

Fall 2020

Philosophy Department Course Descriptions

Philosophy 101 Philosophical Problems—Professor Johnson

MWF 0930-1030 REMOTE

Living a human life poses certain problems for each of us: Who am I? Is there some meaning to my life? How should I act? Using short philosophical readings, we will reflect on issues such as the role of reason in our lives, the nature of religious belief, whether human existence makes any sense, how our personal identity is shaped, and how we construct meaning in our lives. Grades based on written essays and discussion participation.

Philosophy 102 Ethics—GE Portella

MTWR 1100-1200 REMOTE

This course will offer an introduction to the central concepts of ethical inquiry and moral philosophy. What is of paramount importance for us as individuals and as a society? To guarantee equal rights for all? To provide better lives for those less fortunate? To treat well those with whom we interact? And can all of these be of paramount importance at once? In this course you will first learn the basic frameworks of the most influential classical moral theories (we will read selections from Aristotle on virtue ethics, from Immanuel Kant on rights-based deontology, from John Stuart Mill on utilitarianism, and from William James on pragmatist approaches to the very idea of moral philosophy). Following this background exposure to the basic organizing concepts of contemporary moral theory, you will then learn how to utilize, enrich, and critique these theories by examining some of the most pressing ethical conflicts we face today. Critical moral issues we will consider in this part of the class will include economic inequality, racial injustice, and the ethics of emerging technologies of surveillance (here we will read, among others, selections from Ta-Nehisi Coates, Cornel West, Michelle Alexander, John Rawls, and Peter Singer).

Philosophy 103 Critical Reasoning—GE Friez

MTWR 1100-1200 REMOTE

Introduction to thinking and reasoning critically. How to recognize, analyze, criticize, and construct arguments. Through the practice of argumentation in relation to current and classic controversies, this course is designed to improve your reasoning skills as well as your critical writing capabilities. Along the way, students will also explore informal fallacies, basic rules of deduction and induction, issues pertaining to the ethics of belief, and some general reflections on the political dimensions and promise of argumentation. Typical assignments include argumentative journals, homework sets, and in-class exams. Class time involves a mixture of lecture, discussion, and group work.

Philosophy 110 Human Nature—GEs Knowlton & Ralda

Section 1 MTWR 1830-1903 LIL 282, Section 2 MTWR 1100-1200 ALL 221

What does it mean to be human? What makes us “human”? What is the place of humans in the world? Much of the history of philosophy wrestles with these questions in one way or another. Religion, science, politics, and ethics are all informed by the various answers these questions have received and they, in turn, inform the answers. In this course we will look specifically at how some of the answers to these questions have resulted in legacies of sexism, racism, and speciesism with which we still live today. This means we will be addressing sensitive topics that demand respectful discourse.

Philosophy 120 Ethics of Enterprise and Exchange—GE Sinclair

MTWR 1100-1200 REMOTE

This course aims to provide an introduction to ethical theories and the study of issues related to ethical concerns around a free market world, corporation responsibility, capitalism and labor, globalization, neoliberalism, economic and social rights, and the environment. We will begin the first part of the course investigating the nature of some ethical theories, to get a sense of how the ethical notions and questions function in these broad inquiries pertaining to the corporate world. We will look then a wide variety of approaches and arguments, both in terms of ethical theories and practical ethical problems faced by corporations, consumers, and other agents and institutions within the corporate capitalist world.

Philosophy 123 Internet, Society, and Philosophy—Professor Alvarado

MW 1015-1145 REMOTE

What are the new forms of ethical, social and political interaction that the Internet enables? What new ways of knowing and practices of scientific research emerge in an Internet-focused context? What old forms does it render obsolete, problematic, or perhaps even impossible? This course focuses primarily on engaging some of the most pressing social, ethical and political problems posed by the Internet. The course will also cover some of the epistemological, metaphysical, and ontological difficulties and challenges raised by the Internet. While the course will consider ways in which philosophy might enable us to respond to these problems, the aim will not be to deliver definitive solutions by the end of the course. The focus rather will be on the preliminary, challenging and critical task of finding ways to articulate the problems emerging around us. What we need are concepts that help us understand the massive transformations we are all living in the midst of. Since philosophy involves, among other things, the practice of inventing, analyzing and criticizing concepts, the goal of the course will be to practice philosophy for the sake of better understanding the contemporary world in which we live.

The practice of philosophy in this course will involve both traditional methods (the reading of texts, the discussion of ideas, the analysis of cultural phenomena) and newer collaborative methods facilitated by our increasingly web-based world (online and in-class collaborative research projects, the opportunity to develop an individual research project in an online context). The goal is to both expose the Internet to traditional philosophical analysis and to expose philosophical practice to new Internet technologies and practices.

As a course that will satisfy the Group 2 (Social Science) general education requirement, Internet, Society & Philosophy will present a variety of approaches to studying contemporary social phenomena, with a focus on the Internet and new media as the privileged topics for this course. The course will present students with a representative cross-section of philosophical perspectives and modes of analysis used by philosophers and social scientists working in the field. Readings will be drawn primarily from philosophy, but will also include selections by legal theorists, political scientists, sociologists, and various areas in cultural studies. Students who successfully complete the course will have an understanding of what makes the Internet a worthy topic of philosophical investigation; an understanding of recent theoretical developments in the field of Internet students; improved reading, writing and critical thinking skills; and awareness of contemporary political, ethical, legal and policy issues.

Philosophy 130 Philosophy and Popular Culture—GE Gamble

MTWR 0930-1030 REMOTE

This course enables students to engage in the critical reflection central to the discipline of philosophy--that which would facilitate living an “examined life” -- about, in, and through popular culture. What is popular or mass culture? Is it something merely “manufactured” by special interests, or is it still in any way genuine culture, the product of free and spontaneous human interaction? Are the products of popular culture (movies, music, games, sports, etc.) merely sources of entertainment or distraction, or might they serve other purposes such as providing for a sense of community and identity? Do they serve merely to bypass (or even undermine) reflection to inculcate particular perspectives or values into those who are exposed to or who participate in them? Might they rather, upon scrutiny, provide the basis for the kind of critical reflection commonly regarded as facilitated only by “high” culture? By way of testing the last of these perspectives, of the capacity for popular culture to facilitate genuinely critical reflection, a range of products of popular culture will be examined alongside texts that seek to illuminate and reveal the ideas at work in them, and in relation to some works of classical philosophy, ancient and modern. As a result, students should expect to develop an enhanced capacity for intelligent reflection upon popular culture and upon a range of central issues that have been the subject of considerable philosophical examination.

Philosophy 170 Love & Sex—Professor Mann

MWF 1530-1630 REMOTE

Love and sex are so central to human life that many would argue that our intimate relationships are the key to self-esteem, fulfillment, even happiness itself; in fact, our intimate relationships are probably more important to our sense of well-being than our careers. Yet we spend remarkably little time *thinking* about love and sex, even as we spend years preparing ourselves for the world of work. In this course you will be asked to reflect on the most intimate sphere of human existence. We will draw on historical, sociological, religious, feminist and philosophical work to shed critical light on a variety of questions, including: What is love exactly? Why do we continually associate love and sex with happiness and pleasure when they often make us so utterly miserable? Is there, or should there be, an ethics of love and sex? What is moral, what is normal, and who gets to decide? What happens to sex when it is associated with “scoring” (the conquest model of sex)? How are our understandings of masculinity and femininity tied in with what we believe about love and sex?

Philosophy 225 Introduction to Formal Logic—Professor Brence

MWF 0930-1030 REMOTE

This course will serve as a substantial introduction to symbolic logic. At its completion students will be proficient in determining the formal validity of arguments with propositional (sentence) logic and predicate logic. Though often the course will resemble a math course, and mathematical techniques will be employed virtually throughout, the purpose of the course is to inquire into patterns of effective thought concerning potentially all manner of human interests. How do we draw correct inferences and think effectively? How do we avoid errors in reasoning and drawing unwarranted conclusions? What form does compelling evidence for a warranted conclusion take?

Philosophy 307 Social & Political Philosophy—Professor Brence

MW 1215-1345 REMOTE

This course will focus on the development and contemporary status of the political philosophy of "liberalism". The term "liberalism" refers to forms of political theory that emphasize the values of liberty for, and equality among, citizens. In academic discussion and scholarship, the word does not simply refer to "left-leaning" politics in the sense of "liberal" common in contemporary political discourse. Rather, "liberalism" refers to any political vision that puts freedom, especially equal freedoms, first. Thus "liberalism" is the common vision of both contemporary Democrats and Republicans in the U.S. (or, at least most of them). In this sense of the term, the standard sense in scholarly and academic discussion, liberalism has long been the dominant theoretical tradition in contemporary political philosophy throughout developed societies. Accordingly, this course will focus on the origins, development, and challenges of liberalism. In Part I, we will begin by considering the major theoretical and cultural origins of modern liberalism. We will briefly consider the earliest statements of liberalism by the English philosophers Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704) and the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776), before taking an extended tour through John Stuart Mill's (1806-1873) classic statement of liberalism, exploring how Mill saw himself as reconciling the twin imperatives of romanticism and utilitarianism central to nineteenth-century British culture. In Part II, we will use this historical context to develop a fuller understanding of some of the foremost work in contemporary liberal theory. The contemporary liberalisms on which we focus will include John Rawls's (1921-2002) egalitarian political liberalism, Friedrich Hayek's (1899-1992) constitutionalist market liberalism, and Martha Nussbaum's (1947-) liberal theory focused on equity for diverse persons to achieve the capabilities and functionings that basic human dignity requires. In Part III, we will then briefly conclude with discussion of some of the most pressing challenges facing liberal political societies. Here we will read small selection of influential approaches in critical political theory: our readings here will be drawn from the writings of Karl Marx (1818-1883), Emma Goldman (1869-1940), and in more detail Michel Foucault (1926-1984).

Philosophy 310 History of Philosophy, Ancient-Medieval—Professor Warnek

TR 1215-1345 REMOTE

PHIL 310 offers an introduction to Ancient Greek philosophy, primarily through a reading of selections from the texts of Plato and Aristotle. We will also look at other Greek philosophical figures, such as Parmenides and Heraclitus. The course also considers the emergence of Western philosophy in relation to tragic narratives, like those of Oedipus and Antigone. In this regard, Socrates is considered both as a foremost philosophical question and as a possible tragic figure.

Philosophy 335 Medical Ethics—Professor Russell

MW 1415-1545 REMOTE

Medical Ethics (or, more broadly, Bioethics) is the branch of ethics that studies moral values in the biomedical sciences, and can include a very large range of issues. This course aims to offer an interesting sampling of the ideas and practices that can be considered and examined in this area. This sampling is centered on the critical philosophical examination of the various assumptions, values, and socio-political forces underlying clinical, research and biotechnological systems and practices. We will ask not only, "What are good or poor systems and practices and why?" but also, "What are the conceptual frameworks available for, assumed by or perpetuated through this system or practice?" and "What are the effects of this system or practice on people, on their lives, on possibilities for democracy/equality, and on potentials for injustice?" We focus on five major themes: Principles, Inequality, Normativity, Disability, and Enhancement. The work of this course should leave you better able to approach ethical dilemmas in your future work not only with reason and intelligence, but with sympathy and respect for human difference and an eye toward justice.

Philosophy 345 Place in the Cosmos—Professor Vallega

TR 1615-1745 REMOTE

What does it mean to speak of the cosmological dimension of the human? How may one understand cosmological thought/experience? The aim of this course is to introduce cosmological philosophical thought, and in doing so to deepen our philosophical understanding and questioning of the human place in the cosmos. The course engages reading of seminal articulations of life in the Western tradition as well as in non-western traditions of thought. Among the notions that we will explore in the course are, the notions of cosmos and world, of place and space, of time, of movement, of directionality, and we will also question our place in relation to non-subjective and non-human being. The latter will require thinking oneself in relation to otherness, not only in human terms but by engaging the distinct living being of ideas, images, things, elements, sky, mountain, rivers and oceans, a geo-ecological imaginary being in relation that situates us. The course takes into account the variety of articulations of being-in-the-world (myth, narrative, history, lineages, oral traditions, etc.) The course also sets out from a basic differentiation between reality, nature, culture, aesthesis, the work of art, poiesis (making), and production. The readings will engage philosophically Ancient cosmogonies and cosmologies and will trace the development of different views of the cosmos through various thinkers past and present. The course requires close reading and text analysis and leads to the critical comparison of different approaches to the question of the human place in the cosmos and our “contemporary” situation.

Philosophy 399 African Philosophy—Professor Stawarska

TR 1615-1745 ALL 221

This course provides an overview of contemporary African philosophy, that is, intellectual contributions and scholarly debates pursued by philosophers working primarily on the African continent. Considering that the very existence of a distinct branch of philosophy ‘made in Africa’ has been subject to a lively debate, we open with the so-called ‘ethnophilosophy’ (a traditional belief system shared by African people) and its critique, developed most famously by Hountondji (African Philosophy: Myth and Reality). We read several representative ‘ethnophilosophical’ texts, notably by Senghor and Mbiti, alongside the critique. We then turn to contemporary research that critically engages distinctly African epistemic perspectives without essentializing them into an immutable tradition. We read Wiredu’s contributions to philosophical understanding of truth, language, and morality, developed in particular attention to the language and thought of the Ghanaian Akans (Cultural Universals and Particulars). We track how Akan philosophizing can address some of the issues plaguing the Western philosophical tradition, such as the supernaturalist foundations of morality and the mind-body split. We conclude with a discussion of contemporary African feminist philosophy, and its relevance to Western philosophies of gender. Oyewumi’s study of social organization among the Nigerian Yoruba (The Invention of Women) demonstrates that, contrary to the Western feminist view that subordination of women is universal, the old Yoruba do not organize society by gender but by relative age, and do not construct a gender binary opposing ‘women’ to ‘men’. Ultimately, this course offers an expanded way of understanding both the African and the Western philosophies within a decolonial comparative framework.

Philosophy 407/507 Advanced Logic Seminar—Professor Pratt

TR 1215-1345 REMOTE

We will begin this course with a brief history of modern logic and with the development of set theory in relation to modern logic. Then we will explore some problems with classical modern logic and attempt to resolve them through a study of various non-classical logics (including modal logics and systems of strict implication.) If time permits, we will consider the reciprocal relation of logical syntax and ontology and use Charles Peirce’s graphical logical syntax as an illustration.

Philosophy 407/507 Artificial Intelligence Seminar—Professor Alvarado

M 1700-1945 ALL 221

What exactly is artificial intelligence? How does it work? And, what are its implications? This course offers a thorough philosophical overview of the concepts, the computational methods, and the epistemic and ethical issues associated with artificial intelligence. While the course will cover fundamental philosophical work on the relationship between machines and the human mind, the main focus will be on the philosophical concepts behind the computational practices that drive decision-making algorithms, data-driven analysis and other machine learning methodology, all of which are at the core of what we now understand as the technological implementation of artificial intelligence.

Philosophy 433/533 17th- and 18th-Century Philosophers: Descartes and Amo—Professor Stawarska

TR 1015-1145 TYKE 140

This course engages two early Modern philosophers, René Descartes and Wilhelm Anton Amo, in a debate about mind and body relations. Descartes is largely considered to be the founder of the early Modern European philosophy insofar as he established independent rational principles of inquiry into philosophical knowledge. He is also regarded as a staunch mind-body dualist who opposed the infallible knowledge of the mind to the dubious knowledge of the body. We will read from Descartes' Meditations, and excerpts from Passions of the Soul, to evaluate these claims in light of key primary sources. We will then turn to Wilhelm Anton Amo, the first African (Ghanaian) philosopher of the early Modern period, who studied and taught in European universities and made significant contributions to 17th and 18th C. philosophy, especially metaphysics and philosophy of mind. We will be reading Amo's philosophical dissertations (written in 1734, and published in July 2020), in which he re-examined the mind-body dualism, and ultimately provided an organismic (rather than mentalistic) view of human experience. We will consider the sources for Amo's argument in the Ghanaian Akan language and thought. This course showcases the importance of non-European language and thought in the development of philosophical Modernity.

Philosophy 463/563 20th Century Philosophers: Dewey—Professor Johnson

MW 1415-1545 REMOTE

We will undertake a close reading of Dewey's Experience and Nature, which is generally considered to be his seminal work on the nature of experience, mind, thought, language, knowledge, and philosophy. We will focus on roughly one chapter per week, with some use of supplementary reading of other short articles by Dewey and articles or book chapters on issues addressed by Dewey.

Philosophy 463/563 20th Century Philosophers: Whitehead—Professor Muraca

T 1800-2050 GER 302

The course is dedicated to the philosophical trajectory of Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead developed an original philosophy of becoming (known as Process Philosophy), rooted in the idea that relations are prior to and constitutive of entities. His philosophical contribution influenced different philosophical traditions, such as American and Continental philosophy, and has been recently re-discovered by philosophies of life. The course will offer an overview of Whitehead's philosophy and discuss some of its contemporary interpretations and uses.

Philosophy 607 Philosophy & Teaching Seminar—Professor Koopman

M 1100-1200 SCH 250C

This course is offered for philosophy graduate students who are also in their first year of service as graduate teaching fellows. The course runs for the entire year, each quarter offering a different core focus. All three quarters provide opportunity for reflection on pedagogical technique and philosophy of education. The first quarter offers ample opportunity for consideration of these themes. The second quarter also includes attention to curriculum, course design, and syllabus construction. The third quarter extends to a wider range of issues in the philosophy of education. Throughout the year, the

goal is to improve teaching effectiveness and to provide new teachers with a forum for discussing some of the challenges they face in the classroom. Note that this is a one credit course that meets weekly and involves a few additional assigned meetings outside of our regular meetings (for example, class observation visits that can be scheduled to fit each student's calendar).

Philosophy 643 Feminist Philosophy Pro-Seminar—Professor Mann
MW 1215-1345 CON 203

Description

Feminist philosophy is philosophical thought that emerges out of and in relation to social movements for women's emancipation, thus it is a liberatory undertaking, interested in the amelioration of injustice in all forms. It works toward the recuperation of women's and feminist thought in the history of philosophy, an understanding of the human condition as it is lived by diverse women, an articulation of women's ways of knowing in relation to epistemologies that have implicitly or explicitly excluded them—whether based on sex, gender or other aspects of identity—and interrogating political and ethical practices from a feminist perspective. Though we commonly think of “feminist philosophy” as a recent development, scholars agree that philosophical work that exhibits a feminist sensibility has been a critical counter-voice to the mainstream Western tradition since its inception. Nevertheless, philosophy today remains the most male dominated field in the humanities. Yet feminist philosophers have been passionate in their claims that the discipline of philosophy prepares us to ask the questions we need to ask and address the problems that we confront—even as philosophy is transformed in the process. These are some of the questions we will explore in the course: How does feminist thinking both appropriate and change the practice of philosophy? What questions are opened up by feminist philosophical inquiry that are not opened by more traditional approaches? How does feminist philosophy invite us to challenge some of our most deeply held assumptions about knowledge, human nature, and political and ethical practices?

Purpose

The purpose of this course is twofold: 1) to give students an opportunity to reflect on what it means to study and practice philosophy as a woman, i.e. from a position of alterity in relation to the dominant traditions in Western philosophy and 2) to introduce students to basic texts and basic topics in feminist philosophy. By the end of the term students should be able to speak competently about important themes in feminist philosophy, such as identity, the self-other relation, sexuality, gendered embodiment, agency and freedom; and about the contributions of a number of important thinkers in feminist philosophy. Students will gain exposure to feminist appropriations and criticisms of the Western philosophical tradition as well as debates within feminist thinking.