

# Spring 2018 Course Descriptions & Distribution Areas

## **PHIL 407: Medieval Philosophy**

**Augustine**

**Distribution Requirement: Medieval**

**Dr. Blake Dutton**

As well as being a subtle religious thinker who helped set the foundations of Christian theology, Augustine was a first rate philosopher whose influence upon the western philosophical tradition has been immeasurable. The goal of this course is to provide an overview of Augustine's thought, with a particular focus on those parts of it that are of most interest to philosophers. This we will do through a reading of two of Augustine's masterworks - Confessions and The Trinity - as well as several short treatises that deal with a variety of specialized topics. The broad theme of the course is Augustine's views on the pursuit of wisdom within the Christian life and the value of philosophy for that pursuit. In fleshing these views out, we will spend a good bit of time looking at the course of Augustine's intellectual development and such diverse influences as Manicheanism, Neoplatonism, Academic Skepticism and Pauline theology. We will also look at a variety of topics that occupied Augustine in his capacity as a philosopher. These will include freedom of the will, the possibility of knowledge, the nature of the mind, time and eternity, and the ethics of belief.

## **PHIL 416: 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Cent Philosophy**

**Religious & Moral Belief in Bayle**

**Distribution Requirement: Modern, Ethics/Social Political, Metaphysics/Epistemology**

**Dr. Kristen Irwin**

The nature and value of skepticism, the nature and grounds of faith, and the relationship between religious and moral beliefs were three of the hottest topics in 17th century French philosophy. Pierre Bayle sits at the intersection of these three debates, and is thus an excellent figure to guide our inquiry into early modern conceptions of the relationships between reason, religious beliefs, and moral beliefs.

This seminar will use Dr. Irwin's manuscript-in-progress both as a guide through the relevant primary sources, and as a jumping-off point for discussion and interpretation of the primary texts. Seminararians will also gain practical disciplinary skills, such as composing and revising a conference paper for submission to the APA; writing book-review style pieces; writing a referee report; and adapting one's teaching style to different audiences.

Reading knowledge of French will be helpful, but not at all necessary.

### **PHIL 433: Phenomenology/Existentialism**

**Sartre, Beauvoir, Camus, Arendt**

**Distribution Requirement:** Continental, Ethics/Social Political

**Dr. David Schweickart**

This course will focus on four philosophers: Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus and Hannah Arendt, all of whom might be called "existentialist"-- although not all accept that label. We will read a series of works by Sartre and Beauvoir that set the context of French existentialism and take up the issue of an existentialist ethic. We will begin with Sartre's first (and most important) novel, *Nausea* (1938), then follow with excerpts from his most famous philosophical treatise, *Being and Nothingness* (1943). This will be followed by a reading of Sartre's play, "No Exit" (1944), and an analysis of his ethical essay "Existentialism is a Humanism," (1946) and then Beauvoir's more detailed *Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947). We will then read sections of the greatest work in applied existentialism, Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949).

We will move into more political terrain, with Albert Camus's novel, *The Plague* (1947), his philosophical treatise *The Rebel* (1951), and Sartre's play "Dirty Hands" (1948), the latter two specifically concerned with the problem of violence. We will read Hannah Arendt's Heidegger-inflected, *The Human Condition* (1958), then Sartre's attempt to existentialize Marxism, *Search for a Method* (1960). We will conclude with an application of this method, Sartre's autobiographical *The Words* (1964).

### **PHIL 467: Contemporary Ethical Theories**

**Derek Parfit's On What Matters**

**Distribution Requirement:** Analytic, Ethics/Social Political

**Dr. Thomas Carson**

Derek Parfit's multi-volume *On What Matters* is widely regarded as the most important book in ethics in the last 140 years. This course will involve an intensive reading and discussion of *On What Matters*. Parfit's wildly ambitious book addresses almost all the main issues in ethical theory — questions about the nature of the good life and human welfare, questions about moral obligation, and meta-ethical questions about the meaning and objectivity of normative judgments. Parfit defends the view that moral judgments are statements that are objectively true or false independently of what anyone believes or desires. He famously defends a "triple theory" of moral obligation and argues that (what he takes to be) the three best theories of moral obligation, the first version of Kant's categorical imperative, rule-consequentialism, and contractualism, are all equivalent. In addition, Parfit writes very insightfully about many other topics including: the meaning of life, the fine-tuning argument for the existence of God, "why there is something rather than nothing," Nietzsche's moral philosophy, utilitarianism, environmental ethics,

egoism, the long-term survival of the human race (and the future non-human descendants of human beings), and many other issues. Parfit's book is a model of clarity and includes hundreds of interesting arguments. On What Matters is one of most collaborative philosophical books ever written - it was rewritten many times in light of detailed comments and criticisms that he received from hundreds of other philosophers.

**From reviews of the book:**

"the most significant work in ethics since ... 1873 ... a work of epic proportions and ambitions." --Peter Singer, Times Literary Supplement

"Parfit's intricate and beautifully lucid book is undoubtedly the work of a philosophical genius." --John Cottingham, The Tablet

"an epochal work ... Parfit's intellectual personality radiates throughout On What Matters, which as a whole presents a gripping and illuminating picture of a single, comprehensive view of the projects of both normative and metaethical inquiry." --Mark Schroeder, Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews

**Links to discussions of Parfit's life and work:**

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/09/05/how-to-be-good>

<http://dailynous.com/2017/01/02/derek-parfit-1942-2017/>

[https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/04/world/derek-parfit-philosopher-who-explored-identity-and-moral-choice-dies-at-74.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/04/world/derek-parfit-philosopher-who-explored-identity-and-moral-choice-dies-at-74.html?_r=0)

<http://leiterreports.typepad.com/blog/2017/01/in-memori-am-derek-parfit-1942-2017.html>

**PHIL 468: Topics in Ethics**

**Ethics and International Relations**

**Distribution Requirement:** Ethics/Social-Political

**Dr. Joy Gordon**

Some would argue that ethics is simply irrelevant in international affairs—that states and non-state actors simply pursue their interests, and that's all that can be expected of them. But even in war, there has long been a set of articulated principles about constraints on warfare, and what moral duties are owed even to an enemy in combat. The twentieth century saw the emergence of institutions of global governance that addressed ethical violations in warfare, as well as human rights; and which also established means for enforcing international law against states and individuals. But many have raised questions about their focus and adequacy: are

there ways in which international law reflects a gender bias? Why are economic rights treated as secondary, when the human damage from poverty is far greater than the destruction that is done in warfare, or even genocide? This course provides an overview of the theoretical frameworks for thinking about ethical questions within the international arena, as well as some of the emerging issues in the areas of human rights, Just War, global governance, feminist critiques of international relations, economic sanctions, humanitarian intervention, and genocide. Readings will be drawn from philosophy, international law, and international relations.

**PHIL 480: Social & Political Philosophy**

**The Critical Theory of Modernity: Rousseau to Honneth**

**Distribution Requirement:** Ethics/Social Political, Continental

**Dr. David Ingram**

The seminar will be devoted to examining what is perhaps the most iconic theme of the Frankfurt School: the critique of modernity. We begin by examining the sources of this critique in the writings of Rousseau, Marx, and Freud. We then survey some seminal writings of the early Frankfurt School, including essays by Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Benjamin, culminating in Adorno's *Minima Moralia*. We then conclude by looking at the critical reception of that tradition in the writings of Habermas, Foucault and Honneth, finishing with the latter's book on reification. Course requirements: two short presentation/papers and a take-home final exam or final term paper.

Required texts: Ingram, *Critical Theory and Philosophy*; *Critical Theory: The Essential Readings* (Paragon House Publishers); Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (Norton Edition); Adorno: *Minima Moralia* (Verso); Honneth, *Reification* (Cambridge). Texts by Benjamin, Arendt, Habermas, and Foucault will be posted on-line.