Fourth Year Seminars for 2019-20

Fall 2019

Phil 4007
Joshua Shepherd
Topic: Advanced Philosophy of Psychology
The mind can be understood as a bundle of capacities: perception, memory, attention, action control, and more. Psychology studies these capacities in the lab, and builds theories about how these capacities work. Philosophy of psychology works alongside psychology, posing questions about the nature of these capacities in light of ongoing empirical work. What is perception? Memory? Metacognition? In this seminar we will read and discuss cutting edge work regarding the nature of mental capacities, with the aim of developing a sophisticated, empirically-based understanding of key components of the mind.

Phil 4008
Gabriele Contessa
Topic: The Proper Role of Markets
What role should markets play in our society? A first possible answer is that markets should play a central role, as markets allocate resources efficiently and promote desirable values, such as prosperity and freedom. A second possible answer is that markets should play a limited role, as unfettered markets lead to unacceptable outcomes, such as the corruption of social norms or unjust inequalities. A third possible answer is that, while markets are not problematic in and of themselves, specific markets are problematic because they tend to lead to exploitation or they promote the wrong values. This seminar will explore some variations on these possible answers.

Winter 2020

Phil 4100A
Melissa Frankel
Topic: Philosophy with Children

Phil 4100B
Jay Drydyk
Topic: Development Ethics
Students in this seminar will learn about the full range of ethical issues that arise in social and economic development. In response to decades of failed development projects, a consensus has developed about what development should be. Worthwhile development must enhance people’s well-being in ways that are equitable, empowering, and environmentally sustainable; it must also promote human rights and cultural freedom, with integrity (vs. corruption). By implication, these are also seven dimensions in which development can fail ethically. The class will explore each of these dimensions in depth, including the philosophical debates about the key concepts. (For example, which conceptions of social justice are most illuminating for judging whether a particular development process has been ‘equitable’? This discussion will culminate in evaluating particular cases of development with these theoretical considerations in mind.)
Phil 4210
Eros Corazza
Topic: Myself and I
We will discuss myself and I. But mainly "myself" and "I". You will not learn much about myself, but quite a bit about "myself". Questions to be discussed will concern the nature of self-knowledge and what it means for a person to have a notion or concept of oneself and the way one can come to gain self-knowledge. In so doing we will touch on issues pertaining to personal identity, self-reference, etc. And why/how the pronoun “I” seems to play a central role in these enterprises. We will also touch on questions pertaining to herself and “herself” and what is now known as de se beliefs. Authors to be read include Castañeda, Chisholm, Perry, and Lewis. We will also try to make some connections with the classical works of Descartes, Locke and Leibniz.

Phil 4220
Myrto Mylopoulos
Topic: Skilled Action
Reflection on skilled action in a range of areas, including sports, the performing arts, and everyday life, reveals a number of fascinating questions for philosophy of action, philosophy of mind, epistemology, and even moral psychology. Among the questions we will examine in this course are the following: What is the nature of skill, and how does it relate to automaticity, habit, and intentional action more generally? What is the best way to understand the species of knowledge that skilled performers possess, and that novices lack? Does an appeal to the notions of ‘knowledge how’ and ‘knowledge that’ help us here? What is the role, if any, of consciousness, attention, and metacognition in the control of skilled action? Do they simply interfere with the smooth execution of skill, as is commonly supposed, or might they be important, and even necessary for it? Finally, what can be said about the relationship between skill and moral capacities? Can the development of certain of these capacities, such as that for self-control, or virtue more generally, be usefully modelled as a form of skill acquisition? We will explore these questions, and others, through the lens of contemporary philosophy and, where relevant, cognitive psychology and neuroscience.