

UNLV

PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM SERIES

SPRING 2026

1. Friday, January 30, 2026, 3:00pm in CHB C122

“Abortion and Utility.”

Alastair Norcross, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Colorado, Boulder

In this talk, I explore what position a utilitarian should take on (i) the morality and (ii) the legality of abortion. Regarding (i), since utilitarians, like other consequentialists, deny any fundamental moral significance to the doing/allowing distinction, abortion would appear to have roughly the same moral status as the (successful) use of contraception or the choice not to procreate. I present and criticize the case for saying that utilitarians should be in favor of increased human procreation. Regarding (ii), I take an approach similar to what I say about the non-identity problem in my recent book, which emphasizes the difference between moral reasons favoring certain actions and legal coercion to perform those actions. So, even if we think we are epistemically justified in believing either that utilitarian reasons generally favor fewer (or no) abortions, or, on the other hand, more abortions, we may well be justified in believing that legal coercion in either direction is a bad thing, on utilitarian grounds.

2. Friday, February 13, 2026, 3:00pm in CHB C122

“Socially Centered Discourse.”

Ravi Thakral, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Nevada, Reno

People often preface a claim by foregrounding part of their identity: “Speaking as an American...”, “Speaking as an immigrant...”, “Speaking as an educator...”. Although these locutions are widespread in everyday and public discourse, they are surprisingly under-theorized as a distinctive linguistic device. These phrases do more than add background. They change the kind of conversational move a speaker is making—what authority is being claimed, which objections are apt, and what sort of uptake the speaker is inviting. I argue that such “speaking as” constructions cannot be understood simply as speaking for a group, nor simply as straightforward first-person testimony. I develop a metalinguistic account on which “speaking as” is used to negotiate both category membership and epistemic/normative standing. This account unifies the sense in which some uses seem to involve speaking for a group, while others seem closer to first-person testimony, without collapsing either into the other.

3. Friday, February 27, 2026, 3:00pm in CHB C122

“Natural Psychological Kinds - An Integrative Proposal.”

Jasmin Özel, Minnesota Center for Philosophy of Science, UMN, Twin Cities

The homeostatic property cluster framework for natural kinds has proven useful across various scientific contexts, particularly those requiring multiple levels of explanation. In this framework, natural kinds are considered clusters of co-occurring properties sustained by underlying homeostatic mechanisms, such as biological species exhibiting shared traits (property clusters) maintained by genetic and evolutionary processes (homeostatic mechanisms). This talk discusses and develops the recent application of this framework to psychological constructs, emphasizing its capacity to integrate cognitive science, neuroscience, and neuropsychiatry explanations that inform our understanding of mental phenomena.

4. Friday, March 6, 2026, 3:00pm in CHB C122

“Does Cognitive Science Show That Digital Minds Are Possible?”

Carl Sachs, School of Humanities, Marymount University

One widespread argument for the feasibility of digital minds holds that digital minds are possible because biological cognition is computational and computational processes are substrate-neutral. If biological cognition is essentially computational, and computations are substrate-neutral, then the same or similar computational processes could be implemented by digital computers. In short, digital minds are possible just because biological minds are themselves computational.

However, there are crucial distinctions between biological and digital computations. Biological cognition is ecological, where computations are realized across the organism-environment relation. Organisms are adaptive autopoietic agents; environments are spaces of exploitable affordances that are not pre-determined in advance of biological agency. By contrast, digital technologies are not genuinely adaptive nor genuinely autopoietic, and the computations they perform are over predetermined environments.

Hence, even if biological cognition has a computational basis and computation is substrate-neutral, we should not conclude that on that basis alone that digital minds are possible.

5. Friday, March 27, 2026, 3:00pm in CHB C122

“Conversion to Judaism: A Model for Ethnoracial Identity Change?”

Amy Reed-Sandoval, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Nevada Las Vegas

¡Mami sí es mexicana!, my then-four-year-old daughter shouted, tears in her eyes. I was trying to explain that while she and her father are Mexican, I am not. She seemed stunned by my words. Why would I deny all the ways in which Mexican culture is part of our familial life, from the language we speak at home, to the foods we eat, to our relationship to Mexico itself? I have had somewhat similar conversations with certain Mexican friends and family who say that yes, I am *gringa*, but *really*, I am Mexican. In such cases it feels wrong to agree that I am Mexican—but also wrong to stubbornly insist that I am not. Such conversations bring to my mind the words of *ranchera* singer Chavela Vargas, who was born in Costa Rica but eventually moved to Mexico and began to self-identity as Mexican. When asked how she could be Mexican if she was born in Costa Rica, Vargas famously replied: “we Mexicans are born wherever we want to be born!”

Such ethnoracial “boundary-crossings,” so to speak, are rendered all but unintelligible by biological conceptions of race that remain pervasive in many popular and academic contexts. As Osagie K. Obasogie explains, “the scientific method was used during the nineteenth century to ... move away from purely religious or cultural explanations to frame racial differences and disparities as objectively knowable and measurable products of nature” (2013, p. 10). Within this biologicistic paradigm, people whose senses of self may be shaped by their immersion in ethnoracial communities to which they lack the “right kind” of biological connection can only be viewed as mistaken, or even fraudulent.

Contra such a biologicistic view, I explore in this paper how at least *some* ethnoracial identities may be socially molded and even altered over time. To do this, I shall draw upon yet another personal experience: my conversion to Judaism. While conversion to Judaism entails a distinctive change in one's religious identity, it also brings about membership in an ethnoreligious community of which both the "ethnic" and "religious" components are nebulous. As Rebecca Alpert writes, "we Jews have always understood ourselves to be a people, a religion, a nation, an ethnicity, and/or some combination thereof. This complex group definition has caused some confusion about how much who we are is about biology and how much is about culture" (Alpert, 2007, p. 29). Adding to the "complexity" is the fact that when one converts to Judaism, they are understood to become a full member of this community, without qualification. In exploring the question of ethnoracial identity change, I shall limit my analysis to cases in which one is actually claimed as a member by a "different" ethnoracial group. My argument is not that I (nor Chavela Vargas, for that matter) have "converted" to an ethnic Mexican identity. Jewish conversion rituals are clearly defined by Jews themselves, and such "identity conversion" does not currently exist for most other ethnoracial identities. With these qualifications in mind, I shall explore the following questions: (1) Can conversion to Judaism provide resources for understanding other types of apparent ethnoracial identity conversion? (2) Could conversion to Judaism serve a possible *model* for other cases of ethnoracial identity conversion?

6. Friday, April 3, 2026, 3:00pm in CHB C122

"Non-Compact Proofs."

Sergei Artemov, Dept. of Philosophy, The Graduate Center, CUNY

Non-compact proofs are used in mathematics but overlooked in the analysis of (un)provability of consistency. We focus on arithmetical proofs of universal statements (*) "for any natural number n , $F(n)$." A proof of (*) is compact if all proofs of $F(n)$'s for $n=0,1,2,\dots$ fit into some finitely axiomatized fragment of Peano Arithmetic PA. An example of non-compact reasoning is the standard proof of Mostowski's 1952 reflexivity theorem: PA proves the consistency of its finite fragments.

It turns out that Gödel's Second Incompleteness Theorem, G2, prohibits compact proofs but does not rule out non-compact proofs of PA-consistency formalizable in PA. This explains why and how the recent proofs of PA-consistency in PA work: they essentially formalize in PA the explicit version of Mostowski's non-compact proof and use Gödelian provable explicit reflection to rid redundant provability operators.

These findings yield a new foundational reading of G2: the consistency of PA is not provable within a finite fragment of PA, complemented with the positive message: the consistency of PA is provable within the whole PA. This perspective suggests that Gödel's theorem does not represent a failure of the system to "know" its own consistency, but rather a structural limit on how that knowledge can be packaged into a single finite string.

7. Wednesday, April 22, 2026, 3:00pm in CHB C117 [Note the day and place]

"Responses to the Biblical Conquest Tradition."

Rabbi Brant Rosen, Tzedek Chicago, Chicago, IL

The Biblical commandment to the Israelites to conquer the land of Canaan and annihilate its inhabitants occurs repeatedly in the Torah - and is described in horrifying detail in the book of Joshua. The Biblical conquest tradition presents us with a serious moral challenge, particularly when we consider the ways these texts have historically been used to justify colonial conquest, including by the US and the state of Israel. In our session we will study these texts, learn about the ways they have been understood by Jewish commentators and Biblical scholars and how they have been instrumentalized by colonial powers. We will also explore potential ways we might respond to these narratives seriously without surrendering our morality - or our political convictions.

8. **Thursday, April 23, 2026, 4:00pm, Barrick Museum Auditorium [Note the day, time, and place]**
“The Growing Divide in the American Jewish Community Over Israel/Palestine.”
[University Forum Lecture]
Rabbi Brant Rosen, Tzedek Chicago, Chicago, IL

A recent Washington Post poll indicated that 4 out of 10 American Jews believe that Israel is guilty of committing genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. This is but one indicator of the massive changes underway in the American Jewish community’s relationship to Israel. These fissures over Israel have predated the last two years, particularly among younger generations of Jews. However, Israel’s massive violence against Palestinians in Gaza widened this divide into what many believe may be an unbridgeable gulf in the American Jewish community. In this presentation, we will examine this important Jewish communal shift, including the increasing involvement of antizionist Jews in the Palestine solidarity movement, the growth of organizations such as Jewish Voice for Peace and #IfNotNow and the nascent beginning of American Jews who are creating Jewish ritual spaces that affirm a Judaism beyond Zionism.

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For more information contact the
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