics today.” Though only in their infancy, theories of causal powers are quickly being recognized a serious alternative to the deflationary Human accounts of laws of nature and causation currently in vogue.

So what is a causal power? In short, a ‘power’ is a property whose essence is causal. Instantiation of such a property imbues an object with the ability to bring about some effect when the appropriate conditions obtain. In such cases the effect, or ‘manifestation’ as it is typically called, is a product of the power alone—no additional causal features (such as laws or regularities) are required.

We shall consider whether we ought to prefer an attitude of realism or reductivism towards these causal properties, asking, in effect, if these properties really are the causes of their effects, or whether some additional causal feature is needed. Within the realist camp we will consider a number of different approaches, starting with an ontology of pure powers, through to mixed views, and ending with views that include powers along side non-powers. On the reductivist side, we will look at what connections powers may have to certain counterfactual conditionals, the problems the counterfactual analysis faces, and what this means for reduction.

Time allowing, the final section of the course will be dedicated to exploring areas where powers and dispositions have been applied or show some promise. This will include modality, explanation, theories of natural kinds, persistence and even existence.

COL 718 **LATIN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY – [Prof. Jorge Gracia](#)**

W 18:30-21:00 pm Park 141 Reg #055710 (A); 356689 (B)

Graduate Seminar on Latin American Philosophy

Philosophy graduate students may satisfy the History of Philosophy and the Social and Political Philosophy breadth requirements with this course

COL students may take this course for full credit (section A) or P/F (section B)

This is the first graduate seminar on Latin American philosophy offered at UB. The course will be a thorough introduction to 500+ years of Latin American thought, beginning with Las Casas, who discussed the condition and rights of “Indians,” and going all the way to the present. We

will read and discuss a selection of the classic texts from each period. Apart from Las Casas the authors will be: Sepulveda, Sor Juana, Bolivar, Romero, Frondizi, Miro Quesada, Sarmiento, Marti, Mariategui, Vasconcelos, Ramos, Zea, Salazar Bondy, Fernandez Retamar, and Dussel. Something will also be said about pre-Columbian thought. The main topics will be those of interest to Latin American thinkers, such as the rights of conquered peoples, colonialism, Latin American identity, the nature of the self, values, race, and nationality. The authors fall into different philosophical and ideological traditions, including Marxism, Thomism, phenomenology, existentialism, liberalism, analysis, and postmodernism. Some authors are straight-forward philosophers, but some are writers, essayists, or politicians. The readings will come from two collections of texts. One is edited by Susana Nuccetelli and Gary Seay (*Latin American Philosophy*), the other is edited by Jorge Gracia and Elizabeth Millan (*Latin American Philosophy for the Twenty-First Century*). The secondary sources that will accompany the primary sources will be from two collections. One is the Blackwell *Companion to Latin American Philosophy*, edited by Nuccetelli et al, and the other is the forthcoming *Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality in Latin American and Latino/a Thought*, edited by Jorge Gracia. We will also read a couple of short books by Latin American authors to complement the other readings, and provide some more depth.

Graduate students who take the seminar for full credit will have to write a paper and make a class presentation on a reading assignment. Students who will take the course P/F will be required to make a presentation in class.