DEAN'S LECTURE SERIES SCHEDULE 2017-18
St. John's College – Santa Fe, New Mexico

SPRING 2018 SEMESTER

Date	Event
January 19	**"How To Destroy Modernity"** **Speaker**: Michael Grenke St. John's College, Santa Fe In the second book of his Utopia, Thomas More describes a seemingly ideal and idyllic polity. It is at once a noplace, an ou-topia, and a good place, an eu-topia. This ideal polity starts out as an island separate from the world outside, which is rapidly embracing and advancing modernity. But if his ideal island is a successful ordering of human life, as it is intended to be, its inhabitants will multiply. Rather than limiting its population, the polity of Utopia is intended to grow. With such growth, Utopia will extend beyond its island and come into contact with and competition with other, modernized polities. Thus in the Utopia, More depicts a clash between an ideal, but realistic, ancient way of life and kind of modern way of life that is just coming into being in his time and that might be anticipated from conceptions that are just entering the public consciousness at that time. Although More sketches a kind of ancient life in his Utopia, it is an ancient life that it meant to compete with and keep up with Modernity. In fact, there are a number of features of the depiction of Utopia that suggest it is intended ultimately to overcome or destroy Modernity.

February 2

"The Philosophical Hitchcock: Vertigo and The Anxieties of Unknowingness"

Speaker: Robert Pippin
University of Chicago, The Committee on Social Thought
Annual Steiner Lecture

In almost all of Hitchcock's films, people have a great deal of trouble understanding each other. The human condition, as he seems to understand it, is one where self-knowledge and reliable understanding of others seem extremely difficult because of deceit, self-deceit, wishful thinking, and simple ignorance. The most famous manifestations of this are the many films in which the wrong person is blamed for or suspected of something. In his masterpiece, Vertigo, this situation of general unknowingness is extreme, and the consequences more catastrophic than in any of his other films. I explore here the philosophical presuppositions and implications of this depiction, showing several scenes as a way of exploring why he seems to think we are in such a situation and why he thinks it becomes ever more difficult in late modern, advanced societies.

Robert Pippin is the Evelyn Stefansson Nef Distinguished Service Professor in the Committee on Social Thought, the Department of Philosophy, and the College. He works primarily on the modern German philosophical tradition, with a concentration on Kant and Hegel. In addition he has published on issues in theories of modernity, political philosophy, theories of self-consciousness, the nature of conceptual change, and the problem of freedom. He has a number of interdisciplinary interests, especially those that involve the relation between philosophy and literature and has published a book on Henry James and articles on Proust, modern art, and contemporary film. He is currently finishing a book on Hegel's practical philosophy and is at work on a book about political psychology in American film.

February 7

"Legal Punishment: Is It Moral?"

Speaker: Claudia Hauer
St. John's College, Santa Fe

This lecture asks how legal (state-mandated) punishment could be morally justified. The moral argument put forth here rests on an often assumed connection between responsibility and redemption. This essay evaluates the moral claims of this assumption, which when understood philosophically, can potentially guide communities to reasoned and moral responses to inflammatory criminal cases. This discussion looks at one such criminal case that resulted in the sexual assault conviction of a college student, a case that illustrates the importance of a drawing a principled connection between our notions of personal moral responsibility and our assessment of social functioning. This lecture will argue that for the moral claims of legal punishment to be fulfilled, the connection between responsibility and redemption is central, yet both responsibility and redemption place a weighty burden not just on the offender, but on members of the affected community as well. If state-administered punishment is to achieve its moral aspirations, this connection offers the offender the best chance of returning to society as a contributing member, and offers the community the means for the restoration of broken trust on which successful reintegration depends.

February 16

"Descartes on Imagination and Truth"

Speaker: Mary Domski
University of New Mexico

In the epistemic scheme that Descartes forwards in the *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) the intellect takes pride of place. It is our intellectual access to clear and distinct perceptions that offers us the possibility of true knowledge, and it is our reliance on the obscure and confused sensory representations that enter the imagination, which distract us from what is certain and indubitable. And yet, in both the *Meditations and the Principles of Philosophy* (1644), we find Descartes presenting arguments that depend on what is imaginable, not on what is intellectually grasped. This is most conspicuous in Part III of the *Principles* where he supports his Vortex Hypothesis of planetary motion by imagining possible explanations for the phenomena in the visible universe. In the *Meditations*, the imagination also serves a crucial role in the Method of Doubt as Descartes posits scenarios that are meant to motivate doubts about the Meditator's formerly held beliefs. During this lecture, I will unpack some of the arguments from Part III of the *Principles* and the First Meditation, and as I do, I will try to illuminate the relationship that Descartes establishes between the imagination and truth. Ultimately, I hope to show that, for Descartes, comprehending our epistemic situation and our natural circumstances depends both on what the imagination indicates is possible and on what the intellect reveals to be certain.

Mary Domski is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of New Mexico. Before joining the UNM faculty in 2005, She taught at Fresno State for two years, and before that, was a graduate student at Indiana University, where she earned her PhD in the History and Philosophy of Science. Herresearch focuses on the interplay of philosophy, mathematics, and science in the early modern period (and in the work of Descartes, Newton, and Kant, in particular).

She regularly teaches courses in early modern philosophy and philosophy of science, and is the recipient of four UNM teaching awards: the 2014 Presidential Teaching Fellowship, the 2011 Faculty Teaching Award from the UNM Alumni Association, the 2009 Award for Teaching Excellence from the College of Arts & Sciences, and the 2006-2007 Outstanding Teacher of the Year Award.

Currently, she is an Associate Editor for *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science, Part A* as well as Vice President of HOPOS, the International Society for the History of Philosophy of Science.

February 23

"Thomas Aquinas's Second Way to Prove the Existence of God"

Speaker: James Carey
St. John's College, Santa Fe

In the *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas Aquinas presents Five Ways to prove the existence of God. The First Way, which is essentially Aristotle's argument for a first mover, depends on a theory of motion, even a whole cosmology, that modern science has seriously called into question. The Second Way, however, does not logically depend on Aristotelian physics. Nor does it logically depend, even covertly, on the claims of revelation. It is a properly metaphysical argument, and is based on a conception of being that Thomas argues for in an early work, *De Ente et Essentia.* Because the Second Way as presented in the *Summa Theologiae* is a telescoped and elliptically expressed version of the proof advanced more extensively and with greater rigor in *De Ente et Essentia*, it is easy to misunderstand, and hence to underestimate as well. My lecture, which presupposes prior familiarity neither with Thomas Aquinas nor with Aristotle, aims at clarifying what is obscure in the Second Way as it is presented in the *Summa Theologiae*, assessing the cogency of the premises on which the argument is based, and determining whether the logical structure of the argument is valid or invalid.

March 2

"We Shall Be Monsters: *Frankenstein* and the Ugliness of Science"

Speaker: Jeff Black
St. John's College, Annapolis
This lecture is part of the Carol J. Worrell Series on Literature

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is often read as a warning about the dangers posed to our happiness by modern science and technology. This lecture will argue that it is also, and more deeply, a meditation on the ugliness of the desire to know meditation conducted by way of a sustained engagement with the thought of one modern philosopher in particular. We will explore Shelley's meditation by following the course of four educations depicted in the novel: that of Victor Frankenstein, that of the monster, that of the explorer Robert Walton, and that of the novelist herself.

March 30

"Arithmetic as a Liberal Art"

Speakers: Jacques Duvoisin, Topi Heikkerö, and one to three other members of the Jacob Klein study group.

Tutor Panel on Mathematics

The panel will inquire into the following question: What does it mean to study arithmetic as a liberal art? It will consist of three to five short talks, 10 to 15 minutes each. After about an hour of prepared presentations the discussion will include the audience as well. The panel is part of our faculty study group on Jacob Klein's *Greek Mathematical Thought and Origin of Algebra* (1934-1936). Klein was a long time tutor at the College and dean on Annapolis campus. The topic of the panel, *Arithmetic as a Liberal Art*, is intended to cover a range of presentations emerging from our study of Klein's work, including an account of the *quadrivium* that takes arithmetic as the first mathematical art, which differs to some extent from the Euclidian view that is most familiar to us. The common theme of the panel is raise questions about the place of arithmetic, algebra, and number theory in a liberal arts curriculum. We hope this will be an occasion to have a conversation about the philosophical and human significance of the role of the mathematics tutorials in the program.

April 6

"Ahantā, Medieval India's Anti-Cartesian Solution to the Mind-Body Problem"

Speaker: Loriliai Biernacki
University of Colorado, Boulder
Annual Rohrbach Lecture

How do we get something so intangible and complex as consciousness out of something so different from consciousness as body, neurons and messy gray matter? The contemporary West has been baffled by this, the "hard problem." This talk explores a medieval Indian solution to the problem, Abhinavagupta's conception of ahantā, "I-ness" as a way of linking the body to the elusive immateriality of consciousness. Abhinavagupta's solution draws on a foundational first-person perspective, that steers clear of our familiar Cartesian dualities of soul and body.

Loriliai Biernacki is Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Colorado at Boulder. Her research interests include Hinduism, ethics, gender and the interface between religion and science. Her first book, *Renowned Goddess of Desire: Women, Sex and Speech in Tantra* (Oxford, 2007) won the Kayden Award in 2008. She is co-editor of God's Body: *Panentheism across the World's Religious Traditions* (Oxford 2013). She is currently working on a study on the 11th century Indian philosopher Abhinavagupta within the framework of wonder, the new materialisms and ideas of the body and the body-mind interface.

April 17

"James Madison: The Founder of American Founding"

Speaker: James Caesar
University of Virginia

The lecture will show how the classic idea of political founding, rejected in much of modern political thought, was revived and altered by James Madison. This idea, barely noticed today, contributes to a distinct and important understanding of the past and our relationship to the Constitution.

James W. Ceaser is Professor of Politics at the University of Virginia, where he has taught since 1976. He has written several books on American politics and political thought, including Presidential Selection, Liberal Democracy and Political Science, Reconstructing America, and Nature and History in American Political Development. Professor Ceaser has held visiting professorships at the University of Florence, the University of Basel, Oxford University, the University of Bordeaux, and the University of Rennes. Professor Ceaser is a frequent contributor to the popular press, and he often comments on American Politics for the Voice of America.

April 20

"Persons and Parables: Stanley Elkin's Menagerie"

Speaker: Joshua Kates
Indiana University
This lecture is part of the Carol J. Worrell Series on Literature

Stanley Elkin is perhaps the greatest stylist of English prose of whom no one, or nearly no one, has heard. Reasons for this can be found in his fictions. Though his narrators provide many realistic and telling observations of everyday life, their actual stories make it impossible to see them as people "like us," or perhaps even persons at all. The obstacles Elkin's plots pose to the formation of audience, however, themselves serve, I believe, as meditations on personhood—especially on the relation of individuals to the collective and of both to nature. Hence, making passing reference to the work of some recent philosophers, but mainly by way of careful detailed reading, this talk tries to make sense of some of the stranger features of Elkin's stories: such as his "The Making of Ashenden" culminates with the main character having sex with a bear; or his "I Look Out for Ed Wolfe," ends with a desperately lonely character mistaking a sexual advance for an occasion to attempt to reinvent chattel slavery.

My early work focused on the roots of French poststructuralism (particularly Jacques Derrida's thought) in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger. I conceived this interest against a backdrop of questions concerning the methodology of literary studies and the humanities. Since publishing Fielding Derrida in 2008, I have returned to my original concerns, with a project that investigates various models of history, language, and discourse employed in literary, philosophical, and other humanistic scholarship. I have written articles questioning historical frameworks, such as the period, that lay claim to broader totalities in contrast to ones that center on more discrete and individuated historical flows or traditions. In tandem with such discrete historical currents, which I call historicity, I have been investigating alternative views on language that privilege language in use (discourse) over language as such, whether conceived through structures, senses, propositions, or words. In my recent teaching, I have pursued these questions in courses on first-person contempory narratives (Teju Cole, Ben Lerner, Sheila Heti), the hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer, and the work of discourse-oriented philosophers and critics, such as Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, and Charles Altieri.

April 27

"Vibrating Bodies, Disembodied Vibrations"

Speaker: Howard Fisher
St. John's College, Santa Fe

There is a remarkable analogy between *vibrating bodies* and *oscillating electrical circuits*. Even the mechanical properties *elasticity* and *inertia* have their electrical analogs. But for the analogy to be complete, should there not also be an electrical counterpart to the *body* as well as to its properties? Yet what kind of "body," or analogy to body, can an *electric circuit represent*? This is the first of two talks on electromagnetic oscillations.

May 2

"Vibrating Space"

Speaker: Howard Fisher
St. John's College, Santa Fe

Oscillations in an electrical circuit necessarily produce electromagnetic waves in space; and space itself turns out to have characteristics that are glaringly analogous to the mechanical properties of vibrating bodies. How firm, then, is the distinction between matter and space? Ought we perhaps to regard *space itself*, insofar as it supports electromagnetic waves, as a vibrating body?

May 4

"Genji: The Shining Prince and a Rainy Night"

Speaker: Jay Smith
St. John's College, Santa Fe
This lecture is part of the Carol J. Worrell Series on Literature