

Course offerings in Philosophy

Winter 2020

Upper-level Undergraduate

History of Western Philosophy courses

PHIL 330W: Ancient Philosophy (Higgins): MW 12:30-1:45pm (25861)

The course examines the origins of Western philosophy through the study of the ideas and arguments of the ancient Greeks, including the pre-Socratic philosophers, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. These philosophers played a profound role in shaping what we call 'philosophy' today, both in terms of its substantive concerns and its methods. Questions to be considered in this course include:

- What is the world made of, fundamentally?
- What does it mean to know something (as opposed to merely believing it)?
- What is the good for human beings? How ought we lead our lives?
- What are the elements of a just society?

Since this is a course in philosophy, our purpose includes but is not merely to study and understand intellectual history; equally as important, we want to assess the ideas and arguments of the ancient Greek philosophers critically, developing skills for identifying, reconstructing, and evaluating arguments – those of others and our own.

Eastern and Global courses

PHIL 320: Gender, World Religions, and Social Justice (Mehuron): MW 2-3:15pm (25857)

This course examines and evaluates gendered religious practices in global contexts. We inquire how contemporary people, from within their religious realities, can identify and address human rights and social justice issues that are implicated by their religious experiences. Religious realities feature the intersections of sex and gender with the religious and cultural dimensions of everyday life. The concept of intersectionality can show how religions contribute to the gendered and sexed experiences of people living within specific societies. We will study mythic and symbolic concepts, and ritual practices that are simultaneously sexed and/or gendered, as part of religions in global situations. Students will formulate and support their arguments about how specific global religious realities can detract from, or contribute to a just society.

This course may also be used to fulfill the Social Justice requirement of the Philosophy major and minor with the approval of the undergraduate advisor.

Knowledge and Reality courses

PHIL 325W: Theory of Knowledge (Doan): TR 11am-12:15pm (25860)

This course explores contemporary issues in epistemology, the theory of knowledge. We will begin by discussing skepticism. We will consider how skeptical worries have influenced the shape of epistemology throughout the twentieth century. We will then examine various theories of justification, focusing on debates between foundationalists, coherentists, and contextualists. In the second part of the course we will begin by discussing efforts to “naturalize” epistemology. We will consider how these efforts have influenced more recent developments in the field, including the elaboration of feminist epistemologies, analyses of epistemic injustice, and conversations concerning our complex responsibilities as knowers.

PHIL 476: Topics in Metaphysics (Dieterle): TR 12:30-1:45pm (25864)

This iteration of PHIL 476 concentrates on persons and personal identity. The “problem” of personal identity includes at least four distinct questions: (1) Who am I? (2) What kind of thing am I? (3) What (if anything) makes it the case that I am the same person over time? (4) What are the qualities necessary for an entity to qualify as a *person*? In this class, we will examine each of these questions and critically evaluate proposed answers to them. We will draw on literature from the abortion debate and debates about the status of non-human animals for our discussions of personhood. Both traditional and contemporary readings on personhood and personal identity will be discussed.

PHIL 495W: Phenomenology (McMahon): M 3:30-6:10pm (25866)

“Phenomenology” names a movement in 20th century European Philosophy inaugurated by Edmund Husserl and carried on by Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and a large number of contemporary thinkers. It also names a philosophical methodology: the rigorous description of experience as it is actually lived. We will approach the study of Phenomenology through a focus on the themes of *self* and *other*, *violence* and *ethics*. Studying writings from philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, Frantz Fanon, and a number of contemporary phenomenologists, we will ask questions such as:

- What is the self? How is the self not a pre-given subject that subsequently encounters a world of things and others, but constituted in time in ongoing and incomplete manners?
- If the self is not defined in advance according to a pre-given model and is never complete, what does it mean to be oneself authentically? In what ways do we evade authentic existence?
- What is the nature of our experience of other persons?
- In what ways are our experience of others an ethical call, as Levinas says? In what ways do we avoid or turn away from the ethical call of the other?
- In what ways are other persons at the heart of our identities as selves? What forms do ethical relationships of mutual recognition take?
- In what problematic ways are identities formed in violent denials of mutual recognition, such as institutions of racism and sexism?

Ethics and Value Theory courses

PHIL 429W: Topics in Environmental Philosophy (Scoville): TR 3:30-4:45pm (25862)

This course will focus on climate change. We will spend the first half of the course studying *justice-based* framings of the normative problem posed by climate change, with special focus on recent philosophical theorizing aimed at informing climate change policy at the global level. In the second half, we will turn attention to a different set of considerations, namely, *attachment-based* reasons (reasons grounded in an individual’s attachments to particular others, projects, and places) to care about future generations and hence about the effects of climate change. Such reasons are thought to be important because of their connection to our living meaningful lives. One of the motivations for focusing on attachment-based reasons is to decenter (though not abandon entirely) beneficence-based and other moral reasons for caring about climate change. Such reasons are attachment-independent in nature, and tend to be dominant in discussions of reasons to care about climate change. One of the deeper disputes here concerns what sorts of reasons have, or can plausibly be claimed to have, normative authority and motivational force. Defenders of attachment-based reasons argue that such reasons better reflect the structure of our actual values, and of our evaluative attitudes and practices, compared to accounts of reasons that focus on justice and other attachment-independent considerations. If the attachment-based view is apt, it turns out we have evaluative and motivational resources for thinking about future generations and climate change that are missed or eclipsed by the overly moralized philosophical discussions that have been dominant in the literature.

Note: PHIL 429 is repeatable for credit, as long as the topic is different.