

Fall 2016 Undergraduate Course Descriptions

COL 199: On Dignity & Death

Professor David E. Johnson

Class #23417

2:00-3:20 Tuesday & Thursday

116B Greiner

What is dignity? What is the relationship of dignity to what Victor Hugo calls the inviolability of life, but also and no less trenchantly to both the death penalty and the right to die? How does the concept of dignity work both to defend and to challenge both the death penalty and the right to die? On Dignity and Death explores these questions through readings of philosophy (Cicero, Kant, Hegel, Foucault), criminology (Beccaria), legal and medical accounts (Dworkin, Cohen-Almagor), literature (Hugo, Camus, Capote, Mailer), and abolitionists (Badinter, Prejean). We will also read the Universal Declaration of Universal Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (proposed 1966, ratified 1976) in order to examine the paradox of a universal human right to life that coexists with the death penalty. In addition, we will read several United States Supreme Court decisions concerning both the States right to put to death and its right to make live.

COL 199: Race & Ethnicity

Professor Jorge Gracia

Class# 23486

12:30-3:10 Wednesday

640 Clemens

What is race? What is ethnicity? What is the relation between race and ethnicity? What are racial and ethnic identities? How are these identities related to personal identity? Can the same person have several identities? How are racial and ethnic groups individuated? How can we tell that someone belongs to a particular racial or ethnic group? Does belonging to these groups entail particular rights? Do ethnic groups have linguistic rights? Are social groups entitled to reparations for past wrongs committed against members of the groups? Can affirmative action policies with respect to racial and ethnic groups be justified? How are race and ethnicity manifested in cultural phenomena, such as literature and art? These are some of the questions we will be dealing with in this course. The readings come from the writings of authors who have recently staked out important, and sometimes controversial, positions on these issues.

COL 199: Art & Madness Professor

Kalliopi Nikolopoulou

Class# 23484

3:30-4:50 Monday & Wednesday

640 Clemens

When we think of artists we often imagine people who are eccentric, at odds with the everyday world, and indulging in impulsive emotions: easily irascible, self-absorbed, volatile, passionate, melancholic, and self-destructive are some of the adjectives that come to mind. The artist's volatile psychology is often explained as the effect of inspiration: the artist seems to have a special, even sacred, relation to a higher, spiritual reality to which average people lack access. In this interdisciplinary seminar, we will start with Plato's understanding of the artist in his Ion and

in relevant excerpts from *The Republic*. After a brief historical survey of the notion of the artist in the Renaissance and Romanticism, we will turn our focus to two modern novellas: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, both of which explore the significance of violence, madness, and death in relation to artistic creativity.

COL 199: Gender & Popular Culture

Professor Stephanie Clare

Class# 23485

5:00-6:20 Monday & Wednesday

640 Clemens

This seminar provides students with tools to analyze representations of gender and sexuality in contemporary popular, American visual culture. We watch music videos and consider reality TV; we read magazine articles and examine Facebook. We study how popular culture produces racialized masculinities and femininities, and we ponder the pleasures and perils of these productions. Although we focus on contemporary popular culture, we consider representations within their historical context, analyzing images from the nineteenth century until present day. Overall, the course addresses a central question: although many people consider all Americans to be equal, inequalities remain. How does popular visual culture reflect, produce, and undo inequality?

COL 199: Literature of/and Human Rights

Professor Shaun Irlam

Class# 23487

Tuesday & Thursday

640 Clemens

This course will explore the intersections between literature and human rights through a number of contemporary post-modern, diasporic and post-colonial works. Summary: a). Narratives of witness; b). poetics of sentiment, creating an audience; c) politics of representation / aestheticization d.) suffering of others, e.) articulation of rights. How does literature bear witness to human suffering and crimes against humanity? A prominent dimension of the novel since its inception has been the drama of human suffering and championship of the persecuted. In the 18th century, an iconic instance of this was Richardson's heroine, Clarissa; in the 19th century, the social protest novels of Charles Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell and others charted the horrors of industrialization in Victorian Britain while Zola's *Rougon-Macquart* cycle did the same for the French underclasses. Across the Atlantic, a large corpus of slave narratives and novels like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* gave momentum to the abolitionist movement which became to precursor to the contemporary discourse around human rights. *Please note: This is an Academies-affiliated seminar. All are welcome. Learn more at <http://academies.buffalo.edu>

Fall 2016 Graduate Course Descriptions

COL 715 Derrida & Heidegger

Rodolphe Gasché

Tuesdays 12:30-3:10

Clemens 640

Derrida's lectures on Heidegger from 1964-65, Heidegger: The Question of Being and History, will be available in an English translation early summer from University of Chicago Press. These seminal lectures devoted to a close reading of primarily the second half of Being and Time not only anticipate Derrida's later innovative and audacious interpretations of Heidegger regarding Being, ontology, the status of the question, aporia, history, and so forth, they are also instrumental to understanding his elaborations on rhetoric, and, in particular, on metaphor. These latter questions will constitute the horizon in which I will approach Derrida's reading and interpretation of Heidegger's Opus Magnum. Students should already be thoroughly familiar with Being and Time, which together with Derrida's lectures from 1964-65, constitute the required readings for this course. The course's objective is not only to learn how to practice close readings of philosophical texts by developing critical and analytical skills, but also to become familiar with the writings of leading thinkers on the question of Being, history, metaphor, and so forth. Course requirements: Attendance is mandatory. A final research, or argumentative paper of ca. 12-15 pages is required for students, who take the course intensively (A section); a three page paper, for those who take the course extensively (B section).

COL 714 Historiography of Philosophy

Jorge Gracia

Tuesdays 7:00-9:50

140 Park Hall

Do you know any philosophers who in their philosophizing do not refer to the views of other philosophers? I bet not, because an overwhelming number of philosophers refer to the views of other philosophers, although some refer only to the views of dead philosophers, some refer only to the views of living philosophers, and some refer to the views of both dead and living philosophers. All of them are engaged in making judgments about philosophers and their views that are part of history, that is, they are engaged in doing history of philosophy, although the history may be recent in some cases and ancient in others. Surprisingly, it is very rare to find philosophers who raise questions about the activity in which they are regularly engaged. Questions such as: Can we effectively recover and understand the views of other philosophers, whether living or dead, recent or ancient. Are there right and wrong ways of doing so? Is the recovery task drastically different from the task of philosophizing? Are philosophical judgments of the essence in the task of recovery and understanding of the past? What is the value of engaging that recovery? Do philosophers need to do history of philosophy or is it merely desirable that they do so, and if one or the other, why? Are there different ways of carrying out the task of recovery or is there one single and proper way of doing it? Can the task be ever completely insulated from biases? Can one do history of philosophy on the basis of translations? These are just a few questions that may be asked concerning the historiography of philosophy, and that we will discuss in this seminar. The readings will consist of readings from a recently published book by Thomas D. Sullivan and Russell Pannier, papers published by Peter Hare close to twenty years ago in a volume resulting from a conference he organized in Buffalo, various articles that have appeared since then, and my book *Philosophy and Its History: Issues in Philosophical Historiography*. We will also have four visitors to the seminar who will make presentations, including Sullivan, Pannier, Robert Gooding Williams, Carlos Sanchez, and Barry Smith. Moreover, the Capen Lectures to be delivered by Christia Mercer will deal with this topic.

COL 711 Messianism & Modernity

Sergey Dolgopolski

Wednesdays 6:30-9:10

Clemens 640

How do ancient literary figures of Messiah inform modern thinking? The seminar will approach a more specific form of the question: How does an either explicit or implicit reinvention of the ancient figure of Messiah, and more broadly, of the "religious law" or "positive law" inform thinking about time, past, future, and personhood in modernity. We will begin the journey by reading Kant's critique of Jewish and Catholic Messianism in terms of "positive law." With that framework of critique in mind, we will continue by reading Gershom Scholem, first as a secondary text on late ancient figures of the Messiah, and secondly as a primary text among other modern authors both constructing and informed by literary and intellectual figures of messiah: from Hermann Cohen to Franz Rosenzweig, to Franz Kafka, to Walter Benjamin, to Jacob Taubes, to Jacques Derrida, and Giorgio Agamben.

COL 712 Queer Theory & Anti-Normativity

Stephanie Clare

Mondays 6:30-9:10

Clemens 640

Since its inception, queer theory has been framed as a critique of normativity and a rejection of the norms that regulate sex and sexuality. Yet in a recent volume of *differences*, Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth Wilson asked whether another queer theory is possible, one "without a primary allegiance to antinormativity." In response to their question, some scholars answered in the negative: queer studies without antinormativity is not queer studies at all. This course investigates these claims by reading the contemporary debate concerning normativity in queer studies, returning to important texts that have shaped queer theory and queer of color critique, and examining recent contributions to the field. Authors we will read include: Roderick Ferguson, Dean Spade, Maggie Nelson, Robyn Wiegman, Elizabeth Wilson, José Esteban Muñoz, Jack Halberstam, Angela Wiley, and Afsaneh Najmabadi.

COL 525 Extreme Events: Catastrophes & Disasters

Amy Graves-Monroe

Wednesdays 4:00-6:40

CFA 144

This course examines the philosophical, ethico-religious, esthetic and psychoanalytical stakes in catastrophe and disaster. We will explore trauma and massacre, famine, earthquake and plague, the anthropocene, the regenerative power of destruction and the horror of the blank page. Theorists and authors include Leibniz, Voltaire, Diderot, Camus, Beckett, Blanchot, Duras, Mallarmé, Benjamin, Derrida, Deleuze, LaCapra, Felman, Boes and Marshall, among others.

Spring 2017 Undergraduate Courses

COL 199 Dignity & Death

David Johnson

Baldy 108

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COL 199 Art & Madness

Kalliopi Nikolopoulou

When we think of artists we often imagine people who are eccentric, at odds with the everyday world, and indulging in impulsive emotions: easily irascible, self-absorbed, volatile, passionate, melancholic, and self-destructive are some of the adjectives that come to mind. The artist's volatile psychology is often explained as the effect of inspiration: the artist seems to have a special, even sacred, relation to a higher, spiritual reality to which average people lack access. In this interdisciplinary seminar, we will start with Plato's understanding of the artist in his *Ion* and in relevant excerpts from *The Republic*. After a brief historical survey of the notion of the artist in the Renaissance and Romanticism, we will turn our focus to two modern novellas: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, both of which explore the significance of violence, madness, and death in relation to artistic creativity.

COL 112: Cross-Cultural Explorations: Encounters with Western, East Asian, and African Cultures

Professor Ewa Ziarek

Mondays & Wednesdays (Lecture): 2:00-2:50

Recitations:

Tuesday 8:00-8:50, 9:00-9:50, 10:00-10:50

Wednesday 8:00-8:50, 9:00-9:50, 10:00-10:50

Thursday 8:00-8:50, 9:00-9:50, 10:00-10:50

Clemens 640

The principal objective of this course is the study of the diversity of Western, East Asian, and African cultures from the Renaissance to the Modern Age. Although we will explore cultural diversity in its various expressions; in politics, religious thought, social customs, everyday beliefs, and scientific advances; our primary focus will be the study of art, literature, and big ideas. One of the central concerns of this course will be different cultural and historical conceptions of the human and its relation to nature, politics, and science. In the first part of the course we will examine the different formations of humanism in the Western cultures from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment; from Romanticism to Marxism. In the second part of the course we will focus on the non-Western ideas of the human and humanity and their expression

in religions, political organizations, and artworks. We will begin with Daoism and Confucianism and their impact on Chinese ethics, philosophy, politics, and culture during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties. We will also briefly discuss the Cultural Revolution and Maoism in 20th century China. We will follow the influence of Confucianism in Japanese culture and its confluence with Zen and the Shinto Revival. In the context of politics we will focus primarily on the Tokugawa Shogunate. In the context of the arts we will analyze the place of the human in nature as reflected in Japanese landscape paintings, poetry, and woodblock prints. We will conclude our course with the discussion of the devastation of colonialism and the struggle for independence in Africa. We will analyze the influence of traditional (for example, masks and music) and modern African cultures (Fanon, Achebe, and Soyinka) in the contemporary world.

Spring 2017 Graduate Courses

COL 722 Creaturely Life: Kafka, Benjamin, Celan
Noam Pines
Mondays 3:30-6:10
Clemens 640

The course will follow the development of the notion of the “creaturely” in the writings of Kafka, Benjamin, and Celan. The “creaturely” implies the convergence of political and theological figures of abandonment, marking points of continuity and a subtle dialogue between these three writers.

COL 721 Terrorologies
Sergey Dolgopolski
Mondays 6:30-9:10
Clemens 640

The seminar explores the notions of fear, horror, terror and earth in Jewish and Christian classical texts and in contemporary political and ethical thought. Are terror and related notions best approached, understood and critically appraised in a framework of ethics or is the theory of the political is better equipped for that task? Is thinking of terror in terms of literary theory a third alternative? We will explore these questions through readings late ancient Rabbinical and Christian texts as -- and despite of -- they have been appropriated in contemporary theories of ethics and politics. As a central part of that inquiry we will ask the question of "logics" of terror. To that end we will read the late ancient texts for the "logics" of mutual fear between G-d and humans; follow a medieval transformation of that into "logics" of omnipotent and omniscient deity, and explore the resurgence of the tension between the two "logics" in modern thinkers of terror from Kant's theory of sublime, to Heidegger's theory of horror, to Levinas's critique and appropriation of it in his ethics, to thinkers of the political post-Kant -- Arendt, Agamben, Fromm, Schmitt, and Taubes. The concluding part of the seminar will apply these competing perspectives to analyzing case studies in current discussion on terror in political and ethical thought.

COL 720 Existence, History, Finitude: Jean-Luc Nancy
Rodolphe Gasché

Tuesdays 12:30-3:10

Clemens 640

This course will be devoted primarily to the work of Jean-Luc Nancy on the three topics in question with brief digressions into the elaborations on finitude in particular, by philosophers such as Spinoza, Schelling, and Hegel. The aim of the seminar is to clarify the novel conception of finitude one encounters in Nancy's work – “infinitely finite” – which is at the core of his understanding of communal existence and its history. The main texts we will read and comment on are a selection from A Finite Thinking, plus the essay “Finite History,” (The Birth of Presence), and “Our History” (diacritics 20. 3). These are **required readings** for this course. The **course's objective** is not only to learn how to practice close readings of philosophical texts by developing critical and analytical skills, but also to become familiar with the writings of a leading thinker on the question of existence, community, being-with, and history. **Course requirements:** Attendance is mandatory. A final research, or argumentative paper of ca. 12-15 pages is required for students, who take the course intensively (A section); a three page paper, for those who take the course extensively (B section).

COL 719 Descartes: Cogito, Body, Imagination

David Johnson

Tuesdays 3:30-6:10

Clemens 640

The principal focus of this course will be a detailed reading of Descartes, focusing on the place of the imagination in the method and its role as the operator of the difference between body and soul. We will read Descartes' major texts, but also several of his letters. In addition, however, we will take up Jean-Luc Nancy's *Corpus* and his *De l'âme*, as well as, over the last few weeks, the debate between Foucault and Derrida, which turned on the question of how to read Descartes. Requirements: Attendance and one research paper (15-20 pages). NB: There are many editions of Descartes in both French and English. I will likely refer most often to the three-volume Garnier Classiques edition in French and to the three-volume Cambridge edition for the English translation.

COL 718 On Pneuma/Spirit

Kalliopi Nikolopoulou

Wednesdays 3:30-6:10

Clemens 640

The Western philosophical tradition ineluctably connects the term “spirit” with Hegel's magisterial historicization of it in his *Phenomenology*, as well as with the history of this term in revealed religion, especially Christianity. In our seminar, however, we will be concerned with the “pre-history” of spirit. In other words, we will focus on the nature of spirit and on spirit as an aspect of nature. Spirit, after all, both in Greek (*pneuma*) and in Latin (*spiritus*) means breath, wind. We will thus try to reactivate these meanings, and see how they might help us reconsider the modern crisis of the Spirit (and more recently even the crisis of the humanities). To do so, we will consider the figure of Apollo as a god of spirit, in opposition to Dionysus, who has been consistently featured in modernity as the spiritual god par excellence of ancient Greece. We will engage the spiritual and natural geography of Delphi, which is the contested dwelling of both

these deities. Readings will include: Karl Kerényi's *Apollo: The Wind, the Spirit, and the God (Four Studies)*; excerpts from Jane Ellen Harrison's *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*; excerpts from Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Paul Valéry's essay "Crisis of the Spirit"; and 20th century-Greek poet Angelos Sikelianos's long poem "Spiritual March."

COL 717 Derrida & Death

Shaun Irlam

Thursdays 12:30-3:10

Clemens 640

COL 716 Language, Event, Time

Krzysztof Ziarek

Wednesdays 12:30-3:10

Clemens 640

The notion of event, present already in phenomenology, has been popularized in philosophy and literary studies by such thinkers as Derrida, Deleuze, or Badiou. However, less attention has been paid to the implications of event for conceptions of language and literature. The course will examine how our relation to language changes when language is experienced as event, rather than as a system of signs, a vehicle of representation or expression, or a conduit for meaning. We will explore the significance and the implications of such an approach to language for our interpretation of literary texts. The priority of event with regard to language entails also a different relation to time and temporality, exacting attention to the non-repeatable, singular occurrence of existence and the different mechanisms of power that foreclose it. In this context, the course will also explore the way in which refocusing the concept of language on the notion of event can open a dialogue with Eastern thought. To explore the nodal relations between event, language, and time, we will read a number of literary works as well as philosophical and theoretical texts. The reading list will include Beckett, Blanchot, Howe, Lispector, Heidegger, Dogen, Ueda, Attridge. Students will be encouraged to develop the implications of philosophical and theoretical approaches for their respective literary fields.