

Spring 2023 Graduate Seminars

**This schedule is tentative and subject to change without notice.*

PHIL 715-01

Seminar in Philosophical Writing

Prof. Carlos Montemayor

Wednesday 12:30 – 3:15 p.m.

Synchronous

The primary goal of this course is to improve our abilities to read, interpret, and write philosophical essays. To this end, we will study some of the advanced analytic, interpretive, and expressive skills essential to the writing of philosophy. Throughout the course, we will read assigned texts and practice different skills. Written assignments will include argument reconstructions and presentations of our own arguments.

Phil 770-01

Seminar in a Classical Author (Topic: Socrates)

Prof. Jeremy Reid

Monday 4 – 6:45 p.m.

In person

This seminar on a classical author will be on somebody who is not an author: Socrates. Despite not writing anything, Socrates played an important role in establishing what philosophy is and how it should be done. In addition, Socrates himself seems to have been a kind of exemplar for many who admired him, demonstrating by his character and way of life what virtue and happiness are.

In this seminar, we will explore the main accounts of Socrates from our ancient sources, comparing how he is portrayed and used by Plato, Xenophon, Aristophanes, Diogenes Laertius, and Aristotle. Though it is impossible to divide cleanly the historical Socrates from how he gets used as a character in others' writings, we will do our best to paint an accurate portrait of Socrates as a person and thinker. In particular, we will consider Socratic views about virtue, whether virtue is teachable, the primacy of virtue as a value, the relationship between virtue, knowledge, and goodness, the role of the teacher or fellow inquirer, the motivational force of *erōs* and the love of beauty in philosophy, whether death is to be feared, and what Socrates' criticisms of his own society and its prominent citizens were. Along the way, we will also consider issues of chronology in the Platonic corpus and the role of the dialogue form in philosophy.

Readings for this course include Aristophanes' *Clouds*; Xenophon's *Symposium*, *Apology*, and *Memorabilia*, and *Hellenica*; Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*; and Plato's *Apology*, *Euthyphro*, *Euthydemus*, *Meno*, *Ion*, *Hippias Minor*, *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Lysis*, *Symposium*, *Protagoras*, and *Phaedo*. Though we will (of course) read a lot, most of the readings for this course are light and entertaining, and I hope this course will be a good entry point for students to see why many have considered Socrates an inspiring person and thinker.

PHIL 770-02

Seminar in a Classical Author (Topic: Descartes)

Prof. Alice Sowaal

Thursday 12:30 – 3:15 p.m.

In person

Seminar on Descartes: A Non-Canonical Descartes

As students and teachers of philosophy, you may well ask (or be asked): why should we read Descartes at the time of a global pandemic, systematic injustice, and catastrophic environmental disaster due to climate change? Aren't most of his ideas wrong? Further, isn't he the paradigmatic "man of reason" with views that undergird ideologies marked by dualism and individualism that have brought about hierarchal injustice and the "death of nature"?

"Yes," say academics, echoing each other in choral unity.

This Descartes is a character whom scholars love to hate, a stand-in for just about every problem in the 20th and 21st centuries that academics want to address.

In this class, we will take a fresh look at Descartes's philosophy. In doing so, we will read him as part of the mystic and prophetic activist traditions that continue today from their ancient roots. According to these traditions, spiritual practices—including, for example, "meditations"—were designed as tools used to heal the kind of human suffering that is due to many kinds of causes, including systematic social injustice.

In doing so, we will study:

- key texts in Descartes's writings that are often overlooked;
- scholarly literature by analytic philosophers who read Descartes as part of the "mystic" and/or "faith seeks understanding" traditions;
- mystics, theologians, and prophetic activists throughout the history of philosophy through to the 21st century;

- readings about secularism, neo-liberalism, empiricism, and colonialism that will help us understand how this reading of Descartes has been marginalized such that the canonical reading could be developed.

In addition to writing seminar papers, students will also have the opportunity to develop teaching modules about these materials.

PHIL 770-03

Seminar in a Classical Author (Topic: Foucault)

Prof. Mohammad Azadpur

Tuesday 4 – 6:45 p.m.

In person

This course examines Michel Foucault's later ethical turn and his concern with the importance of ancient philosophical spiritual exercises as "arts of existence" or "techniques of the self." We will read selections from Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, the text of his 1981-82 lectures at the Collège de France – *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* – and his related articles and interviews. We begin by considering pertinent aspects of the history of ethics in order to situate his contributions. We will finally assess Foucault's later project by a treatment of relevant secondary literature, including material by philosophers such as Pierre Hadot, Charles Taylor, Alexander Nehamas, and Arnold Davidson. Thematically, this course introduces students to pioneering contemporary discussions that challenge the modern conceptions of philosophical activity and provide opportunities for innovative responses to some of the important ethical and meta-ethical problems.

PHIL 820-01

Seminar: Philosophy of Mind

Prof. Carlos Montemayor

Monday 12:30 – 3:15 p.m.

In person

The purpose of this course is to provide you with an advanced understanding of fundamental issues in the philosophy of mind. We will study in depth the epistemic status of phenomenal consciousness. Among the central questions we will address are: is phenomenal consciousness the sole source of perceptual epistemic justification? If not, what other sources could serve as perceptual epistemic justifiers?

PHIL 850-01

Seminar in Philosophy of Science

Prof. Arezoo Islami

Wednesday 4 – 6:45 p.m.

In person

The aim of this course is to shed light on an exciting and understudied relationship: the relationship between philosophy of science and phenomenology. Through this study, we will get a deeper understanding of (and hopefully a remedy for) the unfortunate alienation between Central-European and Anglo-American traditions in the 20th and 21st century philosophy of science. We begin the course with a close and contextual reading of an unfinished masterpiece: Edmund Husserl's *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* and a host of secondary sources to illuminate Husserl's remarks. Then we turn to the contemporary developments of the newly emerging field of phenomenology of science.

Phenomenologists are not usually listed among the canonical authors of philosophy of science. Given the fact that analyses of the formal, physical and human sciences are ubiquitous in the phenomenological literature, this neglect may seem unjustified. Edmund Husserl is a particularly telling example in this respect. Not only did Husserl address many of the core issues in philosophy of science, but also, he made a number of original contributions, some of which were well ahead of his time. Husserl's discussion of the relations between the lifeworld and scientific world was a model for Wilfrid Sellars' well-known distinction between manifest and scientific image. Husserl's understanding of scientific theories can be seen as a forerunner of the semantic view, as it was later articulated by Patrick Suppes, Frederick Suppe, Bas van Fraassen and others. Husserl offered one of the first systematic treatments of the role of idealizations in physics, an issue taken up in the 1980s by Ernan McMullin. Husserl's notions of archaeology and sedimentation as well as his emphasis on the historical and social embeddedness of science foreshadowed the post-positivist turn, usually associated with philosophers such as Thomas Kuhn, Ian Hacking or Peter Galison.

PHIL 851

Feminist Ethics and Political Philosophy

Prof. Shelley Wilcox

Thursday 9:30 – 12:15 p.m.

In person

This seminar will explore several cutting-edge themes, ideas, and debates in contemporary feminist ethics and political philosophy. In particular, we will examine

recent work by feminist philosophers, critical race theorists, and other cultural critics on five interrelated, normative concepts: oppression, white supremacy, misogyny, epistemic injustice, and dehumanization. In addition to gaining a thorough understanding of these concepts, we will assess their usefulness for diagnosing and theorizing a number of pressing, present-day issues, including state violence, toxic public discourse, attacks on reproductive rights, sexual assault and victim blaming, misogynoir, transmisogyny, and willful epistemic ignorance. We will round out the course by discussing various forms of resistance to injustice, focusing on epistemic activism, solidarity, and self-care.

PHIL 858-01

Seminar in Political Philosophy

Prof. Itzel Garcia

Tuesday 9:30 – 12:15 p.m.

In person

This seminar will focus on the topic of policing in the United States and the special problems it, and law enforcement generally, pose for our democratic structures. We will make our way through Barry Friedman's *Unwarranted: Policing without Permission* (2017). Graduate students enrolled for a grade must (a) lead discussion on **one** assigned reading throughout the semester and (b) write a short 7-10 page original research paper on a related topic.

PHIL 890-01

Seminar: Current Issue in Philosophy (Topic: Moral Psychology)

Prof. Macy Salzberger

Thursday 4 – 6:45 p.m.

In person

This seminar will focus on the moral psychology of love, dependency, and vulnerability. As a branch of moral philosophy, moral psychology is concerned with the psychological concepts that are relevant to moral life. For example, moral psychology is concerned with what kinds of motivation and character deserve praise or criticism and what sorts of psychological capacities are necessary for moral judgment or action. The particular focus of this seminar will lead us through discussions of intimate relationships and ideals for how we psychologically relate to one another (in contrast with, say, how we should distribute relationship goods within society or how we should structure our relationships).

Questions we may discuss include:

- What is love?
- What makes love good or bad?
- How do dependency and vulnerability relate to love?
- How should we understand the relative value of autonomy, dependency, and vulnerability in our relationships?

PHIL 896

Directed Reading in Fundamental Philosophical Texts

Friday 3:00 – 5:00 p.m. (exact dates TBD)

N.b., a mandatory course orientation will take place on Friday, February 3rd at 3:00 PM. A Zoom link will be emailed to all registered students beforehand. Additionally, there are four required study group meetings that take place over the course of the semester. These group meetings are held on Fridays at 3:00 PM (exact dates TBD). Please email Professor Carlos Montemayor with any questions at cmontema@sfsu.edu