Philosophy Courses
Fall 2020

Courses marked with * contribute to satisfying General Education Requirements

*PHIL 1000: Introduction to Philosophy

Section 1: MWF 9:30-10:20   Staff

Major works on such themes as appearance and reality, human nature, nature of knowledge, relation of mind and body, right and good, existence of God, and freedom and determinism.

Section 2: MWF 10:30-11:20   Wells

This course provides an introduction to philosophy through the lens of the concept of “enlightenment.” What we call “the Enlightenment” was a period of intellectual and philosophical development in 17th and 18th century Europe. However, more broadly speaking but in the spirit of that movement, we can describe enlightenment as a series of commitments: Commitment to the idea that humans are by nature rational things, to the idea of truth and that such truth is discoverable through objective and rational inquiry, to the idea that individual liberty and individuality are paramount, and to the idea that the use of our reason is the engine for human progress. This course traces these commitments through a survey of a number of figures in the history of philosophy. It does so in (roughly) three sections. First, we sketch an argument in defense of the concept and the project of enlightenment. Next, we consider some challenges to the foundations of this enlightenment project: Is what we call progress really progress? Are we really transparently rational selves? Are we really free? What if all of this is simply a story we tell to justify control and conformity? Finally, we take up the critical tools of enlightenment to examine our own context, specifically with an eye toward gender, race, disability, and oppression. Throughout this course, we will keep three connected questions in mind: What is a self? What is the relationship between this self and rationality? How do the answers to these first two questions inform how we ought to act, as individuals and as communities?

Section 3: TTH 10:30-11:50   Blakley

This course is an introduction to the activity and discipline of Philosophy. The class uses popular movies and television shows such as The Matrix, The Adjustment Bureau, Groundhog Day, Horton Hears a Who, South Park, and Rick and Morty, among others to introduce students to some of the main questions and theories in academic Philosophy. The main text for the class is Dean Kowalski’s Classic Questions and Contemporary Film: An Introduction to Philosophy (2015).
Section 4: MWF 11:30-12:20    Wells

This course provides an introduction to philosophy through the lens of the concept of “enlightenment.” What we call “the Enlightenment” was a period of intellectual and philosophical development in 17th and 18th century Europe. However, more broadly speaking but in the spirit of that movement, we can describe enlightenment as a series of commitments: Commitment to the idea that humans are by nature rational things, to the idea of truth and that such truth is discoverable through objective and rational inquiry, to the idea that individual liberty and individuality are paramount, and to the idea that the use of our reason is the engine for human progress. This course traces these commitments through a survey of a number of figures in the history of philosophy. It does so in (roughly) three sections. First, we sketch an argument in defense of the concept and the project of enlightenment. Next, we consider some challenges to the foundations of this enlightenment project: Is what we call progress really progress? Are we really transparently rational selves? Are we really free? What if all of this is simply a story we tell to justify control and conformity? Finally, we take up the critical tools of enlightenment to examine our own context, specifically with an eye toward gender, race, disability, and oppression. Throughout this course, we will keep three connected questions in mind: What is a self? What is the relationship between this self and rationality? How do the answers to these first two questions inform how we ought to act, as individuals and as communities?

Section 5: MWF 12:30-1:20    Blakley

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Section 6: TTh 3:00-4:20    Blakley

This course is an introduction to the activity and discipline of Philosophy. The class uses popular movies and television shows such as The Matrix, The Adjustment Bureau, Groundhog Day, Horton Hears a Who, South Park, and Rick and Morty, among others to introduce students to some of the main questions and theories in academic Philosophy. The main text for the class is Dean Kowalski’s Classic Questions and Contemporary Film: An Introduction to Philosophy (2015).

*PHIL/LING 2010.1: Symbolic Logic I    TTh 12:00-1:20    Roland

This course covers the basics of propositional and first-order logic. We will learn a formal language and use it to help us understand logical consequence and related concepts. We will also learn techniques for ascertaining logical features of collections of sentences (e.g., whether or not a collection forms a logically valid argument). In addition to philosophy students, this course will be particularly useful to students interested in mathematics, computer science, and linguistics. There are no prerequisites for this course.
PHIL 2020: Ethics

Section 1: MWF 11:30-12:20  Blakley

This class uses popular culture to introduce students to philosophical ethics or moral theory. Over the course of the semester, we will consider how the main ideas of various ethical theories (e.g. virtue ethics, social contract, utilitarianism, deontology, ethical egoism, nihilism, divine command theory, and others) are illustrated in popular movies as well as the television series Rick and Morty. The main text for the class is Christopher Falzon’s Ethics Goes to the Movies: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy (2018).

Section 2: TTh 1:30-2:50  Blakley

This class uses popular culture to introduce students to philosophical ethics or moral theory. Over the course of the semester, we will consider how the main ideas of various ethical theories (e.g. virtue ethics, social contract, utilitarianism, deontology, ethical egoism, nihilism, divine command theory, and others) are illustrated in popular movies as well as the television series Rick and Morty. The main text for the class is Christopher Falzon’s Ethics Goes to the Movies: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy (2018).

Section 3: MWF 2:30-3:20  Wells

In this course we examine major positions in the history of ethical theory, as well as their applications and challenges to them. In the most basic sense, this course asks: What is right? How ought we act? How ought we live? In considering these primary questions, we will ask further: How ought we treat, and what do we owe, each other? Where do these obligations and responsibilities come from, i.e., what are their foundations? Our aim will be not only to understand these questions in theory, but to grapple with how they challenge us to live our lives, give us meaning, and determine what we value. Our task is to consider who we are and who we want to (or, perhaps, who we ought to) become. In pursuing this task, we will consider virtue ethics, stoic ethics, Kantian ethics, utilitarianism, and care ethics. We will also consider critiques of morality. In the final portion of the course we will examine the concept of oppression and its relation to ethics.

Section 4: TTh 3:00-4:20  Sarkar

This course will cover some of the central concepts and theories in ethics.

Required Textbooks:
Section 5: MWF 3:30-4:20     Wells

In this course we examine major positions in the history of ethical theory, as well as their applications and challenges to them. In the most basic sense, this course asks: What is right? How ought we act? How ought we live? In considering these primary questions, we will ask further: How ought we treat, and what do we owe, each other? Where do these obligations and responsibilities come from, i.e., what are their foundations? Our aim will be not only to understand these questions in theory, but to grapple with how they challenge us to live our lives, give us meaning, and determine what we value. Our task is to consider who we are and who we want to (or, perhaps, who we ought to) become. In pursuing this task, we will consider virtue ethics, stoic ethics, Kantian ethics, utilitarianism, and care ethics. We will also consider critiques of morality. In the final portion of the course we will examine the concept of oppression and its relation to ethics.

*PHIL 2033.1: Hist. of Ancient & Medieval Philosophy. MWF 1:30-2:20     Staff

Introduction to philosophy through a study of some of the main writings of classical and medieval philosophy.

PHIL 2034.1: Tutorial Ancient & Medieval Philosophy. TBA     Staff

PHIL 3001: Existentialism     MWF 12:30-1:20     Schufreider

Basic themes of existentialist philosophy; the works of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger.

PHIL 3020.1: Critical Theory     MW 4:30-5:50     Goldgaber

In this class, we will focus on the foundations of critical theory in the works of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Weber, paying particular attention to the methods they deploy in the treatment of moral and religious phenomena. Lectures will primarily involve a close analysis and discussion of the readings. Marx, Freud, Nietzsche and Weber are among the greatest critics of religion and morality in the Western tradition. All hold that our beliefs about religion and established values are, in some sense, false. Understanding the specific sense they give to this epistemological claim will allow us to understand what sets “critical theory” apart from other modes and methods of philosophical inquiry and explanation.

PHIL/POLI 4098.1: Politics and Ethics.     MWF 11:30-12:20     Eubanks

Course Objectives: to examine the origins and nature of moral sensibility; to become acquainted with a variety of theories of distributive justice; to consider the nature of Aristotle’s relevance to our understanding of ethics and politics in the 21st century; and to consistently examine the role of moral thinking in our dialogue with ourselves and with our communities of discourse. Readings will include: Aeschylus, Plato, Kant, Mill, Hobbes, Rawls, Arendt, Nussbaum, Sen, Aristotle, & Heidegger.
PHIL 4786.1: Selected Topics. Nietzsche’s Ethics  
MW 3:00-4:20  
Sarkar

This course will be centered around the core of Nietzsche’s Ethics.

Required Textbooks:

PHIL 4941.1: Philosophy of Mind  
TTh 12:00-1:20  
Cogburn

Suppose that the standard model of physics can be expanded to incorporate the full relativistic model of gravity as well as other known anomalies such as the cosmological observations leading to postulations of dark matter, dark energy, matter/anti-matter anti-symmetry, etc.

This is a big supposition. At the end of physics would we then be in a position to say that what’s real, *really* real, are just the particles and forces (or fields, strings, whatever) named by the physicist’s completed model?

Since Descartes at least, most Western philosophers worry about whether conscious states require more to the universe than the kind of things physicists tell us exist. How can a state such as being in pain really just be nothing over and above whatever it is that causes insensate bits of matter to push each other around? Couldn’t a “zombie” universe have all of the same physics type entities as ours, even organized identically to ours, but with no conscious states such as pain? Aren’t conscious states such as feelings of pain something completely different from the mere disposition to move around and to cause other things to move around in various ways?

Moreover, perhaps any counterfactual concerning “a completed physics” is trivially true because the antecedent is impossible. A universe with a completed physics would have physicists in it. Physicists, presumably, *understand* physics. But, again, understanding seems to be a completely different kind of property than the kinds of property physics either postulates or is invoked to explain. So any universe with a completed physics would *not* have a completed physics (again, because the physicists in that universe have properties that are neither part of nor fully grounded in physics properties). So there is no universe with a completed physics. *QED*.

We won’t solve any or this, and instead will assess the contemporary theories of consciousness on offer which are in part motivated by the problems. We will learn some very neat things along the way and hopefully better understand ourselves and our fellow sentient beings a little better as a result.

We shall use the following texts:

Susan Blackmore, *Consciousness: A Very Short Introduction*  
Susan Blackmore and Emily T. Troscianko, *Consciousness: An Introduction*
PHIL 7901.1: Seminar in Analytic Philosophy – Phil. of Mathematics TTH 4:30-5:50 Roland

This is a course on philosophy of mathematics. We will focus on the “big three” philosophies of mathematics: logicism, intuitionism, and formalism. These three philosophies of mathematics dominated the discussion of the nature of mathematics and mathematical knowledge for much of the twentieth century. Variants of them continue to command attention, and newer philosophies of mathematics (e.g., structuralist, fictionalist, and naturalistic views) emerged as responses to them. Along the way, we’ll also cover some set theory and Gödel’s incompleteness theorems. Our aim will be to develop a general appreciation for some of both the chief concerns and central methods of philosophy of mathematics.

Prerequisites: Graduate student or permission of instructor. Students will benefit from having had at least one course in quantificational logic (PHIL 2010 or equivalent) or a significant background in mathematics.

Courses outside the Philosophy department

Deborah Goldgaber (WGS TBA)

On Sabbatical (for the entire 2020-2021 academic year): François Raffoul