Disability, Ability, and the Idea of the Self
Prof. Jeremy Colangelo

As Emmanuel Levinas observes in his early book On Escape, the bourgeois subject “admits no inner division and would be ashamed to lack confidence in himself” and is instead wedded to a “conception of the ‘I’ as self-sufficient.” With this understanding as a starting point, Disability and the Idea of the Self examines how in the cultural arena of disability an understanding of the self as undivided and self sufficient becomes wrapped up with an understanding of normativity. One can understand the notion of ability, then, as a form of phenomenological hegemony, where a culturally manufactured understanding one’s own self as a self-sufficient unit substitutes for more complex understandings while producing “abled” subjects resistant both to notions of collective action and to the evidence of their already-existing dependencies.

Through the lens of disability theory, and to a lesser extent phenomenology, as well as a small number of literary texts, this course explores questions of how questions of abled and disabled selfhood play out in relation to (and at times against) broader conceptions of normativity. The course will discuss these questions in relation to a variety of disabilities (including impaired vision, deafness, and autism), while also drawing insights from queer studies, critical race studies, and postcolonial studies.

**Course Texts**
Melanie Yergeau, *Authoring Autism* (selection)
Theri Pickens, *Black Madness :: Mad Blackness*
Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory* (selection)
Tobin Siebers, *Disability Aesthetics*
Ato Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness* (selection)
Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy*
David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *The Biopolitics of Disability* (selection)
Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*
Emmanuel Levinas, *On Escape*
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind”
Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (selection)
Jacques Derrida, *Memoires of the Blind*

**Method of Evaluation**
Class contribution: 15%
Seminar: 25%
Short Paper: 20%
Final Paper: 40%