

2014-2015 First Year Preceptorial Courses

FALL 2014 FYP COURSES

1. Reason and Passion in the Ancient World (Prof. Tommaso Gazzarri)

This course is concerned with the archetypal categories of reason and passion. A number of texts crucial to the classical tradition will be analyzed, and for each one we will try to assess how they contributed to the constitution of arguments that are still relevant to the modern discussion of the topic.

What follows is a partial list of the many issues that will be targeted:

- Reason and emotions are opposite or conciliable categories?
- The creation of orderly systems can be seen as a product of cold reason or is it rather a balanced regimentation of emotions?
- Are passions detrimental or beneficial for the individual? And for the collectivity?
- Is beauty something that can be created and fully experienced by reason, or does it pertain and involve solely our emotions?
- What do atomic theories have to do with fear and emotions?
- What is madness?

Regular discussions will develop from the problems presented by the texts at hand. Participation and attendance in class are therefore of paramount importance.

The students will be responsible for writing a paper concerned with one of the themes targeted in class. The final version will be preceded by three drafts. For each draft the students will be provided with extensive feedback.

2. Self and Society on Trial (Prof. Hans-Friedrich Mueller)

We shall read about those who conspire, about those who resist, about those who are put on trial, about winners and losers, in a variety of genres, including such works as Plato's *Republic* and *Apology of Socrates*, the *New Testament*, the *Communist Manifesto*, Kafka's *The Trial*, and Edward Luttwak's *Coup d'État: a Practical Handbook*. Who attempts to maintain control over society? Who fights back? Who conspires against whom and for what reasons? On what basis do we judge individuals and their sometimes fraught relationship to society more generally? Socrates, for example, is revered as a founder of Western philosophy. His fellow citizens famously condemned him to death for corrupting the young. Perhaps his fellow citizens had a point? And Athens was a democracy. Socrates' student Plato, on the other hand, was not a fan, and designed an ideal state where rulers lie to the people for their own good. Is Plato's alternative better? Are there modern parallels? We shall read as much evidence as time permits, formulate well-reasoned opinions, and, after class discussion, you will make your arguments in essays that muster the rhetorical resources of the English language. You will prosecute, defend, and render your verdicts.

4. Living Through Troubling Times (Prof. Jeannette Sargent)

We'll take a close look at how people deal with the big and little disasters of life by examining works of literature from as far back as ancient China (Tao Te Ching) to the futuristic novel *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood. Winnie the Pooh turns out to be a model Taoist who lets his life be guided by the Tao Te Ching, while Atwood gives us a glimpse of the future we may be creating for ourselves as we try to figure out how much we want technology and marketing to control our lives. Rabbi Kushner's "When Bad Things Happen to Good People" asks us to consider why people believe in divine intervention in human affairs, and Boccaccio's *Decameron* gives us entertaining insight into how people dealt with the Black Death in Florence in the fourteenth century. The short stories of Raymond Carver show how easy it is to be overwhelmed by the modern world and the dangers of isolation, while the contemporary David Sedaris offers humorous takes on serious problems like death and political correctness.

5. What Is the Avant-Garde? (Prof. Jennelle Troxell)

Perhaps the most famous piece of avant-garde art is Marcel Duchamp's Fountain, which was just a regular urinal displayed as art. This intentional transgression of the "normal" boundaries of art, literature, and film is at the heart of the avant-garde. But what exactly are these boundaries, how do they get established and what does it mean to transgress them? Over the course of the semester, we will explore the transnational, interdisciplinary aims of the avant-garde, focusing on the avant-garde's rhetoric of shock, its pervasive DIY ethos, and its critical stance towards the culture industry.

6. Media Accuracy, Credibility, Fairness, and Reliability (Prof. Mohammad Mafi)

According to a published report by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, "Seventy-eight percent of U.S. adults believe there's bias in the news media." In order to carry out our social responsibilities, we ought to be able to think critically and evaluate the information we get through the media: radio, TV, Internet, movies, books, newspapers, and magazines.

In this course, students will:

- Gain an increased awareness of inaccuracies in the media and be provided with tools to search for different opinions and perspectives
- Be inspired to critically reflect on increasingly complex social, political, and cultural issues
- Learn how to read between the lines and form their own independent opinions despite the proliferation of media outlets and PR tricks
- Be better prepared to identify WMD (Weapons of Mass Distraction)
- Have ample opportunity to use and enhance their critical thinking abilities

As citizens and future leaders, our students will be better equipped to protect great values such as democracy, civil liberties, peace and justice if they are well informed.

7. Age of Darwin (Prof. Krisanna Scheiter)

Science has played a major role in challenging the notion that human beings hold a privileged place in a world designed for their sake. The Copernican Revolution, for example, shattered our belief that we are at the center of the universe. Similarly, Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) undermined the notion that nature reflected some divine purpose or design. In this course we will discuss how the Darwinian Revolution changed the way human beings see themselves and their relationship to nature. As we will see Darwin's theory of evolution was part of a broader shift in thinking that included literature and the arts as well as the sciences. We will begin the course reading *Frankenstein* (1816), which is about what happens to a man whose ambition leads him to try to set himself apart from and even above nature. Next we will read excerpts from *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1776), a treatise written by the philosopher, David Hume. In the *Dialogues* Hume shows that there are serious problems with the idea that living things could be attributed to an intelligent designer. But when design in nature is replaced by Darwin's theory of natural selection, purpose and meaning seem to evaporate as well. Such concerns are exhibited in the novel *Thérèse Raquin* (1867), which is about two lovers who the author describes as human animals, without souls, completely enslaved by their animal instincts, raising questions about the place of values in the natural world.

The humanities and the sciences overlap not only with regard to content but also with regard to methods of inquiry and persuasion. Taking Darwin and Hume's texts as our examples, we will see that scientists and philosophers construct their arguments in much the same way. In this class we will see that the patterns of argument and methods of analysis used in philosophy are essential to scientific inquiry. The ability to analyze arguments is an important skill to be used, not only in the classroom, but also as citizens and human beings.

9. Hegemonies, At Home & Abroad: From Gramsci to Chomsky (Prof. Robert Hislope)

This class is about how and why citizens consent to conformity, control, and sometimes, coercion. In other words, how and why does hegemony happen? Hegemony describes a situation in which free people, with rational means at their disposal, embrace social conformity, support policies contrary to their interests, and consent to their own repression.

The autonomy (free will) they exercise as citizens thus gives way to heteronomy (subjection to the will of others). We will examine multiple, interdisciplinary examples of this problem that cover the fields of domestic and comparative politics, popular culture and the media, music, personal style (clothing and hair), and international relations.

Our foundational starting point will be the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), who developed the concept of hegemony while suffering from harsh prison conditions during Mussolini's fascist rule. On the basis of Gramsci's innovation, subsequent philosophers, academic scholars, political activists, and art and cultural critics, holding a variety of different perspectives, have applied, criticized, reformed, and extended the concept. We will trace this intellectual development, examining the permutations of the concept, and critically assess its explanatory ability to unlock this truly puzzling human paradox of conformity and coercion under conditions of freedom.

A sample of specific scholars and themes we will read include: analyses of Gramsci's Prison Notebooks; patterns of working class conservatism in America; Noam Chomsky's work on the role of the media in "manufacturing consent"; comparative studies on how hegemony works in developing countries; Ian Lustick on the epistemological difficulties of using hegemony as an explanatory concept; Dick Hebdige's study on the counter-hegemonic clothing and hairstyles of the reggae and punk musical subcultures in late '70s Britain; and scholarly work on "hegemonic stability theory" in the field of international relations.

10. Artistic Revolutionaries (Prof. William Finlay)

Who has changed the way we think about our world in terms of "performance"? The belief that Art reflects reality is as old as Aristotle, yet equally persistent is the hope that art might affect reality as well. The special place between the imagination and the external world has always been the home of artists willing to risk everything to attack, to influence and transcend prevalent thought. Through the use of film, attendance at professional productions and assigned readings this class will examine a variety of artists from widely divergent genres, cultures and time periods. From Apollinaire to Artaud, Butoh to Ballanchine and Bukowski to Gomez-Pena all had one thing in common. They gave of themselves totally to their inspiration and made Art/Performances that changed the way we see and think. Hopefully this class will do the same for it's participants.

11. Animals and Humans (Prof. Peter Heinegg)

This course is a historical, scientific, and philosophical study of the ways we have thought about and treated our fellow creatures. It focuses in particular on the narcissistic human domination of nature-supported by both religious and secular traditions-that has brought us to the desperate ecological crisis now threatening the world. It reflects on what, if anything, can be done about all this.

Reading List: Bible readings, selections from Montaigne (hand-outs); Jonathan Balcombe, *The Exultant Ark*; Marc Bekoff, *The Emotional Lives of Animals*; Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation*; Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eating*; Reg Morrison, *The Sprit in the Gene*; Aldo Leopole, *A Sand County Almanac*.

12. The Rules of Madness (Prof. Patrick Singy)

You often feel sad – do you suffer from depression? You are obsessed with not eating too much – are you anorexic? You cannot concentrate – do you suffer from ADHD? In the last two centuries, moral flaws, existential difficulties, and idiosyncratic traits have regularly been reinterpreted as psychiatric diseases. But are these diseases real, and in what sense of "real"? Have they been discovered or invented? And how do we draw the line between the normal and the pathological? History shows that this line has been constantly redrawn under the influence of broad cultural changes, business decisions, or personal interests. After a brief general introduction on the history of psychiatry, from Philippe Pinel in the early nineteenth century to the recent DSM-5, this course will focus on a select number of psychiatric diseases and debate the proposition that they are historically constructed.

13. Laughter and Literature at Wit's End (Prof. Nicole Calandra)

In this course we will examine the extremes of the human condition through a comic lens. Placing psychoanalytic, anthropological, and philosophic observations next to works of literature, we will ask what special insights might emerge from reading texts that portray comic visions of colliding horizons, clashing perspectives, social disorder, and,

of course, people at their wit's end. Literary authors read may include Kurt Vonnegut, Eugène Ionesco, Zadie Smith, Zora Neale Hurston, and Italo Calvino.

14. Science, Morality, and the Human Condition (Prof. Chalmers Clark)

In this course we will look first at the genesis of moral philosophy and natural science (natural philosophy) as they both emerged in ancient Greece. The first Western philosophers were concerned with the origins of all things and they speculated about the nature of how the world in all its variety came into being. In the 500s BCE, a thinker named Thales is generally given the nod as the first Western philosopher. He speculated that the origin of all things was water. But how did it go from here? How did we get from such humble beginnings to the dramatic advent of atomic theory?

While such naturalistic speculations were evolving, another Greek named Socrates emerged on the scene. Socrates spurned considerations of the natural world and focused rather on the inner moral world. The world of good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust. As Cicero would put it centuries later, "it was Socrates who first brought philosophy down from the sky."

These were brilliant beginnings. Science and moral theory were firmly in place.

Yet beneath the surface lurked the seeds of deep human conflict. The scientific world picture that has come about threatened to make morals and what matters in our lives part and parcel of the unfolding cause and effect scheme of science. Bertrand Russell once put it this way: "Such, in outline, but even more purposeless, more void of meaning, is the world which Science presents for our belief... That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms."

It certainly *seems* that we have a distinct freedom and dignity to make moral choices regarding what is right and what is wrong, what is just from what is unjust; But do we really? If we take the scientific world picture Russell describes as valid, would that imply our sense of value, of freedom and human dignity are actually based on false and illusory assumptions? Are moral matters, and our values more generally, merely a special case of the deterministic cause and effect scheme that natural science has presented to us?

These topics will be discussed and argued both pro and con in this course. Some basic logic too will part of our efforts to analyze and articulate the impact that science has had on our view of nature and the human condition.

15. Mass Extinctions (Prof. Stephanie Peek-Dosiek)

Extinction is forever. Or is it? In the geologic past, billions of species have gone extinct. The fossil record records five mass extinctions. A mass extinction is defined by the number of species that go extinct and the rate of the extinction. For this reason, many scientists believe we are currently in the middle of the sixth mass extinction. From the Columbian Mammoth to the Baiji River Dolphin, species are dying at a rate almost unparalleled in the history of the Earth. And humans seem to be the common thread that ties these extinctions together. Through readings, documentaries, discussions, and debates, we will question: Are we in the sixth mass extinction? Are humans responsible, directly or indirectly, for this extinction? Can we stop, or even reverse extinction? And if so, should we? How might we go about it? We will explore scientific, cultural, and ethical aspects of this incredibly controversial topic.

WINTER 2015 FYP COURSES

1. Brand Consciousness (Prof. Robert Samet)

Ours is a uniquely, some might say disturbingly, brand conscious age. It is through the commodities that we consume that most of us come to know ourselves, each other, and the world around us. This first-year seminar asks: What kind of knowledge is brand consciousness? What are its historical roots, its social manifestations, its quotidian practices? How does it compare with other ways of knowing? Over the course of the term we will investigate these and other questions through a series of texts about brands, commodities, and the rise of consumer marketing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The class will be divided into four sections. Part one introduces students to different critical approaches to advertising and commodities. Part two examines the historical and social context in which branding became the central device used by the advertising industry in the United States. Part three considers

the practices associated with branding from the perspectives of consumers and marketers. Finally, part four looks to apply a critical brand consciousness to contemporary issues that have real world implications.

2. On Travel (Prof. Stacie Raucci)

This course will explore the concept of travel in literature, film, and culture. We will consider why people travel and the possible effects of encountering difference. We will also discuss what it means to be a reader/watcher of someone else's travel narrative and what it is like to "travel" the world from the comfort of your sofa. The course will begin with an overview of the concept of travel before setting off on adventures with various people over a range of time periods and locations. We will start our wide-ranging journey with Homer's *Odyssey*, find ourselves in the 1950s with Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, and study abroad with the cast of *L'Auberge Espagnole* (2002), among others.

3. Remembering War: Myth, Monument and Media (Prof. Sara Watkins)

At one point in Homer's legendary tale of fantasy and adventure, the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is overwhelmed with emotion as he listens to the story of the sack of Troy. As he recalls the conflict, Odysseus's "heart melts and tears wet his cheeks," and the poet likens the hero to a widow whose husband has been killed in battle. As Odysseus's example shows, how we choose to remember war can, and has had, a powerful effect on human society from the ancient world to modern times. In this section of the Preceptorial, we will examine how humans have struggled to understand, remember, and learn from war. Beginning with the realm of myth itself, we will study the legend of the Trojan War and then expand the scope of our inquiry to a variety of historical conflicts, including the American civil war and Vietnam. Our evidence will range from literary narratives and physical monuments to photographs and films. Throughout the term, we discuss how war has been memorialized, by whom, and to whose benefit; the politics involved in crafting our collective memory of war; and whether, as the journalist and war correspondent Chris Hedges has argued, war is a "force that gives us meaning."

4. Literature, Ethics, and Environment (Prof. Katherine Lynes)

In this course we will consider and explore the intersections of human cultures and the environment, with an emphasis on the social and cultural dynamics of the environment and environmental action. Some questions we will consider: What are the ethical questions that we pose and wrestle with as we interact with and within our environment? What is the place of literature in community, literacy, and environmental activism? To what extent does place matter in our conceptions of what nature is? What are the connections between race, class, and environmental degradation and environmental activism? How do class and gender enter into the nexus of ethical considerations that shape our environment? We will consider both the concept of "nature" as we consider the concept of human culture. How does the language we use when writing about nature affect what we do in, for, and to nature?

This course is collaborative in nature, and as such students should bring their interests, curiosities, and discoveries to add to the mix.

A partial list of possible readings include those by Terry Tempest Williams, Barbara Kingsolver, Evelyn White, bell hooks, Benjamin Alire Sáenz, Luther Standing Bear, Running-Grass, Simon Ortiz, Ana Castillo, Amitav Ghosh, Wangari Maathai, readings from Orion magazine.

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6. Poop and Poison: What We Eat and What We Are (Prof. Hugh Jenkins)

Poop and Poison: What We Eat and What We Are. We may be the first culture ever to destroy itself by what and how we eat. Tomatoes that feel and taste like softballs. Meat marbled with hormones and chemicals. Frozen foods manufactured in factories in the Third World, flavored by chemists in New Jersey, and bulging waistlines and stopping hearts in the suburbs. We'll read about how Jefferson's dream of an agrarian republic has turned into a consumer emporium of both abundance and toxicity. We'll try to be balanced and look at arguments and taste food from both sides, but a fresh, organic meal or two may drive economic logic to the side. Students will also have the opportunity to help out with Union's "Octopus's Garden" and get their hands really dirty and calloused. We may take some side trips into rural culture (pickup trucks, country and bluegrass music, and the like) as well. All that and learning how to read critically and write well, too.

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8. Living Through Troubling Times (Prof. Jeannette Sargent)

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9. What We Know... or Think We Know: The Marketplace of Ideas (Prof. Denis Brennan)

The vast networks (traditional and electronic) which provide news, intelligence, perspective, and gossip enlighten our lives, and we believe that what we know (or think we know) provides a critical foundation for how we live. Information drives society today unlike ever before and the free exchange of information, uncensored expression of beliefs, and open competition between perspectives (i.e., the "marketplace of ideas") is essential for an energetic democracy like the United States. Today, however, the "marketplace of ideas" is endangered by the variety of perspective, the speed of information exchange, the drive to limit access to certain information, and the rhetorical transformation of the marketplace to talking points, headlines, and slogans. Teaching ourselves to read beyond the "lede" has perhaps become more important than ever. While inclined to view this as a modern phenomenon, information's use (and misuse) has a long and rich lineage. This course will use a variety of texts to study several critical past events and to examine what people knew, how they knew it, and evaluate the reliability of the information on which they depended. We will then use that knowledge to seek a better understanding of information's application in our own lives.

10. Love, Sex and Marriage in the Contemporary US (Prof. Angela Ellis)

Within the last five years, New York has permitted for the first time both no-fault divorce and same-sex marriage. Regardless of an individual's feelings about such policy shifts, it remains undeniable that expectations for and even definitions of love, sex, and marriage are undergoing tremendous change in New York and the contemporary United States as a whole. In this preceptorial, we will consider in greatest depth such more narrowly focused aspects of this

wider trend as the rise of the so-called college hookup culture, the debate over legalizing polygamy, and the controversy over gender-neutral parenting. Together, we will read, watch, and analyze various depictions of American love, sex, and marriage in the twentieth-first century. In the process, we will ponder how the practices and institutions associated with our most private lives have broader, public implications and the extent to which they are natural, innate, and timeless; culturally constructed, externally imposed, and subject to change; or somewhere in between.

11. Reading Mythologies of New York City (Prof. Brigham Taylor)

This class takes America's most dynamic important city (some might say our only *real* city) and considers the ways in which the experience and the idea of New York have inspired the human imagination, and how this inspiration is expressed in literature and other art forms, as well as in popular culture. More specifically, we will be looking at New York City as the source and object of *mythologies*, as something symbolic that represents and explains values, beliefs, and ideas beyond its mere factual existence. These themes are not only ways of exploring our material; this class is itself a learning community working together and responding to each other as we develop and express insights and connections, and, just as our authors have, we will consider how New York City inspires our own imaginations.

12. The Other: A Stranger Among Us (Prof. Elena Reznikova)

In this course we will discuss the concept of the "other" by examining several narratives centered on the protagonist's search for identity. Invariably authors introduce these quests through the rhetorical device of the stranger. We will consider the image of the stranger in order to confront the estrangement inherent in family origins, gender and literary acceptance, and the author's unresolved feelings about him(her)self. Frequently the associations of a sense of place are bound together with memory, stasis and nostalgia. What gives a place a unique flavor is the fact that it is constructed out of a specific arrangement of social and physical relations that intersect at a particular point. The works selected center on the theme of alienation seen through the eyes of the stranger. We will discuss the function of this trope on three levels: the spatial, temporal and psychological. Of particular interest will be the disturbing 'falling away' from the family or group, and the movement from unity and acceptance to individuality and denial. Through a close reading of selected works, we will seek to understand the way one is able to construct and manipulate his/her own sense of place.

13. Riddles of Existence (Prof. David Barnett)

A traditional view holds that human life begins at conception, that an adult at the end of his or her life can be the same person that was once a child and who was before that that an embryo, and that this same person will go on to survive the death of his or her body. Does this traditional conception of human existence hold up to critical scrutiny? In this introductory philosophy course, we will address such fundamental questions of human existence as: When does life begin? When during the development of an embryo into an adult human being does one acquire moral rights? What is a mind, and what is the mind's relationship to the brain? Do animals have minds? Could robots or computers have minds someday? Do you have an immaterial soul that is capable of surviving the death of your body and brain? When does life end? Do human beings in a persistent vegetative state have the same right to life that most adult humans have? Is euthanasia ever morally permissible? No prior background in philosophy will be presupposed, although a willingness to ask difficult questions and develop careful and methodical reasoning in support of one's answers will be essential.

14. Arts and Politics at the Turn of 20th Century (Prof. Cigdem Cidam)

In this class, we will explore the origins and ongoing influence of what came to be known as "modernism" in art by focusing on the rapid developments and contentious debates that were taking place in the social, political, and economic life of Europe at the turn of the twentieth century. We will ask: How did the developments in the field of artistic creation during the late 1800s and early 1900s reflect, challenge, and shape the sexual mores, cultural understandings, manners, and norms in Europe? What were the artistic, philosophical, economic, and political responses to the devastating experience of the Great War that began in 1914? To what extent, our understanding of art is still shaped by the debates that took place during this period? To address these questions, we will critically analyze a wide-range of artistic, philosophical, historical, and political works which include, among others, novels and/or short-stories by Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann, and Marcel Proust, selections from the writings of Henri Bergson, Hannah Arendt, and Sigmund Freud, musical works by Igor Stravinski, and paintings by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque.

15. An Eye for An Eye: Retribution, Retaliation and Justice (Prof. Peter Bedford)

In ancient and medieval societies it was commonly thought that justice was best served by punishing the perpetrator exactly according to the crime committed (literally, 'an eye for an eye'; *lex talionis* in Roman law), although monetary compensation to the victim might be allowed. In modern society different principles of justice prevail, although we occasionally hear calls for a return to a regime of punishment more in line with these earlier notions of retaliation. This class examines the history of the 'eye for an eye' theory of justice and compares it to other views, inviting critical reflection on how we conceptualize the notion of 'justice'

16. Dream Café: Viewing Culture through Dreams (Prof. Patsy Culbert)

How do we define ourselves through dreams? How do artistic and literary representations of dreams speak to our communal understanding? Are the archetypes of our dreams universal? How do artists shape dreams to reflect culture? We'll look at dreams through the eyes of writers, artists, playwrights, film makers. We'll view different cultures through the medium of dreams. We'll research the science of dream theory and look at how the psychology of dreams has shaped how we view dreams. Course readings and writings will encourage critical evaluation of these questions on a personal, individual basis and on a communal, reflective level.

17. Mass Extinctions (Prof. Stephanie Peek-Dosiek)

Extinction is forever. Or is it? In the geologic past, billions of species have gone extinct. The fossil record records five mass extinctions. A mass extinction is defined by the number of species that go extinct and the rate of the extinction. For this reason, many scientists believe we are currently in the middle of the sixth mass extinction. From the Columbian Mammoth to the Baiji River Dolphin, species are dying at a rate almost unparalleled in the history of the Earth. And humans seem to be the common thread that ties these extinctions together. Through readings, documentaries, discussions, and debates, we will question: Are we in the sixth mass extinction? Are humans responsible, directly or indirectly, for this extinction? Can we stop, or even reverse extinction? And if so, should we? How might we go about it? We will explore scientific, cultural, and ethical aspects of this incredibly controversial topic.