

FROM: Fred J. Abbate
TO: Dr. Shannon Gary
RE: Proposal for an Honors Colloquium

9 February 2011

COURSE TITLE:

The Jack the Ripper Case and the Logic of Criminal Detection

SUMMARY:

The brutal Whitechapel murders in the East End of London in 1888 have fascinated novelists, historians, criminal investigators, film makers and others for decades. The identity of the killer is still a topic of impassioned debate, and candidates for the "Jack the Ripper" moniker get more numerous by the year.

This course will use the Ripper case to examine some broader logical and philosophical questions raised by the frantic quest to solve the murders, issues that are embedded in the very methods of all criminal investigation. Among the topics: the canons of inductive reasoning, the logic of hypothesis formation, competing theories of explanation, evaluating claims of evidence, mental states and levels of responsibility, and the pragmatics of warranted probability claims. In addition to these issues, the course will also give students an opportunity to join the ranks of the millions of armchair detectives who have weighed in on the notorious case.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

At the successful conclusion of this course students should have:

- comprehended the differences of logical type among factual assertions and how evidence for them is connected with the analysis of field invariant and field dependent standards of coherence;
- understood the nature of induction, deduction, confirmation and explanatory inference, and see in what ways they serve as the foundations of methods of criminal analysis and detection;
- learned what factors strengthen or weaken the soundness of explanatory models, especially the subtler traps to avoid in assessing the probabilities of conclusions;
- recognized the underlying assumptions about mental states at work in criminal profiling, its limitations, and how the practice connects with scientific explanation and legal reasoning;
- become knowledgeable about the history and essentials of the Whitechapel murders and the theories that were at work in the police attempts to solve the murders;
- researched, proposed and defended--as members of a team--a comprehensive case that argues for a particular suspect as the infamous "Jack the Ripper."

APPROACH:

Class sessions will be a combination of lecture and discussion, beginning with the facts of the case itself, including the victims, principal (an anomalous) suspects, witnesses, coroner findings, investigative methods used by the Metropolitan Police, and media (newspaper) coverage. Each major area of the Ripper case will give rise to a discussion of a particular logical or wider philosophical issue.

WORK REQUIREMENTS:

Students will be graded both individually and as members of assigned teams of three or four (depending upon class size). (1) As individuals, they will be required to be fully prepared to lead a discussion in each class on the day's topic, take the mid-term examination and complete a written assignment; the latter two will require knowledge of the logical and philosophical questions our class discussions have been addressing. (2) Each team will make a formal presentation to the instructor and to the entire class as their final course project; it must be a well-researched and coherent case for a particular suspect as the most probable candidate for the Whitechapel serial killer. The teams will be expected to answer questions about their methodology and to defend their conclusions against challenges.

COURSE MATERIALS:

There will be two required texts for the course: Philip Sugden's *The Complete History of Jack the Ripper* and Stephen Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument*. Supplementary readings, problems, exercises and internet sites appropriate to the logical topics being examined will also be supplied. These will range from the classics of logic and philosophy of science (e.g., John Stuart Mill's *System of Logic*, Ernest Nagel's *Logic and Scientific Method*, John Dewey's *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*) to some contemporary works on forensics (e.g., Cyril Wecht's *Mortal Evidence*, Dorothy Lewis's *Guilty by Reason of Insanity*.) In addition, several recent documentaries about the Ripper case will be viewed and discussed.

GRADING BASIS:

Final grades for the course will be determined as follows: class preparedness and participation-10%; mid-term examination-30%; written assignment-20%; final team project- 40%

FACULTY MEMBER'S RELEVANT EXPERTISE:

- M.A. in Philosophy, Boston College
- Ph.D. in Philosophy, Columbia University
- I have been teaching philosophy in the Pennoni Honors College for several years, including courses on Philosophy, Science and Religion, Political Theory, and American Pragmatism
- I have taught undergraduate and graduate courses in logic, philosophy of science, analytic philosophy and philosophy of mind at Rutgers University, the City University of New York, and Iona College
- I am co-chairing, with Paula Marantz-Cohen, a conference on the Ripper case-- *Jack the Ripper Through a Wider Lens: An Interdisciplinary Conference* (which will be held at Drexel on October 28-29, 2011)