

PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT

Spring 2010 COURSE OFFERINGS

All courses in the Department of Philosophy satisfy the General Education requirement in the Humanities (U). Any additional GE is listed in the individual course descriptions. All courses are for four credits unless otherwise noted.

PHILOSOPHY 101/1: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

This course aims to introduce the student to the nature and concerns of philosophy by confronting fundamental issues in areas of philosophy such as ethics, political and social philosophy, metaphysics, epistemology and others. It is intended that the student develop skills in rigorous thinking and become involved in the process of philosophizing.

T/R: 8:30-9:50

AUDREY ANTON

PHILOSOPHY 101/2: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

This course aims to introduce the student to the nature and concerns of philosophy by confronting fundamental issues in areas of philosophy such as ethics, political and social philosophy, metaphysics, epistemology and others. It is intended that the student develop skills in rigorous thinking and become involved in the process of philosophizing.

T/R: 10:00-11:20

AUDREY ANTON

PHILOSOPHY 101/3: INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

Philosophers, that give themselves airs of superior wisdom and sufficiency, have a hard task when they encounter persons of inquisitive dispositions, who push them from every corner to which they retreat, and who are sure at last to bring some dangerous dilemma. The best expedient to prevent this confusion, is to be modest in our pretensions; and even to discover the difficulty ourselves before it is objected to us. By this means, we may make a merit of our very ignorance.

– David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

What should we do? What should we believe? Most philosophers spend their lives trying to answer these two deceptively simple questions, while other philosophers, known as skeptics, raise doubts. This self-perpetuating back-and-forth can seem like a high-minded and irrelevant game. After all, while philosophers are arguing about the reality of large objects, everyone else has to get about the business of living. But with our new awareness of how cultural traditions differ and the waning influence of religion on our everyday decisions, philosophy has found a new life. If we cannot look to God or tradition to guide us, perhaps we can figure out what to do and believe by paying closer attention to one another. In this course, we will learn how to pay close attention – how to listen, read and write carefully, how to listen, read and write charitably, and how to listen, read and write critically.

The best way to accomplish these lofty goals is to study the writings of our deepest thinkers. So we will examine the central texts of a particularly influential philosophical era – the modern period – in relation to the ancient and post-modern periods, among others. This period of enlightenment, dating from approximately 1640 and lasting into the late 1880s, closely followed Luther's Protestant Reformation (1517) and Copernicus's heliocentric theory of the universe (1541-3), which initiated great revolutions in religion and physics. These revolutions left modern thinkers concerned mainly with the issue of how to ground their beliefs in a secular way. If theorists could no longer look to gods as authorities on earthly matters, what other methods could possibly ensure that the beliefs of mere mortals were well grounded? We will study several answers to this question, while pausing to think about how philosophical modernism continues to impact contemporary theorists, who largely believe they have abandoned modernity and moved into the post-modern period.

Readings will be drawn from the authors of philosophy's and, indeed, the written word's, greatest hits, including Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, Nietzsche, James, and Rawls, among many others.

M/W/F: 1:30-2:20

ALEXANDRA BRADNER

PHILOSOPHY 200: PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES

This course offers a detailed and careful study of some of the central texts, issues, and ideas in the history of Western philosophy. Among the figures studied will be Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Wittgenstein, Quine, and others. The course is intended for most students as a second course in philosophy, whose goal is to prepare students for further philosophical work (and if desired for a major in philosophy) by providing them with experience in philosophical study beyond that offered in Philosophy 101. Some students with particular interest in the field, however, may choose to begin their philosophical studies with this course. In either case, the course will give students the opportunity to grapple with fundamental philosophical questions by examining the works of a series of great figures in the history of philosophy.

M/W/F: 10:30-11:20

Prerequisite: One previous course in Philosophy or consent of instructor.

BARBARA FULTNER

PHILOSOPHY 231: GREEK AND MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

The ambitious goal of this course is to educate the student of philosophy about key texts and themes that span roughly two thousand years—ancient and the medieval periods. We shall begin with the presocratics' quest to find the arche (underlying principle of all that exists). From there, we shall study the major works of Plato and Aristotle. We shall close our investigation of the ancient period with several Hellenistic themes including neoplatonism, stoicism, cynicism, and Epicureanism. From here we shall move into the medieval period, studying figures such as Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Maimonides, Ockham, and Duns Scotus. Several themes that will span both periods include the problem of universals, the problem of free will, theories of time, the existence of God, and the problem of Evil. In short, we shall scrupulously examine the roots of modern Western philosophy and culture.

M/W: 8:30-10:20

Prerequisites: PHIL 200 or consent of instructor.

AUDREY ANTON

PHILOSOPHY 269: PHILOSOPHY OF THE ARTS: AESTHETICS

Philosophical aesthetics addresses questions from three broad categories.

First are questions having to do with works of art in general: What is a work of art? What makes something a work of art? What is the difference (or is there a difference) between works of art and other products of human creativity or manufacture? What makes something a good or beautiful or important or interesting work of art? How can works of art be meaningful? Who decides what the meaning of a work is? What role, if any, do the intentions of the artist/author/architect play in deciding the meaning of a work?

Second are questions having to do with particular arts and the aesthetic analysis of things that aren't works at all: Do we need special analyses for different types of art (painting, poetry, literature, film, music, etc.)? Can nature or natural objects be a proper subject of aesthetic analysis? If so, will it (or they) need its own analysis or will it be (relevantly) like a work of art?

Finally there are questions having to do with ethics and politics: What is the (proper) relationship between art and politics? Is it an abuse of art to politicize it or is it necessarily political? Can works of art make ethical claims upon us? Is there an ethical responsibility that follows from an aesthetic judgment (e.g., to preserve a work)?

Readings from the course will be drawn primarily from contemporary work in aesthetics, although there will also be some readings drawn from the history of aesthetics.

T/R: 10:00-11:20

Prerequisite: One previous course in Philosophy or Art History/Studio Art/Dance/Music/Theatre/Cinema Major or consent.

JONATHAN MASKIT

PHILOSOPHY 296: CONCEPTIONS OF THE SOCIAL

Human beings are both linguistic and social animals. Indeed, these two characteristics are often said to be essential to being human. This course will investigate the relationship between them. Our starting point will be the debate in the philosophy of language about whether language or meaning are in any philosophically interesting sense *social*. Some, like Donald Davidson, deny that there are any philosophically interesting social aspects of language. Others, like Robert Brandom, take them to be essential to the emergence of semantic content. What notions of the social do the two sides implicitly presuppose? What might philosophers of language be able to learn from social theorists (and vice versa)? To address these questions, we will examine a range of conceptions of the social. We will consider what it means to say that social reality is constructed, what a social fact is, what the relationship between an individual and her community or social environment is, and what a social practice is. Finally, we will return to ask: In what sense is language a social practice? How is it connected to other social practices? What sorts of conceptions of the social are most apt to contribute to theories of meaning? Our readings will come from a range of disciplines, including philosophy (Davidson, Habermas, Gilbert, Searle, Foucault), sociology (Bourdieu), and psychology/anthropology (Tomasello).

M/W: 2:30-4:00

Prerequisite: One previous course in Philosophy or consent of the instructor. This course may fulfill the Oral Communication Requirement, pending approval by the Academic Affairs Council.

BARBARA FULTNER

PHILOSOPHY 326: THEORIES OF JUSTICE

John Rawls wrote in his widely influential book *A Theory of Justice* that “justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought.” Just as a scientific theory marked by elegance and simplicity in its concepts is nonetheless useless if its claims are false, so too a social order that is efficiently organized or produces large quantities of wealth must be rejected if its institutions are unjust. Yet “justice” (like “truth”) is a difficult concept to define. This course will examine several recent attempts to understand what justice is, in order first of all to help students think critically about the concept – and therefore about a series of crucial contemporary national and international political questions – and secondly to make them aware of some of the most important current controversies in political philosophy.

Appropriately, we will begin with Rawls’s own book, whose appearance in 1971 had an impact on political theory that is still felt today. The influence of the book is such that no serious political thinker can afford to ignore it, though certainly many find it essential to criticize it. Rawls defended a strongly egalitarian version of social democracy that viewed social inequalities as just only if they were “to the advantage of the worst-off members of society.” We will also read from the liberal thinker Ronald Dworkin for some enlightening contrasts with Rawls’s view. Then we will look at some alternative accounts of justice – including the libertarianism defended by Rawls’s colleague Robert Nozick, the communitarian and neo-Aristotelian views of justice associated with Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor, and Alasdair MacIntyre, feminist discussions of justice in the work of Susan Okin, Iris Young, and Martha Nussbaum, as well as theories that emphasize “discursive democracy” including those of Joshua Cohen and Jürgen Habermas. At the end of the semester if time permits we will return to Rawls, and talk about changes he made in his account of justice later in his life; we will also read some work by Richard Rorty, who raises significant questions about whether “justice” is the sort of thing it makes sense to provide a “theory” of.

Among the questions that will help to organize our discussions will be:

- * *Is justice the first virtue of social institutions, and is it definable?*
- * *Does “justice” have a special role to play in societies marked by significant degrees of pluralism, or can a society only be truly just if it is based on substantial agreement among its citizens on fundamental questions of morality, religion, etc.?*
- * *Is the definition of justice necessarily bound up with some account of what the “good” is for human beings?*
- * *What is “distributive justice”? Can distinctions be made with respect to the justice of various ways in which wealth and other “primary goods” might be distributed in a society? Is justice fundamentally a matter of rights and liberties, or is it a question of economics, or do these turn out to be the same thing?*
- * *Is equality in some sense essential to justice?*
- * *What is the relation between justice and democracy?*
- * *How is the relation between individual and state to be understood in a just society?*
- * *What, if anything, does justice have to do with gender?*

T/R: 3:00-4:20

Prerequisites: PHIL 200 or consent of instructor.

STEVE VOGEL

PHILOSOPHY 431: KANT AND GERMAN ROMANTICISM

It would be hard to overestimate the importance of Immanuel Kant's contribution to philosophy. He decisively reshaped epistemology, bringing to an end the 150 year struggle between rationalism and empiricism. He introduced an entirely new way of understanding moral reasoning and thus reconfigured the terrain upon which arguments in moral theory take place. And he gave aesthetics a place within a philosophical system it had never hitherto enjoyed, thus recasting philosophical discussions about art and human experience. In addition, Kant made important contributions to anthropology, philosophy of science, and philosophy of religion.

This course will focus on one of the two great trajectories Kant's work took in his followers (the other is German Idealism). We will begin with selections from Kant's most important metaphysical and epistemological work: the *Critique of Pure Reason*. We will then turn to his work on aesthetics, biology, and the possibility of living an ethical life in a mechanistic world: *The Critique of Judgment*. Finally, we will look at some of those who picked up Kant's ideas both philosophically and in literature. Readings here will be drawn from the tradition of Early German Romanticism including such figures as Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich Schlegel, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis).

M/W: 11:30–1:20

Prerequisite: Philosophy 200. Juniors/Seniors only.

JONATHAN MASKIT

PHILOSOPHY 440: SENIOR SYMPOSIUM

Senior Majors only. 1 credit course.

W: 4:00-5:00

BARBARA FULTNER

FYS 102.1/WMST 209.4: THE (IN)JUSTICE OF ENTANGLEMENT: INTRODUCTION TO THE ETHICS OF CARE

*Experience is not what happens to a man;
it is what a man does with what happens to him*

– Aldous Huxley, *Texts and Pretexts*, 1932

We might want to live in a just society, one in which scarce goods are distributed fairly to all members. But we might also want to live in a benevolent society, one in which caring for people and their particular needs trumps fairness. Feminist ethicists of care champion benevolence.

The ethics of care suggests that the modernist notion of the individual as a discrete or bounded metaphysical locus is a historical, anthropocentric and misogynist artifact. Rights, responsibilities,

praise, and blame should not accrue to single persons, but to small groups attached to one another through relations of dependence and care. We might even abandon justice-talk entirely. Collectives – like nations, communities and families – might aim for kindness exclusively (over equality and fairness). Reconstituting our socio-political ontology in these ways would force a reevaluation, a radical revisioning of our identities, labor practices, and social structures.

We will start our course by examining the justice/care debate as it was framed in the modern period by Kant and Hume. We will then trace Kant's justice view through the more contemporary work of John Rawls and Lawrence Kohlberg. In critique of Kohlberg, we will read Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* in its entirety – a now canonical contribution to the care perspective. Last, we will examine the work of philosophers such as Annette Baier, Claudia Card, Patricia Hill Collins, and Virginia Held, among others, who offer both extensions and internal criticisms of care theory, relating the approach to ongoing discussions about the environment, ethnicity, healthcare, and the market, among many other topics.

As a course in curricular service-learning, this FYS 102 will offer a unique intellectual opportunity: Students will process readings viscerally by entering into their own relationships of dependence and care with community partners – groups whose needs might clash with our collegiate schedules and priorities. In other words, as an empirical source of reflection and critique, we will take our abstract understanding of care theory and bring it to the community by working on a service project, thus transferring some of Denison's resources to other organizations on the simple ground that these organizations have a need. Students who enroll in this course should be prepared to spend, on average, an extra three hours a week coordinating, conducting, and reflecting upon their service project.

T/R: 10:00-11:20

Prerequisites: First Year Students Only. Curricular Service Learning. Course is cross-listed with WMST-290-04.

Alexandra Bradner

FYS 102.2/WMST 209.5: THE (IN)JUSTICE OF ENTANGLEMENT: INTRODUCTION TO THE ETHICS OF CARE

See description above.

T/R: 1:30-2:50

Prerequisites: First Year Students Only. Curricular Service Learning. Course is cross-listed with WMST-290-05.

Alexandra Bradner