PHIL 323
“Puzzles of the Imagination: From Childrens’ Worlds to Philosophers’ Worlds”

Wednesdays 11:40-14:30 in FASS 2101
Fridays 9:40-12:30 in FASS 1080

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The imagination is an astonishing faculty of our minds. As an integral part of human life and culture, it plays an important role in various fields: from art to architecture, in technological inventions or scientific progress, in daily plans and understanding other people’s behavior. But it is also a puzzling phenomenon: For example, while reading a novel, imagining a scenario can sometimes make us cry. How can fiction generate such strong emotional responses given that we do not believe that the imagined characters exist? Or, when, in a fiction, a mother kills her baby on the grounds of its gender, and the story tells us that this was the right thing to do, we resist imagining what the author describes. Given that we have generally no difficulties in entertaining most fantastic and improbable stories, why can we not allow fictional worlds to differ in fundamental moral respects from the real world as we understand it? Or, can you imagine a zombie, a creature lacking consciousness? If yes, then for many contemporary philosophers, you have just proven the truth of dualism, the thesis that mental facts cannot be reduced to physical facts. How can our imaginative exercises be in a position to confirm or refute significant philosophical theses?

This interdisciplinary course will introduce to some of such puzzles surrounding the notion of imagination. We will start by listing some convergences and divergences among the scholars about the nature of imagination and its cognitive development. Are mental images constitutive for imagination? Is imagination akin to perception, only less intensive? Or is it rather belief-like given that it mirrors the inferential role of beliefs? After getting an idea about the different notions of imagination and what they involve, we will study the imagination in early childhood. When children pretend to be trains or have a tea-party after the age of 2, what do their activities tell us about their conceptual development? What is different in the imaginative capacities of autistic children? How do pretend mental states relate to adults’ use of imagination when they try to put themselves into another’s shoes?

In surveying four issues related to the imagination, this course will encourage the participants to think about possible answers to the above mentioned puzzle of pretence, the puzzle of emotions and fiction, the puzzle of imaginative resistance, and the puzzling relation
between imagination and possibility. No prior acquaintance with philosophy or cognitive psychology is required.

**Evaluation:**

Active Participation: 10 %

Questions on Reading: 20 % (3-4 very brief questions on the readings of the week to be answered at home)

Mid-Term Exam: 30 %

Final Exam: 40 %

**Required Readings:**


**Schedule of Readings:**

**WEEK I**

**Introduction:** What is this course about?


**WEEK II**


**WEEK III**


**WEEK IV**


WEEK V

Mid-Term Exam

WEEK VI


**Imagination and Possibility I**: Descartes, R., *Meditations*, selections from the sixth meditation and from Objections and Replies, and Hume, D., selections from *A Treatise Concerning Human Understanding*.

WEEK VII


**Imagination and Possibility III**: Kripke, S., selections from *Naming and Necessity*.

WEEK VIII

Recapitulation and Resume

Final Exam