

Course offerings in Philosophy

Winter 2020

Graduate level

Methods courses

PHIL 576: Topics in Metaphysics (Dieterle): TR 12:30-1:45pm (25865)

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 595: Phenomenology (McMahon): M 3:30-6:10pm (25867)

“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?

Social Justice courses

PHIL 592: Gender, World Religions, and Social Justice (Mehuron): MW 2-3:15pm (25858)

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.

PHIL 529: Topics in Environmental Philosophy (Scoville): TR 3:30-4:45pm (25863)

This iteration of PHIL 529 will be focused on a variety of normative issues raised by climate change. We'll spend the first half of the course studying justice-based framings of the normative problem posed by climate change. In particular, we'll focus on recent philosophical theorizing aimed at informing climate change policy at the global level (e.g., in the institutional context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change). In the second half of the course, we'll turn attention to a different set of considerations that bear on our normative thinking, namely, attachment-based reasons to care about future generations (and hence about the effects of climate change, among other things). Attachment-based reasons refer to those reasons grounded in an individual's attachments to particular others, projects, places, and so on. 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. Insofar as the attachment-based view survives critical scrutiny, one noteworthy implication seems to be this: in moral-political discussions of climate change (in particular, though the point generalizes), we should resist the idea that a constraint on the reasons relevant to action and policy is that these reasons must be widely shareable (as per the common Rawlsian view, which figures prominently in many justice-based approaches to policy making). Further, 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 529 is repeatable for credit, as long as the topic is different.