On What is Not
Fall 2020

CUNY, GC: PHIL 76500
Columbia University: PHIL GR9515

Place/Time: Online. Tuesdays 2pm–4pm. First class, September 8; last class, December 8. Zoom links will be sent out at least half an hour before meetings.

Extra Classes: Because of the large number of students, we will be putting on two extra classes per week for enrolled students. (Times to be arranged.) We will teach one each. Students may go to one or other of these. These classes will be driven by questions from students.

Graham Priest:
Office: GC 7113.02. Phone: 917-391-4114. Email: priest.graham@gmail.com

Achille Varzi:
Office: CU 713 Philosophy. Phone: 212-854-3531. Email: achille.varzi@columbia.edu

Office Hours: Students who wish to talk with us outside class should email to arrange a time for a Zoom chat.

Description: It seems clear that in some sense the world contains things that are: people and planets, societies and works of art, and maybe numbers and other abstract objects. Many philosophers have held that it contains, equally, things that are not. But if they are not, how can such things be in the world? Indeed, does the notion of something that is not even make sense? This seminar will investigate. Some of the topics and philosophers we may meet include: Plato on non-being; non-existent objects (Meinong); negative facts (Russell); omissions, absences, and our perception thereof (Sartre, Nyāyā philosophers); nothingness (Heidegger, Nishida); holes, silences, pauses; negative epistemic states; the empty world, the null mereological individual—and what-not.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course students should be able to think more critically about the issues the course covers, and explain and defend their views on these matters.
**Program:** The first class will be an introduction; the last class will be a wind-up. For the other classes, reading will be set. This will be distributed the week before. Reading will be of two kinds: required and optional. You are expected to do the required reading before the class and come along prepared to discuss it. Enrolled students are expected to email us a question on the texts they have been reading suitable to be discussed in class. We need to receive this no later than the Sunday before the class.

**Assessment:** The grade for the course will be determined by a term paper, due at the end of the semester, exact date to be determined.

**Provisional Schedule**
(This may be adjusted as we go along.)

1 **September 8 — INTRODUCTORY SESSION. NO READING**

2 **September 15 — THE SOPHIST ON NON-BEING**

   Optional reading:
   - Varzi, A (ed.), A brief selection of relevant texts from Aristotle and some Medievals.

3 **September 22 — NON-EXISTENT OBJECTS**

   Optional reading:


### September 29 — IMPOSSIBILIA

(NB. This is a Monday schedule at the GC, but we will meet anyway.)


Optional reading:


### October 6 — ABSENCES

• Sartre, J. P. (1984), *Being and Nothingness*, tr. H. Barnes, New York, NY: Washington Square Press, ch. 1. [Omit sections III and IV if you don’t know much about Hegel and Heidegger. Section V will become relevant when we discuss nothingness.]

Optional reading:


### October 13 — NYĀYĀ ON ABSENCES


Optional reading:


7 **October 20 — NEGATIVE STATES OF AFFAIRS**

• Demos, R. (1917), ‘A Discussion of a Certain Type of Negative Proposition’, *Mind* 26: 188–196.


Optional reading:


8 **October 27 — OMISSIONS AND NEGATIVE EVENTS**


Optional reading:


9 **November 3 — HOLES**

(NB. This is Columbia holiday, but we will meet anyway.)


Optional reading:


10 November 10 — HEIDEGGER ON NOTHINGNESS


Optional reading:


11 November 17 — NOTHINGNESS AND THE NULL INDIVIDUAL


Optional reading:


November 24 — NISHIDA ON NOTHINGNESS


- Priest, G. (202+), ‘*Nothingness, the Ground of Reality, Heidegger, and Nishida*’, ms.

Optional reading:


December 1 — WINDUP SESSION. NO FURTHER READING

December 8 — OPTIONAL QUESTION SESSION