

Thesis Preparation Seminar

Spring 2015

Instructor: Laura Franklin-Hall, lrf217@nyu.edu
Meetings: W 2:00 – 4:00 pm (5 Washington Place, room 202)
Office Hours: by appointment (5 Washington Place, room 407)

Summary

The Thesis Preparation Seminar is a venue at which NYU Philosophy PhD students have an opportunity to: 1) advance their dissertation projects by obtaining feedback on work-in-progress; 2) gain experience presenting work and responding to questions; 3) gain experience asking questions and engaging with the work of others productively and supportively, 4) learn about work being done by colleagues.

Each meeting will be dedicated to the work of one presenter, who may choose from the following four formats:

- 1) The no-presentation option: a paper will be distributed by Friday for discussion the following Wednesday. There will be no presentation of the paper and thus we will move immediately into a general discussion.
- 2) The short-hybrid option: a paper will be distributed by Friday for discussion the following Wednesday. The session will begin with a short (e.g., 10 – 15 minute) presentation by the author, followed by open discussion.
- 3) The long-hybrid option: a paper will be distributed by Friday for discussion the following Wednesday. The session will begin with a colloquium-style presentation by the author (e.g., 50 minutes), followed by Q&A.
- 4) The colloquium option: no paper is distributed in advance. The session will begin with a colloquium-style presentation (e.g., 50 minutes), followed by Q&A.

Attendance: Those presenting papers in the seminar should make their best effort to attend all sessions.

Schedule

Meetings will take place on the following dates:

January 28 – Harjit B.

February 4 – Vera F.

February 11 – Dan W.

February 18 – Camil G.

February 25 – Max B.

March 4 - Mike Z.

March 11 – Camil G. (2nd)

March 25 - Zee P.

(April 1 – NO MEETING),

April 8 – Michelle D.

April 15 – Ian G.

April 22 – Martin A.

April 29 – Dan W. (2nd)

May 6 – Mike (2nd)

Discussion Guidelines

Members of our department have recently drafted guidelines for seminars and presentations. I include them on our syllabus as a reminder of the norms governing productive scholarly interactions.

I. Respect

1. Be nice.
2. Don't be incredulous, roll your eyes, make faces, laugh at a participant, or start side conversations.
3. Don't present objections as flat dismissals (leave open the possibility that there's a response).
4. Don't speak over others, especially toward the beginning of an exchange (later in a long exchange or a long speech, there's more room for back and forth with interruption, but it's always good to let people get their point out first).
5. It's good to acknowledge your interlocutor's insights as well as those of previous contributors.

II. Constructiveness

1. Objections are fine, but it's also always OK to build on a speaker's project. Even objections can often be cast in a constructive way, and even destructive objections can often be usefully accompanied by a positive insight suggested by the objection.
2. If you find yourself thinking that the project is worthless and there is nothing to be learned from it, think twice before asking your question.
3. It's OK to question the presuppositions of a project or an area, but discussions in which these questions dominate can be unhelpful.
4. There's no need to keep pressing the same objection (individually or collectively) until the speaker says uncle.
5. Remember that philosophy isn't a zero-sum game.

III. Inclusiveness

1. Don't dominate the discussion (partial exception for the speaker).
2. Try not to let your question (or your answer) run on forever. Raise one question per question (follow-ups developing a line of thought are OK, but questions on separate topics can wait). You can usually talk more with the speaker after the talk.
3. It's OK to ask a question that you think may be unsophisticated or uninformed.
4. Don't use unnecessarily offensive examples.

5. Chairs should attempt to balance discussion between participants, prioritizing people who haven't spoken before, and keeping in mind the likelihood of various biases (e.g. implicit gender biases) when calling on questioners and applying these guidelines.