

Fall 2016

Department of Philosophy

Graduate Course Descriptions

http://www.buffalo.edu/cas/philosophy/grad-study/grad_courses/fallcourses_grad.html

PHI 548 Biomedical Ontology

Professor Barry Smith

Monday 4:00 - 6:50

Class #24057

This course provides an introduction to biomedical ontology. It will review how data and information are generated through biological and biomedical experiments and through patient care, and show how ontologies are used in accessing, maintaining and exploiting the results. We will describe how biomedical ontologies are developed and evaluated and provide a comparative critical analysis of the principal current ontology resources. We will also review the major theories, methods and tools for the development of ontologies, and illustrate how these are being used in different areas of biomedical research and healthcare. On completion of this course students will have a thorough understanding of strategies to manage and exploit biomedical data; they will have a knowledge of categorization, of the philosophy of experimentation, of the philosophy of medicine, and of computer-based reasoning with data.

PHI 556 Early Modern Philosophy before Kant: From Hobbes to Rousseau

Professor James Lawler

Wednesday 4:00 - 6:50

Class #24056

The course examines the early modern philosophies before Kant in two parts: the British philosophies of Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Adam Smith, and the Continental orientation of Descartes, Leibniz, and Rousseau. The key to the interpretation of this history is provided by remarks of Kant regarding the previous conflicts of empiricism and rationalism in philosophical methodology, and materialism and spiritualism in metaphysics. For Kant it was above all important to recognize in the conflicting and interweaving evolution of the preceding philosophies the emergence of a critical morality and a non-sectarian and non-dogmatic spirituality in harmony with the new sciences.

The primary theme of the metaphysics of matter and spirit is integrated with its implications for epistemology and methodology of science, for moral, social, and political philosophy, and for the philosophy of religion. Comprehensive views of the philosophers are organized and compared within the framework of the battle between opposing metaphysical options, which are seen to permeate the philosophers' thinking on all subjects. Thus while the matter-based orientation stresses individualism and culminates in the free-market orientation of Adam Smith, the spirit-based orientation stresses the values of communication and sharing in Descartes' agenda for a science-based ethics and culminates in Rousseau's call for an authentic social contract based on the general will.

When contemporary philosophers describe their standpoint as “post-modern” they presuppose a concept of modernity. The modernity of modern philosophy is explained first of all in relation to the new revolutions in the sciences of the seventeenth century, beginning with the heliocentric astronomy of Copernicus and the new physics of Galileo. Hence Kant describes his own goal as consisting in a Copernican revolution in philosophy. The modern philosophers of both British and Continental streams ponder the revolutionary implications of the new sciences in relation to the traditional philosophy of Greek and Roman antiquity and the European middle ages. The course therefore begins with an outline of this traditional philosophy, represented especially by the philosophy of Aristotle, as background for highlighting the originality of the modern perspectives.

The textbook is James Lawler, *Matter and Spirit: The Battle of Metaphysics in Modern Western Philosophy before Kant*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006.

PHI 556 Topics in History of Philosophy

Professor Lewis Powell
Thursday 1:00 - 3:50
Class #21330

In this course, we will carefully read (selections from) John Stuart Mill's “System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive”, and some of the earlier texts Mill is responding to, in order to appreciate the contributions Mill was making to philosophy of language, philosophy of science, and to epistemology. We will undertake close readings of Mill's text, reconstruct his arguments, and assess the tenets of his system.

PHI 579 Ethics, Practical Reason

Professor Alexandra King
Wednesday 1:00 - 3:50
Class #24059

Questions about practical reason have become important in contemporary metaethical and metanormative theorizing. Roughly characterized, practical reason aims at action, where theoretical reason aims at belief. The fundamental puzzle is to explain at once how it can be a genuine form of reasoning while also being normative or motivationally efficacious. While interesting in its own right, it's also important for metaethics more generally. For example, some see the task of explaining how practical reason functions as The Big Problem for realist metaethical (or metanormative) views. In this course, we'll examine what practical reason is, whether it actually exists, and if so, how it is best characterized.

PHI 579 Contemporary Political Philosophy

Professor Richard Cohen
Tuesday 4:00 - 6:50
Class # 25227

In the late 20th century, scientific, technical, and economic developments have been joined together by global financial capitalism, creating a corporate system - the “administered society” - through the alliance of positivism, instrumentalism, commodification and celebrity, reducing the real to the quantifiable, whether digits or dollars. This juggernaut has at the same time radically challenged Enlightenment political traditions. For instance, already in 1900 Rosa Luxemburg understood that: “No absolute and general relation can be constructed between capitalist development and democracy. Democratic institutions ... have completely exhausted their function as aids in the development of bourgeois society.” Having overthrown monarchy and aristocracy, capitalist accumulation tramples all values, except the purely instrumental power of money. Simpleminded theories, such as “neo-liberalism,” justify this displacement of the political by market economy, reducing real community (health, education, welfare, sustainable environment, culture, etc.) to abstract rights which pretend the poor are equal to the rich. This seminar will examine several political philosophies critical of such developments, beginning with Marx and Engels, then turning Georg Lukacs, Rosa Luxemburg, the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse, and concluding with the more recent analyses of situationalism (Guy Debord), Jacques Rancière, and the ongoing Occupy movement. Can democracy be made viable in the age of global capitalism?

PHI 637 Historiography and Philosophy

Professor Jorge Gracia
Tuesday 7:00 - 9:50 pm
Class #23506

Do you know any philosophers who in their philosophizing do not refer to the views of other philosophers? I bet not, because an overwhelming number of philosophers refer to the views of other philosophers, although some refer only to the views of dead philosophers, some refe

only to the views of living philosophers, and some refer to the views of both dead and living philosophers. All of them are engaged in making judgments about philosophers and their views that are part of history, that is, they are engaged in doing history of philosophy, although the history may be recent in some cases and ancient in others. Surprisingly, it is very rare to find philosophers who raise questions about the activity in which they are regularly engaged. Questions such as: Can we effectively recover and understand the views of other philosophers, whether living or dead, recent or ancient. Are there right and wrong ways of doing so? Is the recovery task drastically different from the task of philosophizing? Are philosophical judgments of the essence in the task of recovery and understanding of the past? What is the value of engaging that recovery? Do philosophers need to do history of philosophy or is it merely desirable that they do so, and if one or the other, why? Are there different ways of carrying out the task of recovery or is there one single and proper way of doing it?

Can the task be ever completely insulated from biases? Can one do history of philosophy on the basis of translations? These are just a few questions that may be asked concerning the historiography of philosophy, and that we will discuss in this seminar. The readings will consist of readings from a recently published book by Thomas D. Sullivan and Russell Pannier, papers published by Peter Hare close to twenty years ago in a volume resulting from a conference he organized in Buffalo, various articles that have appeared since then, and my book *Philosophy and Its History: Issues in Philosophical Historiography*. We will also have four visitors to the seminar who will make presentations, including Sullivan, Pannier, Robert Gooding Williams, Carlos Sanchez, and Barry Smith. Moreover, the Capen Lectures to be delivered by Christia Mercer will deal with this topic.

PHI 637 Pro-seminar

Professor John T. Kearns
Monday 1:00 - 3:50
Class #: 21332

This course is a writing-intensive course based on some twentieth-century works in the analytic tradition. The books we will read are:

Russell, *Lectures on Logical Atomism*
Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*
Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*
Quine, *Word and Object*
Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

In addition, we will read a number of papers related to these works.

There will be frequent writing assignments in which students identify and explain problems that the different authors are addressing, or in which students critically evaluate solutions that the different authors provide for problems they address. Most papers will be approximately 1500 words, together with two longer papers of approximately 3000 words. The longer papers will be revised and expanded versions of two of the shorter papers.

Classes will be devoted to discussion of the various philosophers and their positions, to student presentations based on the writing assignments, and to discussion of student papers.

Individual Tutorial Course Sections

See [HUB Registration site](#) for Individual Tutorial Course Sections with Philosophy Department Faculty, to be Arranged with Permission of Instructor:

PHI 599 Graduate Tutorial

PHI 701 MA Thesis Guidance Tutorials (Arranged with Professor)

PHI 703 Dissertation Guidance Tutorials (Arranged with Professor)

[See the Course Archive for a listing of courses that have been offered in recent years.](#)

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