

**Sample Seminar Syllabus**  
**Introduction to Social Philosophy**  
**Fall 2019**

**Instructor:** Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini

**Office Hours:** [TBA]

**Course Email:** [TBA]

### **Course Description**

Our social positions — characterized by factors like race, gender, sexual orientation, and affluence — shape the trajectories of our lives in myriad ways, determining to a significant extent whether we experience subordination or privilege, whether we are given the benefit of the doubt or received with suspicion, and whether we are regarded in culture as normal or deviant. But what *are* these factors in terms of which we define our social positions? What is the ontological status of categories like race and gender? And what are the mechanisms whereby our social positions shape our lives and others' perceptions of us?

This course is an introduction to social philosophy focusing on three of its most dynamic subfields: social metaphysics, social epistemology, and social philosophy of language. In social metaphysics, we will discuss the metaphysics of social construction as it pertains to three socially significant categories: race, gender, and sexual orientation. In addition to asking descriptive questions about these categories, we will engage with the ameliorative tradition, which seeks to replace our existing understandings with ones that better serve the purpose of promoting of social justice. In social epistemology, we will explore the contributions of the feminist tradition and the recent literature on epistemic injustice before considering applications to the philosophy of race, disability, and sexual orientation. In social philosophy of language, we will focus on the ways in which language can be used to establish, reinforce, exercise, and occasionally subvert relations of power between individuals and groups. In particular, we will study the power of generic language and slurs to shape how we think about members of particular social groups and the ways in which certain speech acts can be used to subordinate, silence, and control.

### **Textbook**

There will be no textbook for this course. All readings will be made available online.

### **Assignments and Grading**

Grades in this course will be based on three papers of approximately 3,000 words each, one of which will be due at the end of each unit. Paper topics must be related to the themes of the unit for which they are written, though they need not engage directly with

any of the readings. I highly recommend discussing your paper ideas with me well in advance of each deadline.

## **Semester Overview**

### **Unit 1: Social Metaphysics**

Week 1: Sally Haslanger, "Ontology and Social Construction"

Week 2: Sally Haslanger, "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?"

Week 3: Katharine Jenkins, "Amelioration and Inclusion: Gender Identity and the Concept of *Woman*"

Week 4: Anthony Appiah, "The Uncompleted Argument: DuBois and the Illusion of Race"

Week 5: Charles Mills, "'But What Are You *Really*?' The Metaphysics of Race"

Week 6: Robin Dembroff, "What is Sexual Orientation?"

### **Unit 2: Social Epistemology**

Week 7: Miranda Fricker, *Testimonial Injustice*, Chapter 1 ("Testimonial Injustice") and Chapter 2 ("Prejudice in the Credibility Economy")

Week 8: Elizabeth Anderson, "Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and a Defense"

Week 9: Charles Mills, "White Ignorance"

Week 10: Elizabeth Barnes, *The Minority Body*, Chapter 4 ("Taking Their Word for It")

Week 11: Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini, "Gaslighting in Axiology"

### **Unit 3: Social Philosophy of Language**

Week 12: Sarah-Jane Leslie, "Carving Up the Social World with Generics"

Week 13: Elisabeth Camp, "Slurring Perspectives"

Week 14: Rae Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts"

Week 15: Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, Chapter 4 ("Language as a Mechanism of Control")