

FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



PHILOSOPHY LECTURES PROSPECTUS:
GRADUATE CLASSES

MICHAELMAS TERM 2020

IMPORTANT NOTES:

- Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this Prospectus is accurate at the start of term, but sometimes errors persist. If you think you have found a mistake, please contact James Knight (james.knight@philosophy.ox.ac.uk).
- Times given here are UK times. Students attending remotely in other timezones should adjust their times accordingly.
- The Faculty's Graduate Studies Committee considered, during Trinity Term 2020, how delivery of graduate teaching could take place during the pandemic. It directed that classes in Michaelmas Term take place subject to the following conditions:
 1. Classes may happen as face-to-face teaching, but only if the expected class size can be accommodated in the Faculty's teaching rooms given the reduction in capacity caused by the need for social distancing.
 2. Any class that happens face-to-face should also have online access.
 3. There will be no repetition of sessions.
 4. All teaching will take place in weeks 1 to 8 only, and classes will only take place between 9am and 5pm (UK time) on Monday to Friday.
 5. Class duration will be reduced to 90 minutes.
- As plans for Michaelmas Term develop, more information will become available on class timings and locations (whether virtual or physical).

Graduate Classes

Graduate classes are, except where otherwise indicated, intended for the Faculty's BPhil and MSt students. DPhils may also attend if there is capacity. In general, it is likely that access to classes will be restricted to students registered with the Faculty.

BPhil Pro-Seminar: Theoretical Philosophy

Restricted access - available to particular groups of BPhil students

The BPhil Pro-Seminar is compulsory for 1st year BPhil students and available only to them. The year group will be divided into smaller groups, each of which will have four weeks studying one area of theoretical philosophy, and then four weeks studying another. Class-givers will contact the members of their groups, specifying readings, and arranging the online classes.

Ancient Philosophers on Memory

Prof Luca Castagnoli

How is it possible to acquire knowledge of something? Is human learning the process of recovery or 'recollection' of innate knowledge latent in our minds since birth? Or is our mind a *tabula rasa* (a blank slate) upon which fresh data and knowledge are imprinted from outside, through experience and authoritative teaching? What kinds of things can we learn and remember, and in what way? And how can we retain them in our memory?

In these classes we will discuss how Plato first placed the concepts of memory, recollection and forgetfulness at the centre of his epistemological and methodological reflections, in a way which both appropriated and transformed earlier poetic and philosophical traditions. We will also investigate the complex ways in which this model for thinking about human cognitive abilities was related to other Platonic models for the acquisition of knowledge, such as intellectual vision or pregnancy/generation. We will then move on to Aristotle's discussion of the role of memory in the epistemological ascent from perception to knowledge, and his investigation of the mechanisms of memory and recollection in his *On Memory and Recollection*. Finally, we will have a glimpse at how Hellenistic philosophers (Epicureans, Stoics and Sceptics) thought of the role of memory in human cognition and practice.

The main topics and texts of the eight classes are provisionally scheduled as follows:

W1. Introduction: memory, learning and metempsychosis before Plato; introducing Plato's 'theory' of recollection: the *Meno* (especially 80a-86c)

W2. Recollection, Forms and the immortality of the soul: the *Phaedo* (especially 72e-77a) and the *Phaedrus* (esp. 245c-256b; 274c-278b)

W3. From recollection to noetic vision: (1) the *Republic* (esp. VI 504a-VII 535a); (2) intellectual midwifery and psychic pregnancy: *Theaetetus* 148d-151d and *Symposium* 206b-212b

- W4. Towards a mundane theory of memory: the wax tablet and the aviary in the *Theaetetus* (191b-200c); memory and pleasure in the *Philebus* (esp. 33c-40b)
- W5. Aristotle's theory of memory in *On Memory and Recollection 1*
- W6. Aristotle's theory of recollection in *On Memory and Recollection 2*
- W7. Aristotle on Meno's paradox, memory and experience
- W8. Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics on memory

This class is mandatory for students of the Ancient Philosophy MSt; BPhil and DPhil students in philosophy and other students with an interest in the topic are also very welcome to attend.

Introductory readings

- Fine, G. (2014) *The Possibility of Inquiry: Meno's Paradox from Socrates to Sextus*. Oxford.
- Kahn C. (2006) 'Plato on Recollection', in H. H. Benson (ed.), *A Companion to Plato*. Oxford: 119-132.
- Scott D. (1995) *Recollection and Experience: Plato's Theory of Learning and Its Successors*. Cambridge.
- Sorabji R. (2008) *Aristotle on Memory*, 2nd edn. Chicago.

Political Philosophy

Prof Cecile Fabre and Prof Tom Sinclair

This class is open and restricted to B.Phil students with an interest in moral, political and legal philosophy. The classes are organised into two broad themes, each to be taught in a bloc of four weeks:

1. Legitimacy and authority (Tom Sinclair): the philosophical anarchist's challenge; the statist response; democracy; the oppressive state?
2. Justice (Cécile Fabre). Topics: egalitarian justice ; territorial justice ; justice and immigration ; reparative justice.

The class will accordingly be divided into two groups: Group 1 will start with Tom Sinclair, and Group 2 with C. Fabre. The Groups will switch over in week 5. Each topic has been assigned two core articles/chapters, which students will be expected to have read. As a rule of thumb, you should allocate half a day per week to do the required reading. The readings should be used as bases for formulating and defending your own views about the issues and arguments at hand. A full syllabus is available [here](#).

Feminist Philosophy

Prof Mari Mikkola

Everyday and feminist philosophical debates concerning pornography are fraught with many difficult questions. These include: What is pornography? What does pornography do (if anything at all)? Is the consumption of pornography a harmless private matter, or does pornography violate women's civil rights? What, if anything, should legally be done about pornography? Can there be feminist pornography? Answering these questions is complicated by confusion over the conceptual and political commitments of different anti- and pro-pornography positions, and whether these positions are even in tension with one another: different people comprehend the concept of *pornography* differently and easily end up talking past one another. This seminar looks at contemporary philosophical debates that deal with pornography from a feminist perspective. We will discuss various philosophical positions on pornography that are found in ethics, aesthetics, feminist philosophy, political philosophy, epistemology, and social ontology. Topics include: whether pornography subordinates and silences women; free speech versus hate speech debates; whether pornography produces a distinct kind of knowledge; whether it objectifies women and if so, in what sense; how should we think about the aesthetics of pornography; what difference do non-heteronormative, 'female-friendly' and/ or queer pornography make to our philosophical treatment of the issue. We will be mainly focusing on two recent texts: papers collected in *Beyond Speech: Pornography and Analytic Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Mari Mikkola (NY: OUP, 2017) and *Pornography: A Philosophical Introduction* by Mari Mikkola (NY: OUP, 2019).

Those taking part in the seminar must read the following background texts before the start of term:

- Langton, Rae. 1993. "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22: 293-330.
- Mikkola, M. *Pornography: A Philosophical Introduction* (NY: OUP, 2019), chapter 1.

Readings to be discussed during week 1 are as follows (full syllabus to be distributed at the start of MT20):

- Antony, Louise. 2017. "Be What I Say: Authority Versus Power in Pornography." In *Beyond Speech: Pornography and Analytic Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Mari Mikkola, 59-90. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mikkola, M. *Pornography: A Philosophical Introduction* (NY: OUP, 2019), chapter 2.

Decision Theory

Prof Bernhard Salow

This class will cover a variety of debates in decision theory, including what rational constraints there are on how to engage with risk, how to make rational decisions when one's opinions or values are imprecise, and whether we should evaluate actions by the outcomes they cause or by the outcomes they give us reason to expect.

A continuing theme will be how we should deal with sequences of decisions, and whether there is anything problematic about decision theories whose recommendations at each point in a sequence add up to an overall course of action that is clearly suboptimal. Another theme will be how epistemology and decision theory inform and constrain one another.

While the material will invariably involve some mathematical machinery, familiarity with such tools will not be presupposed. And we will try to focus on readings that present the philosophical issues with as little formal baggage as possible.

A tentative schedule is below. Students who want to get an introduction to what decision theory is about might want to read one of:

- Lara Buchak (2016) Decision Theory. In Hajek and Hitchcock, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Probability and Philosophy*
- Johanna Thoma (2019) Decision Theory. In Pettigrew and Weisberg, eds. *The Open Handbook of Formal Epistemology*

Week 1: Probabilities, Utilities, and Preferences

Week 2: Risk-Aversion

Week 3: Imprecision

Week 4: Diachronic Choice

Week 5: Externalist Evidence

Week 6: Evidential vs Causal Decision Theory I

Week 7: Evidential vs Causal Decision Theory II

Week 8: TBD (probably either spill-over from previous weeks or an introduction to epistemic utility theory)

Philosophy of Physics

Prof James Read (*weeks 1 to 4*) and Prof Simon Saunders (*weeks 5 to 8*)

This class is compulsory for students on the MSt in the Philosophy of Physics. BPhil students may choose to attend this class in order to satisfy their attendance requirements. The schedule below is for the first half; the schedule for the second will follow in due course.

Week 1: The philosophy of symmetries

What is a symmetry transformation of a physical theory, and in what sense are symmetries a "guide to reality"? In this lecture, I'll present some recent attempts to answer these questions.

Week 2: The hole argument

The hole argument purports to show that general relativity is radically indeterministic. I'll present the argument, some classic responses, as well as a recent line that the argument rests on a mathematical mistake.

Week 3: General covariance and background independence

The quest to identify a sense in which general relativity is distinct from the spacetime theories which came before it has rumbled on for a century. In this lecture, I'll look at some proposed such senses and their discontents.

Week 4: The dynamical approach to general relativity

The 'dynamical approach' to spacetime theories, developed by Brown and Pooley, is well-understood in special relativity. However, there remain many aspects of the view to be spelled out in the context of general relativity. I'll present what has been done, and what remains to be done.

Formal Semantics

Prof Paul Elbourne

Much work by contemporary philosophers of language uses the tools of formal semantics. This course trains students in the craft of doing formal semantics. It introduces Frege's hypothesis that functional application is the mechanism by which the meaning of a complex phrase is composed from the meanings of its constituent parts. It applies this insight to the analysis of a variety of core semantic phenomena, including argument structure, adjectival modification, definite descriptions, relative clauses, binding, and quantification. Emphasis throughout is on training students to be able to produce explicit detailed analyses of novel data.

We will be using the following textbook: Irene Heim and Angelika Kratzer, 1998, *Semantics in Generative Grammar*, Blackwell. Students intending to follow this course should acquire a copy.

Before the first session, participants are requested to read the first three chapters of the textbook and do Exercises 3a and 3d on pages 32-4; for Exercise 3a, please use the lambda notation as defined on pages 34-8.

Hard Choices

Prof Ruth Chang

What are hard choices and what should we do in the face of them? This seminar series investigates such choices from a philosophical perspective, examining values, reasons, practical agency, and the nature of normativity in order to answer these two questions.

This is an interdisciplinary seminar with postgraduate students from the law, philosophy, and politics faculties. If you are interested in enrolling, please send an email to ruth.chang@law.ox.ac.uk indicating your interest and describing your philosophical background. There is an enrolment cap of 8-10 Philosophy students. DPhil students are also welcome to enrol. Please send your expression of interest before October 1, 2020.

This seminar series is part of a new interdisciplinary course, 'Topics in Philosophy, Law, and Politics'. In conjunction with the new course, there is a Philosophy, Law, and Politics Colloquium with invited guests. This year's guests include Nomy Arpaly, Catherine MacKinnon, Cass Sunstein, and Danielle Allen. However, due to the pandemic, these speakers will likely be postponed until 2021-22.

Topics in moral philosophy

Prof Andreas Mogensen and Dr Teru Thomas

This class aims to familiarize students with key topics in moral philosophy. Each week's readings try to pair an influential paper from the recent past with a more contemporary paper on the same topic, the aim being to give students both an understanding of where a given debate comes from and where it is currently heading. We aim for the class to be accessible to students with little prior familiarity with moral philosophy.

With the exception of the first week, where the conveners will present the papers assigned, we aim to have student presenters introduce each paper, in the form of a succinct summary of its key arguments, as well as suggestions for questions to serve as a springboard for discussion. We nonetheless expect all participants - i.e., including those who are not presenting - to have read the key readings for each week.

The key readings for week 1 are:

Derek Parfit (1984) *Reasons and persons*, Appendix I: "What makes someone's life go best?", pp. 493-502 (OUP).

Jennifer Hawkins (2019) "Internalism and prudential value," *Oxford Studies in Metaethics* 14, 95-120.

In future weeks, we will cover the following topics: moral status (week 2), demandingness (week 3), deontological constraints (week 4), distribution (week 5), aggregation (week 6), collective impact and individual obligations (week 7), and the non-identity problem (week 8).