

Spring 2020 Course Descriptions & Distribution Areas

PHIL 406: Aquinas

Aquinas On Morals and the Mind

Distribution Requirement: Medieval

Dr. Peter Hartman

In this course we will study core issues in Thomas Aquinas's philosophy of mind and his ethics. We will read his commentary on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, complementing this reading with contemporary discussions, as well as texts elsewhere in Aquinas and other medieval philosophers, such as John Buridan. The topics we will cover will include: the nature of the will, freedom, the formation of habits, the nature of habits, the role of habits, the distinction between a virtue of character and a virtue of intellect, and happiness. All readings will be in English.

PHIL 422: Nietzsche

Genealogy of Morals

Distribution Requirement: Ethics/Social-Political, Continental

Dr. Jacqueline Scott

The focus of this course will be on one of Nietzsche's best-known books: On the Genealogy of Morals. This work is most commonly known for Nietzsche's criticisms of traditional philosophy (slave morality, bad conscience and the Christian Ascetic Ideal). In this course, we will also engage in a close analysis to suss out Nietzsche's positive arguments. In particular, we will examine the roles of art, self-knowledge, religion, philosophy in Nietzsche's criticisms of, positive suggests for, contending with philosophical nihilism.

While the focus of this course will be on the Genealogy, I will not assume prior knowledge of Nietzsche's works. This course should be of interest to anyone with interests in ethics, 19th century philosophy, and social/political philosophy. The course will also be of use to anyone who might want to include Nietzsche in her/his own introductory philosophy course.

We will begin by reading Birth of Tragedy as well as Beyond Good and Evil and The Gay Science in order to get a more general sense of his arguments and themes in the late works. For the bulk of the course, we will focus on making our way through Genealogy. We will then spend the last few weeks of the course reading a few secondary sources that address themes/concepts/arguments raised in Genealogy. The class will be run as a discussion-based seminar in which students will be given the opportunity to facilitate half of a class meeting. We will also work on skills such as close textual analysis, writing thesis defense papers, and revision.

PHIL 433: Phenomenology/Existentialism

Topics in Critical Phenomenology

Distribution Requirement: Ethics/Social-Political, Continental

Dr. Johanna Oksala

There has been a critical turn in phenomenology in recent years: phenomenology is increasingly understood as a form politically and ethically engaged critique capable of analyzing and illuminating contemporary socio-political phenomena. In this course, we will ask what such an understanding of phenomenology entails. We will reflect on the limits of phenomenological inquiry through an analysis of such topics as intersubjectivity, the body, power and oppression, gender, race, and sexuality. We will also attempt to read the canon of phenomenological writing against the grain by studying less well-known texts and marginalized figures such as Franz Fanon and Simone de Beauvoir. The course aims to provide students with an up-to-date understanding of recent developments in phenomenology, as well as a renewed perspective on its key questions and challenges.

PHIL 462: Kant's Moral Philosophy

Distribution Requirement: Ethics/Social-Political, Modern

Dr. Naomi Fisher

In this course, we will examine both the foundations and content of Kant's moral philosophy. We will begin with the Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals and the Critique of Practical Reason, and then move on to discuss the manner in which Kant's moral philosophy is intertwined with his work on religion, politics, and history. To this end, we will read portions of Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, portions of the Metaphysics of Morals, and various essays.

PHIL 468: Topics in Ethics/PHIL389: Contemporary Issues

The Ethics of Enhancement

Distribution Requirement: Ethics/Social-Political, Analytic

Dr. Joe Vukov

As humans, we have long sought to improve ourselves, even while we debated the ethics of these efforts: Plato, for example, notoriously argued that the written word—apparently, a prop to enhance memory—in fact worsened it. New technological developments, however, have raised particularly pressing ethical questions surrounding enhancement. Genetic modification; cognitive enhancing technologies; artificial intelligence; the 'uplifting' of non-human animal species:

these technologies and others pose ethical questions at a rate that has often outpaced philosophical reflection. This course thus aims to catch up.

The course will begin by investigating philosophical theories of enhancement: what counts as enhancement and how can we define it? The course will then move on to investigate the ethics of human enhancement, from the mundane (e.g. using your smartphone to navigate a new city) to the cutting-edge (e.g. heritable genetic modification). In addition to considering standard questions about the permissibility of enhancement, the course will also explore the rationality and desirability of enhancement: for example, regardless of whether enhancement is permissible, is it something that is either rational or deeply desirable to undergo? The aim of the course will be to provide students with several frameworks for approaching contemporary debates about the ethics of enhancement, as well as relevant background into the technologies that are currently shaping these debates.

PHIL 468: Topics in Ethics

International Ethics

Distribution Requirement: Ethics/Social-Political

Dr. Joy Gordon

This course is intended to give students an overview of the theoretical frameworks for thinking about ethical questions within the international arena, as well as some of the critical issues in this field. Some would argue that ethics are 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, which 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? Should there be measures of accountability that are binding on institutions of global governance themselves?
