

Fall 2021 Course Descriptions & Distribution Areas

PHIL 400: Philosophy Research Tools

Research and Analysis of Social Justice Issues

Distribution requirement: Ethics/Social-Political

Dr. Joy Gordon

Is it ethical to use drones in warfare? What are the causes of homelessness? What are the specific ways that migration impacts women? Who is morally responsible for the acts of a government? This course looks at several different methodological approaches to social justice issues: broad ethical frameworks; specific ethical issues, such as volition and duress; quantitative analysis; various conceptions of violence; US law; and international human rights law. Students are asked to pick a subject area that they will follow throughout the semester. Focusing on various aspects of their topic area, students will do targeted literature reviews and write several short analytic papers, utilizing each of the methodologies that are covered in the course.

PHIL 402: Aristotle

Knowledge as a Virtue

Distribution requirement: Ancient, Metaphysics/Epistemology

Dr. Joshua Mendelsohn

In recent decades, a number of epistemologists have defended accounts of knowledge in terms of admirable intellectual traits or truth-guiding cognitive powers. This idea, in some sense, goes back to Aristotle. Alongside his account of the virtues of character, Aristotle also offers an account of various types of knowledge as so-called “intellectual virtues”, and emphasizes certain similarities between ethical virtue and scientific knowledge. There is however no easy mapping between what Aristotle has to say about intellectual virtues and contemporary virtue-theoretical accounts of knowledge. This is, in part, because it is not straightforward to say which if any of the cognitive achievements Aristotle discusses corresponds to the contemporary philosopher’s notion of “knowledge”; it is also in part because Aristotle explicitly denies that certain cognitive achievements which contemporary philosophers take as paradigms of knowledge (like recognizing an object in perception) are knowledge in the sense connected with a virtue; and it is finally because Aristotle draws a sharper distinction between good traits of character and admirable traits of mind than some contemporary theorists.

In this course, we will study Aristotle’s account of the intellectual virtues and his distinctions among various types of knowledge alongside contemporary writings by Ernest Sosa, John Greco, Linda Zagzebski and other virtue epistemologists. Our aim will be to understand the differences in the ways that Aristotle and contemporary theorists each call upon the notion of virtue in their respective treatments of knowledge. Some of the philosophical questions motivating our comparisons will be: What is involved in calling a certain trait a virtue? Are there “purely theoretical” virtues, or do all virtues boil down to ethically praiseworthy traits? How variegated are the various cognitive achievements that we group together under the heading “knowledge”? Are there plausible and principled ways of drawing a distinction between types of knowledge that are connected with virtues and those which are not?

PHIL 438: Topics in Continental Philosophy

Simone de Beauvoir

Distribution Requirements: Continental, Ethics/Social-Political

Dr. Johanna Oksala

In this course, we will investigate Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy. Beauvoir was excluded from the philosophical canon for decades, but today she is increasingly recognized as a key figure in the 20th century movement of existential phenomenology. The course focuses primarily on two of her most significant works, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and *The Second Sex*. We will also read a selection of her philosophical essays and political writings, as well as studying her contemporary feminist critics who contest issues such as the sex-gender distinction and the analogy between women and slaves in her work. The aim is to expose and address possible tensions between the philosophical and the political aims of Beauvoir's work, and this way to connect it with contemporary debates on critical phenomenology.

The course is intended for both students who are new to Beauvoir's philosophy, as well as for those already familiar with it. It offers an up-to-date understanding of her work, deepens student's knowledge of its philosophical influences, and provides conceptual tools for a critical assessment of its contemporary relevance.

PHIL 445: Philosophy of Mind

Philosophy of Mind

Distribution Requirement: Analytic, Metaphysics/Epistemology

Dr. Joseph Vukov

The philosophy of mind can be thought of as a kind of philosophical anthropology. It studies several issues falling under one wide-ranging question: what is the relationship between who you are (and what you experience) and the neural and bodily processes that underlie who you are (and what you experience)? This course explores contemporary issues in philosophy of mind from a distinctively philosophical perspective and also brings in resources from psychology, neuroscience, and the history of philosophy when relevant. The course will be organized around three main units: Mind-Body Theories, Philosophy of Cognitive Science and Consciousness, and Mental Powers. While we be covering recent research in Philosophy of Mind, the course will also provide a general overview of the field.

PHIL 480: Social & Political Philosophy

Frankfurt School of Critical Theory

Distribution Requirement: Continental, Ethics/Social-Political

Dr. David Ingram

The course will survey thinkers and themes associated with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Thinkers who might be discussed are: Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herberly Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Juergen Habermas, Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, Angela Davis, Rahel Jaeggi, Andrew Feenberg, and Amy Allen. Themes that might be discussed are: capitalism, Marxism, Freudianism, antisemitism, authoritarianism, racism, feminism, reason and the Enlightenment, development and historical progress, technology, discourse ethics, ideology, social pathology, democratic theory, law and rights, emancipation, recognition theory, and various topics relating to social justice. Students will be required to write short (1-page) weekly reaction papers, deliver a short class

presentation; comment on a class presentation, and submit a final 12-20 page research paper (or an equivalent take-home exam designed by the instructor).

PHIL 490: Current Philosophical Issues

Whiteness and White Supremacy

Distribution Requirements: Ethics/Social-Political

Dr. Jesus Luzardo

This course will analyze the concepts/phenomena of whiteness and white supremacy as they emerged and have continued to function in the West over the last five centuries, focusing primarily (but not exclusively) in the United States. We will approach these concepts/phenomena not just philosophically, but historically and materially. Indeed, one of the main premises of this course is that our accounts of race and racism (and of the many further concepts, identities, and phenomena that fall within them) will be weaker if they do not directly engage their historical and material operations. Thus, after initially assessing influential philosophical accounts of whiteness, we will proceed to examine key conceptual and historical sites — such as Land, Slavery, Labor, Minstrelsy, Reconstruction, Law, Amalgamation, Police, and Habit — through which we may better observe the emergence, formation, and operations of whiteness and white supremacy. To do this, we will engage texts and thinkers from a variety of traditions and disciplines, including Mills, Sullivan, Yancey, Marx, Robinson, Du Bois, Davis, E.P. Thompson, Roediger, Ignatiev, Sexton, Harris, and Guenther, among others.