

# **PHILOSOPHY COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

## **FALL 2009**

### **101-01 History of Western Philosophy**

**Mr. Miller**  
**TR 3:10 - 4:25**  
**RH 307**

Ancient Greek poets and thinkers responded to radical political crisis by seeking its causes, by articulating the forms of life that might thrive in, undercut, or stay clear of its dangers, and by thinking and rethinking the nature of the cosmos itself which such causes and such forms of life seemed to imply. We will study the way philosophy itself first emerges and develops in the context of these reflections, examining these key moments in the history of Greek thought: Hesiod's and the Milesians' searches, at once ethical and cosmological, for the intelligibility of the world; the efforts by Heraclitus and Parmenides to think the deepest unity of things; the way in which Plato brings the speculative discoveries of his predecessors to bear on the ethical disorder of the city by his presentation, in the dialogues, of Socratic inquiry and the "forms"; and Aristotle's reflections on language, on form and matter, and on the prime mover, in his search for the ultimate sense or sort of being.

**Texts:** Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*; McKirahan's *Philosophy Before Socrates*; several Plato dialogues (to be determined); readings from Aristotle's *Categories*, *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *On the Soul*.

**Requirements:** Several take-home essays, a near-end-of-semester paper on a topic of your choosing; faithful attendance and engagement.

**101-02 History of Western Philosophy**

**Mr. Murray  
MW 12:00 – 1:15  
RH 112**

This course will explore and define the birth of philosophy among the early Greeks, that great spiritual outburst which starts as the break from the myth suggested in the poems of Homer and Hesiod, climaxing in the search for philosophical first principles by Anaximander in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C., and pursued in different directions by the major Pre-Socratic thinkers. This will be followed by a study of the life, trial, and death of Socrates, unfolded in the Platonic dialogues. This is a prelude to the vast and original scheme of thought elaborated by Plato and Aristotle, who provide the basis for the Western tradition. We shall trace, out of proximity and affinity, the evolving differentiation of the philosophical way of life and knowing from that of the sage, the craftsman, the poet, the politician and the sophist. At the end of the course, we will consider the medieval thought of Aquinas, Eckhart, and Ockham.

**Texts:** McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*; Plato, *Apology, Meno, Symposium, Republic, Theaetetus* (selections); Aristotle, selections from *Posterior Analytics, Physics, Metaphysics, Ethics, and Poetics*; Added reading: Emile Brehier, *The Middle Ages and the Renaissance* “selections”

**Requirements:** A take-home mid-term, a longer paper on a topic of the student's choosing and a final self-scheduled examination

**101-03 History of Western Philosophy: Ancient**

**Mr. Seidman  
TR 12:00-1:15  
RH 304**

This course offers an introduction to ancient philosophy, aiming less at breadth than at depth. We will concentrate on the philosophical thought of two authors, Plato and Aristotle – by far the most far-sighted, acute, and radical philosophical writers of Western antiquity, and among the four or five greatest philosophers in the Western tradition. Almost two and a half millennia of cultural and intellectual change separate these authors from us. But the questions they raise and attempt to answer are questions in which all human beings, at all times, have a stake. And the arguments they offer in support of their own answers to these questions are arguments with which anyone with a serious interest in the questions must grapple. Our goal will be to evaluate these arguments appreciatively but critically.

We will trace the course of Plato's and Aristotle's thought through two areas of philosophy, ethics and metaphysics, which both authors saw as intimately connected. Plato's inquiries begin from the (ethical) question "what is a good life for a human being?" But Plato argues that we cannot answer this question on its own. In order to answer it adequately, we must answer prior, *metaphysical* questions: What is a human being? What is goodness? And, more broadly, what is real? Aristotle takes over these metaphysical questions from Plato, but seeks to criticize and improve upon Plato's answers. We will examine the metaphysical system he presents in his great and difficult work, *The Metaphysics* – a system that continued to dominate Western philosophical thought for almost 1800 years. Finally, we will consider the implications Aristotle takes his metaphysical views to have for the question with which the course begins: what is a good life for a human being.

**105-01 Problems of Philosophy**

**Mr. Lam  
TR 1:30 – 2:45  
RH 203**

What is philosophy? This course will introduce you to philosophy as the assimilation of human experiences--perceptual, imaginative, moral, and emotional--with the power and limitations of human reason. We will look at how philosophers apply reason and argumentation to perceptual experiences in their search for knowledge and rationality. We will investigate the issues of personal identity, and the existence of unperceivable things, to see how philosophers use reason to make sense of our imaginative experiences. Finally we will look at the application of reason to moral and emotional experiences in the search for the right account of moral good, freedom, and moral responsibility. Students will leave the course with an appreciation for the breadth and scope of philosophical thinking.

**Readings:** Descartes, Locke, Hume, Pascal, William James, Bernard Williams, and Harry Frankfurt among others.

**Requirements:** An ungraded writing assignment, two 1200-1500-word papers, and a cumulative final examination. Class discussion and regular postings on Blackboard are also required.

**105-02 Problems of Philosophy**

**Mr. Van Norden  
TR 12:00 – 1:15  
RH 212**

This course is an introduction to some of the issues, methods, and classic texts of philosophy. Among the topics we will address are the following: Is ethics purely subjective? Can we know anything? Can we trust our senses (sight, hearing, etc.)? Do humans only act out of self-interest? So the ends justify the means? What makes life worth living? Readings include classic texts by Aquinas, Descartes, Hume and Kant, as well as some contemporary essays. There will be some lectures in this class, but also much discussion, and several written assignments. Regular attendance and at least some class participation is required. There is a final exam but no midterm. This course has no prerequisites.

**106-01 Philosophy and Contemporary Issues**

**Ms. Narayan  
TR 9:00 – 10:15  
RH 210**

The course covers a number of contemporary issues on which there is significant philosophical disagreement and moral debate. We will examine a range of positions on topics such as abortion, euthanasia, animal rights, affirmative action, and issues of sexual morality, free speech and distributive justice. This course aims to promote the understanding of the philosophical arguments for a variety of positions on contemporary moral issues and to illuminate the different moral concepts and types of argument at work in these readings. We will also think about the legal and public implications of various positions on these issues.

**Requirements:** Regular attendance and active participation in class discussions is strongly expected. There will be a mid-term paper, a final paper and an in-class presentation.

**106-02 Philosophy and Contemporary Issues**

**Mr. Kelly  
MW 1:30 – 2:45  
RH 304**

This course introduces students to the philosophical study of moral issues, focusing upon topics such as war, terrorism, our food choices, abortion, and euthanasia. Emphasis throughout will be placed upon argumentative clarity and precision.

**Requirements:** Weekly writing assignments and active class participation.

**110-01 Early Chinese Philosophy**

**Mr. Van Norden  
TR 10:30-11:45  
RH 212**

An introduction to Chinese philosophy in the period between (roughly) 500 and 221 B.C., covering Confucians, Taoists and others. Among the topics discussed by these philosophers are human nature, methods of ethical education and self-cultivation, virtues and vices, and the role of human conventions, institutions and culture in human life. The course format consists mainly of lectures, with some discussion, as well as extensive reading of primary texts (in translation).

**Requirements:** There will be brief written assignments due every week. No familiarity with Chinese history, philosophy, or language is assumed.

**Texts:** TBA

**205-01 19<sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy**

**Mr. Miller  
TR 12:00-1:15  
RH 210**

Philosophy in the nineteenth century has as its point of departure Hegel's attempt to articulate a rational comprehension of the whole of reality. The very precision with which he is able to subordinate religious and secular social life within his dialectical vision of the whole of Spirit helps to light the way for his principal critics, the Christian existential thinker, Kierkegaard, and the social revolutionary, Marx. Their challenges raise a host of fundamental issues, including, for example, the rationality of reality and the reach of philosophy, the (ir)reducibility of the religious, the relation of the social whole and the individual, the historicity of ideas, and the implications for the human condition of the emergence of mass culture and the industrial division of labor. At the same time, it is first possible for Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Marx to have such deep disagreements because they are agreed in looking to or contesting specifically dialectical reason in facing the question of the intelligibility of existence. It is Nietzsche, above all, who seeks to break with this agreement. We will trace the movements of this self-expanding and self-undermining conversation.

**Readings:** texts from Fichte, Hegel, Feuerbach, Kierkegaard, Marx, and Nietzsche.

## **215-01 Phenomenology and Existential Thought**

**Mr. Murray**  
**MW 1:30-2:45**  
**RH 112**

This course provides an introduction to the major developments in Continental phenomenology and existential philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, beginning with the German phase and its founding by Husserl's phenomenology of intentional consciousness and its transformation by Heidegger who by joining resources from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche turns phenomenology in an existential-ontological direction. Next follows the French phase represented by Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Merleau-Ponty with its productive emphasis upon the lived body. The course closes with a sketch of later stages of Continental philosophy found in Levinas' metaphysics of the Other, the hermeneutics of Gadamer, and the deconstruction of Derrida.

There will be a take-home mid-term examination, a final examination, and a term paper.

## **220-01 Metaphysics**

**Mr. Winblad**  
**TR 3:10-4:25**  
**RH 203**

Metaphysics is the study of the nature of reality. In this course, we will examine a series of interlocking metaphysical questions, among them the following. Who or what am I? Am I a person, or something other than a person? If I am a person, what makes me the person I am? Is personal identity a matter of psychological continuity, or physical continuity? Could it be that the very idea of personal identity is flawed, as some contemporary philosophers insist? If so, should we cease to use this idea in thinking about ourselves? However we think about ourselves, surely we are conscious. But what is consciousness? Do we have any direct evidence that consciousness exists, or is our belief that we are conscious arrived at inferentially? Could it be, as some have held, that there simply is no such thing as consciousness? What about time? Is time an illusion, as some physicists and philosophers maintain? If so, how are we to understand how it arises, given that it cannot coherently be thought to unfold in time? Do we possess free will, or is the widespread conviction that we are free some sort of delusion? If we are fate's creatures, is it our destiny falsely to believe that we are free? Finally, why is there anything at all? Could it be that any attempt to answer this question must fall prey to viciously circularity, give rise to an unacceptable infinite regress, or beg the question? If so, is it a legitimate question after all? If it is not a meaningful question, why is it so hard for many thinkers to liberate themselves from the bondage of thinking that it is?

**Texts:** Essays and selections from books by Dummett, Frankfurt, James, Lewis, McTaggart, Nagel, Nozick, Parfit, Strawson, Williams, Wittgenstein, and others.

**Requirements:** Preparation for class, regular attendance, two in-class exams and a final paper.

**228-01 Epistemology****Mr. Lam  
MW 10:30-11:45  
RH 112**

Epistemology is the study of knowledge, justification, and rationality. The theories we will study in this course will be understood as responses to increasingly radical skeptical arguments. We will begin with the problem of induction, which claims that we can never justifiably infer generalizations from particular cases, infer beliefs about the future from ones about the past, and infer from observable patterns to unobservable explanations. We will uncover various paradoxes about such inferences, and attempt to respond to them. We will then look at skeptical arguments that we do not know anything on the basis of sense-perception, and the various theories of knowledge and justification that are built in response to such arguments. Of particular interest will be the Gettier problem, externalism versus internalism about knowledge and justification, foundationalism versus coherentism about justification, fallibilism, and whether one can solve skeptical problems by noting that knowledge admits of degrees.

**230-01 Symbolic Logic****Mr. Winblad  
MW 12:00 - 1:15  
RH 203**

Frege, the founder of modern logic, calls logical laws “the laws of truth”—the laws that govern how we are to think if we are to arrive at true beliefs. Like its Aristotelian predecessor, contemporary symbolic logic rests on the insight that one can see more clearly what makes inferences valid if one abstracts to some degree from the content of what we think and say, concentrating instead on reason’s formal aspects. In an attempt to make these structural features transparent, we will devise a “formal system” consisting of a language designed to render the form of our thoughts more explicit and a set of rules that guide transitions between them. We shall use this system to assess the logical status of a wide range of inferences. Finally, ascending to a meta-perspectival vantage point, we will explore the issue of whether our formal system is adequate to its purpose.

**Text:** Warren Goldfarb, Deductive Logic.

**Requirements:** Regular homework, two in-class exams, and a regularly scheduled final exam.

**238-01 Social and Political Philosophy****Mr. Kelly  
TR 1:30 – 2:45  
RH 112**

This course introduces students both to the history of political philosophy and to contemporary debates within it. Our focus will be the relationship between justice and equality.

**Requirements:** One in-class exam, two papers, a presentation, and active class participation.

### **310-01 Seminar: Philosophical Problems**

**Mr. Winblad**  
**M 6:30 – 9:30**  
**RH 212**

The predominant current in philosophy since ancient times seeks solutions to philosophical problems. Another current calls into question the possibility of such solutions. In this seminar we will examine several contemporary attempts to show that some central philosophical problems admit of no solution, at least none we can discover. The problems on which we shall focus include the problem of whether we can know anything, the mind-body problem, the problem of free will versus determinism, and the problem of why there is something rather than nothing. We will also consider several alternatives to the view that these problems are unsolvable. Could it be that the problems are solvable, but just haven't been solved yet? What if the problems already have been solved, but their solutions remain widely unrecognized? Is it possible that these so-called "problems" are not really problems after all? Finally, could it be that the problem of whether these problems are solvable is itself unsolvable?

**Texts:** Essays and selections from books by Double, Lange, Mates, McGinn, Priest, Unger, and others.

**Requirements:** A take-home midterm exam and a final paper.

### **384-01 Freedom, Agency, and Moral Responsibility**

**Mr. Seidman**  
**M 3:10 – 6:10**  
**RH 308**

Wittgenstein asked "what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm?" My arm going up is something that *happens* – an event, caused by and causing other events, that has my body as its locus – just like a light wave hitting a rod in my eye, a neuron firing in my brain, a signal travelling down the nerves in my arm, or my arm muscles contracting. And indeed, it can happen without my *doing* anything – for instance, when I have an epileptic seizure. But *raising my arm* is not just something that happens in my body, it is something that *I do*. What is this "I" who does this, and what is it for me to *do* something?

The question matters, in part because we hold one another responsible, morally and legally, for things we do, but we do not usually hold one another responsible for bodily behavior of which we are not the agents. If my hand strikes you during an epileptic fit, you will probably not be angry with me.

We do not hold one another "fully" responsible even for everything that we *do*. When a kleptomaniac steals, she *does* something. But we will understand her if she says that she tried not to steal, but that she was overcome – and this may alter our moral or legal evaluation of her behavior. We may want to say that although she acted, she did not act freely. So, we can add another layer to Wittgenstein's question: "What is left over if I subtract the fact that I raise my arm from the fact that I raise my arm *freely*?"

These are the questions we will seek to answer. Readings by Davidson, Frankfurt, Watson, Bratman, Wallace, Velleman, and others.

### **Other Departmental Offerings**

Environmental Studies

ENST 380-01 Risk Perception / Environmental Regulation Mr. Kelly  
T 10:30 – 12:30

Women's Studies

WMST 251-01 Global Feminism Ms. Narayan  
TR 10:30 – 11:45

### **COURSES CURRENTLY SCHEDULED FOR SPRING 2010**

(SUBJECT TO CHANGE IF NEEDED)

102-51	HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY II	MURRAY
102-52	HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY II	SEIDMAN
102-53	HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY II	SEIDMAN
105-51	PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY	CHURCH
106-51	PHILOSOPHY & CONTEMPORARY ISSUES	KELLY
210-51	NEO-CONFUSIONISM & CHINESE BUDDHISM	VAN NORDEN
222-51	THE PHILOSOPHY OF LOGIC	WINBLAD
230-51	SYMBOLIC LOGIC	WINBLAD
234-51	ETHICS	SEIDMAN
240-51	PHILOSOPHY OF ART & AESTHETICS	MURRAY
250-51	FEMINIST THEORY	NARAYAN
320-51	SEMINAR: HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY – KANT	CHURCH / KALIN
330-51	SEMINAR: ETHICS AND THEORY OF VALUE	KELLY
340-51	SEMINAR: CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY	MURRAY

### **Other Departmental Offering For Spring 2010**

Chinese / Japanese

CHJA 120-51 Introduction to Chinese / Japanese Literature Van Norden