

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY SPRING 2019 COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

PHIL 2300-001	Beginning Philosophy	9:00 -9:50	MWF	ENG/PHIL 260
Dr. Joel Velasco				

This course will be organized around three major questions which we will approach from many different sides:
 1) Should I believe in God? 2) Do we have free will? and 3) Is government authority justified?

PHIL 2300-002	Beginning Philosophy	12:00-12:50	MWF	ENG/PHIL 163
PHIL 2300-003	Beginning Philosophy	1:00-1:50	MWF	ENG/PHIL 164
Douglas Westfall				

This class will take seriously the questions that have bothered you since childhood. Questions like: What can we know? Do I have a soul? Free will? Is there a God? How should I live my life? What is justice? etc. This class will focus on classic texts in order to shed light on these problems while providing an introduction to the philosophic cannon.

PHIL 2300-005	Beginning Philosophy	11:00-12:20	TR	ENG/PHIL 260
Dr. Anna Ribeiro				

What is philosophy? Has it always existed? Some of the questions that philosophers have tried to answer include what is the essence of all that exists, whether we have free will, what is the right way to live one's life, whether God's existence can be proven, and whether reason or sensory experience is the foundation of knowledge. We shall cover these and other questions in their historical context as we read through philosophical texts by some of the most influential thinkers in the Western tradition.

PHIL 2310-001	Logic	11:00-11:50	MWF	ENG/PHIL 260
PHIL 2310-002	Logic	10:00-10:50	MWF	ENG/PHIL 260
Dr. Joseph Gottlieb				

This is an introduction to symbolic logic via the study of sentential and predicate logic. Topics to be discussed include analyzing arguments, translating ordinary prose into a formal language, as well the methods of truth-tables, truth trees, and natural deduction in sentential and predicate logic.

PHIL 2310-D01	Logic	ONLINE	TBA	TBA
Dr. Christopher Hom				

A central aspect of reasoning is the ability to give arguments for one's conclusions. Logic is the formal representation of arguments, so mastering logic is essential for good reasoning. In this course, we will investigate the underlying, logical form of sentences and the deductive relations that hold between them, thus giving us deeper insight into the notion of inference from premises to conclusion. The course will present three logical systems, each in increasing expressive power: sentential logic, monadic quantificational logic, and polyadic quantificational logic. For each system, we will closely examine the syntax of the system, its relation to English, its particular semantic features, and the general properties of satisfiability, validity, implication and equivalence.

This is an online course, so all lectures, handouts, assignments and exams will be on Blackboard. Exams require a regular computer (Windows/Mac computer or laptop). You cannot take exams from mobile devices (e.g. iPhone, iPad, Android devices, etc.). You also need a working webcam and microphone, and your computer will need the Google Chrome web browser.

PHIL 2320-003	Introduction to Ethics	11:00-11:50	MWF	BIOL LH100
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Dr. Howard Curzer

Contemporary ethics is dominated by three systems (virtue ethics, utilitarianism, deontology) proposed by three great philosophers (Aristotle, Mill, and Kant). Students in this course will come to understand these three moral systems. Students will be able to compare and contrast these three moral systems, weighing their strengths and weaknesses. Students will also apply each of these three moral systems to two contemporary moral problems (abortion and economic justice).

PHIL 2320-005	Introduction to Ethics	9:30-10:50	TR	ENG/PHIL 163
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PHIL 2320-006	Introduction to Ethics	11:00-12:20	TR	ENG/PHIL 163
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Dr. Jeremy Schwartz

How should we live? What is a good life? Ought I to forgo my own interests for the interests of another? Is it sometimes permissible to kill innocent human beings? Is it permissible to kill animals for food? Ethical philosophy attempts to answer these sorts of questions through reason and reflection. Within current ethical philosophy, there are three major schools of thought on how these sorts of questions should be answered: utilitarianism, virtue theory, and deontology. While each of these attempts to shed light on all of these questions merely through reason and reflection, each of them arrives at very different answers to these questions. In this class, we will investigate utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue theory in some detail by closely reading both the founding texts of each of the ethical theories as well as reading some modern re-interpretations and criticisms. In addition, in the last part of the class, we will seek to apply these theories to three test cases: abortion, animal rights, and global poverty. The application to test cases should both shed light on our intuitions about these morally contested issues but also shed light on the ethical theories themselves.

PHIL 2350-001	World Religion & Philosophy	10:00-10:50	MWF	ELECE 101
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Dr. Mark Webb

This course introduces students to the major world religions while placing a special emphasis on the philosophical issues related to religion. My approach is to cover each religion alongside the other religions of the larger tradition. I give special attention to the the different understandings of human nature and personhood, problems of human existence, and proposed solutions.

We cover the Vedic Tradition (Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism), the Chinese Tradition (Confucianism and Daoism), and the Abrahamic Tradition (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). In addition to discussing the basic tenets, practices, and history of each religion, we consider some of the philosophical commitments entailed by various religious beliefs. When feasible, we will invite guest speakers representing different religions and take field trips to worship sites.

PHIL 3303-001	Modern European Philosophy	11:00-12:20	TR	ENG/PHIL 164
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PHIL 3303-002	Modern European Philosophy	2:00-3:20	TR	ENG/PHIL 163
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Dr. Francesca DiPoppa

This course will offer an overview of the major philosophical debates in the age from Bacon to Kant (early 17th to late 18th century). Among the topics covered, issue in metaphysics and epistemology (such as the problem of causation and the quest for a clear and certain knowledge), ethics (questions on duty and human happiness), religious epistemology and some political thought. We will read, among others, Descartes, Bacon, Malebranche, Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibniz and Kant.

PHIL 3304-001

Existentialism/Phenomenology

12:30-1:50 TR

ENG/PHIL 164

Dr. Howard Curzer

What unites the existentialist is not their individual philosophies, but the nature of the problems that they set out to explore. We will discuss the following themes:

Primacy of the Individual: Traditional philosophy, modern science, and the industrial revolution have reduced people to an abstraction. Existentialists maintain that the truths of human existence cannot be known through detached observation and contemplation, but must be inwardly appropriated through the experience of personal involvement growing out of one's own passionate concern.

Critique of Reason: If reason is but part of human nature, rational fulfillment alone is not enough for a complete and authentic life. Moreover, the investigation of reality cannot be left to logic and reason alone.

Authenticity and Inauthenticity: The inauthentic person never acquires a distinctive individual identity, but simply plays a part, acts out an assigned role, unquestioningly follows a pattern of behavior given by society. The authentic person seeks self-awareness and chooses to actualize a true self, discovered through introspection.

Boundary Situations: Suddenly there comes a moment when a direct awakening is inescapable. Inauthenticities and illusions are exposed. Typical boundary situations include, chance, choice, guilt, and especially death. Typical responses include alienation, nothingness, and dread.

PHIL 3321-001

Philosophy of Law

9:30-10:50 TR

ENG/PHIL 164

Dr. Daniel Nathan

The United States Supreme Court regularly sends down decisions that engage broad popular interest. For example, court decisions have lately addressed questions of transgender rights, gun control, same-sex marriage, the government's use of intrusive surveillance, voting rights and restrictions, and immigration policy. Each of these decisions has been viewed by the general public as highly controversial, and has generated a broad spectrum of political and personal responses. But popular political views rarely reflect an understanding of the nature of law and legal systems, or a familiarity with the Court's reasoning in relevant previous cases, or even a superficial acquaintance with philosophically and legally reasonable views of the ideas of justice, privacy, or liberty. This course will try to remedy some of the gaps in understanding, first by studying the nature of law and its relation to morality, then by turning its focus to the nature of justice, privacy, and liberty in specific relation to the legal issues raised by Supreme Court cases during the past several years.

PHIL 3340-001

Minds, Brains & Computers

1:00-1:50 MWF

ENG/PHIL 163

Dr. Joseph Gottlieb

This course is an introduction to issues in philosophy of mind and philosophy of psychology. Topics include: the relationship between mind and brain, consciousness, the nature of mental representation, artificial intelligence, and "uploading" debates in personal identity.

PHIL 4300-001

Topics in Phil: Decision Theory

11:00-11:50 MWF

ENG/PHIL 164

Dr. Joel Velasco

We often criticize one another's decisions. People who spend their money at casinos are charged with being ignorant, people who save too much are regarded as miserly, people who chose unpleasant mates are fooling themselves, etc. Sometimes this criticism is failure to recognize diversity - others care about different things than we do - but other times we still regard decisions as wrong even after we know what the decider values. Implicitly judgments like this rely on a notion of "correct" decision making, which will be the topic of our course. We will examine theories of rational choice in the context of decision theory (one person making a decision under conditions of risk or uncertainty), game theory (where at least two players are interacting), and social choice (collective decision making).

PHIL 4322-001 Metaethics 2:00-3:20 TR ENG/PHIL 164

Dr. Jeremy Schwartz

Metaethics asks not about the virtues of any particular normative ethical theory but about the status of ethical claims. Are ethical claims a form of knowledge? Are they objective? Are they part of the fabric of the world? Are they projections of our attitudes onto the world? This course seeks to make progress on these questions. Of particular importance will be developing an understanding of expressivism and realist non-naturalism.

PHIL 4331-001 Philosophy of Language 2:00-3:20 MW ENG/PHIL 163

Dr. Bruno Whittle

If I say that Henry VIII was a less than ideal husband, then I seem to have said something about a thickset guy who lived hundreds of years ago in England. But what is the connection between those sounds that I produced and that man that makes this possible? Alternatively, suppose that I show you my stab at the great American novel, and ask what you think. You say that you really like the font—and you don't say anything else. Although you didn't say that you don't like my novel, I will of course infer that. What are the rules that govern such communication, that goes beyond what we explicitly say? More generally, in this class we will look at philosophers' attempts to understand that richest and most fascinating of our creations: language.

PHIL 5302-001 Studies in Modern Philosophy 3:00 - 5:50 W ENG/PHIL 264

Dr. Francesca DiPoppa

This will be a survey of (mostly) metaphysics and epistemology during the 17th and 18th century. Readings will include (but not limited to) Descartes, Hume, Spinoza, Cavendish, Malebrahche, Astell, Hobbes, Kant.

PHIL 5311-001 Sem in Epistemology: What Should 2:00-4:50 R ENG/PHIL 264

Dr. Amy Flowerree I Believe? Epistemic Norms and
the Ethics of Belief

A fundamental human question (one that shapes the field of epistemology) is, "What should I believe?" This class will systematically examine answers to the question. One common approach to answering this question is to begin by thinking about the aim of belief. Is the aim of belief truth? Knowledge? Understanding? Some other epistemic goal? We will then consider the role of non-epistemic factors and belief. Do moral and pragmatic stakes impact what we should believe? This will lead us to explore whether we can believe on the basis of these factors, and whether what is conceptually possible for us matters for what we are normatively required to believe. We will then turn to the meta-normative perspective: what grounds the authority of epistemic norms? We will conclude with a look at epistemic pathologies: human susceptibility to bias, manipulation, and conspiracy.

PHIL 5315-001 Topics of Aesthetics 2:00-4:50 M ENG/PHIL 264

Dr. Anna Ribeiro

This seminar will be on the philosophy of poetry (possibly the first of its kind in the history of philosophy!) It is an experimental course in that we will focus on my monograph, *Beautiful Speech: The Nature, Origins, and Powers of Poetry*, a work in progress. We will read the ten chapters that comprise the book, plus several readings related to each of the chapters. We will work through some metaphysical topics (definitions of poetry, ontology of poems), evolutionary psychology (origins of poetic practice), philosophy of psychology (cognitive processing, aesthetic effect, emotional effect) philosophy of language (tropes, abstract thought, the nature of fiction), and value theory (the nature of poetic value). This will be a highly interdisciplinary course, as readings will be from various areas in philosophy as well as from scholarship in English, classics, evolutionary psychology, linguistics, anthropology and archaeology on oral and written poetic traditions ancient and contemporary.

PHIL 5321-001

Social/Political Philosophy

2:00-4:50 T

ENG/PHIL 264

Dr. Justin Tosi

The topic of this seminar is social morality, which we'll understand roughly as that part of morality that makes claims on us that may be backed by socially sanctioned demands. In other words, social morality is the part of morality that we are free to enforce in our interpersonal dealings. We'll consider questions about what the relationship is between morality in general and social morality (and whether there is any difference between them), how we should discuss and justify moral demands, the morality of making moral complaints, the appropriate forms of moral criticism (e.g. mockery), social activism, moralizing, minding your own business, and moral indifference. Authors we might discuss include P. F. Strawson, Kurt Baier, J. S. Mill, Lord Devlin, Dan Moller, Karen Stohr, Julia Driver, Kate Norlock, Linda Radzik, and Hallvard Lillehammer.

PHIL 5333-001

Sem. In Philosophy of Language

6:00-8:50 T

ENG/PHIL 264

Dr. Christopher Hom

The seminar will focus on how contemporary theories of meaning account for expressive aspects of language. Expressive language includes insults (e.g. 'jerk'), exclamations (e.g. 'oops'), swear words (e.g. 'f**k'), racial epithets (e.g. the N-word), honorific terms (e.g. 'sir'), evaluative terms (e.g. 'honorable') and pornographic representations. Along the way, we will consider various issues such as the internalism-externalism distinction, the semantics-pragmatics distinction, nominalism about meaning, context-sensitivity, social dimensions of language, and how (or whether) norms are linguistically represented.

Requirements include a seminar presentation, a presentation commentary, a short paper, and a longer, research paper.