

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
GRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Fall Semester August 31 – December 11, 2020

[PHI 578 Kant's Ethics](#)

Dr. James Lawler

Wednesday, 4:00 PM – 6:40 PM

Delivery mode – online: real time

Class #: 24209

Kant's ethics occupy a central place in his three critiques. The first Critique provides the metaphysical space for the second. If deterministic science is true of reality, then morality, with its crucial assumption of free will, is an illusion. So it was necessary for Kant "to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith" as he says in the Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Since knowledge is limited to appearances, although we cannot *know* that we have free will, we can still *believe* that our will is free. Kant's faith-related moral philosophy therefore occupies this metaphysical space opened up by the critique of scientific knowledge. It is important to keep in mind this perspective in considering what Kant says about morality. To focus exclusively on the role of reason in Kant's ethics is to miss the significance of this initial framework, with its critique of knowledge and its grounding of a moral faith.

Moreover, it is not enough to understand what is morally right; it is necessary to *realize* one's moral duties, the culminating ideal for which, is the creation of a just society, what Kant calls "the highest good." Kant's third critique, the *Critique of Judgment*, develops a teleological conception that complements the mechanism of science but is open to incorporating the perspective of morality. In this perspective of the realization of the moral ideals, both Kant's aesthetics and his historical and political essays provide essential components for the understanding of morality.

The second critique therefore makes complete sense only within the frameworks provided by the first and the third critiques. In the light of the system of three critiques, the course focuses primarily on Kant's small but intricate work, the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Lectures and supplied reading materials will provide sufficient information regarding Kant's three critiques and relevant essays.

In addition to regular attendance and participation in lecture discussions, a final 15-20 page paper, incorporating both research in Kant scholarship and the essential ideas of the course, will be required.

## **PHI 579 The Metaphysics and Ethics of Transhumanism**

Dr. David Hershenov

Wednesday, 1:00 PM – 3:40 PM

Delivery mode – online: real time and recorded

Class #: 24286

Transhumanists desire to overcome their natural biological limitations. Many seek to persist long after their living bodies would wear down by replacing their organic parts with more durable inorganic parts. Others envision a future in which brain scans are possible and the information about their psychology can be uploaded and eventually realized in longer-lasting bodies. Some advocate freezing freshly dead or dying human bodies until there exists the biotechnology to reanimate those bodies without their pathologies. The first half of the course will be concerned with whether such ambitions are metaphysically possible. If we are essentially living organisms, such technologies would perhaps replace us with duplicates, not extend our existence.

Many Transhumanists focus upon enhancing cognitive abilities beyond the norm for the species. Some believe there is even a duty to pharmaceutically or genetically render people more virtuous. Transhumanists typically advocate interventions to make people smarter, improve their memories, increase their attentiveness, better their work habits, etc. Critics of Transhumanism worry that such interventions may increase inequality, undermine solidarity, corrupt parent/child relationships, fail to appreciate nature as a gift, render people too responsible for their condition, lead to a loss of diversity, unleash unforeseen biological dangers, and unmoor politics from restraints of human nature. The second half of the course will deal with such ethical concerns raised by Transhumanism.

The readings will be articles by John Locke, Nick Bostrom, Andy Clark, Ray Kurzweil, Randall Keane, Derek Parfit, Martine Rothblatt, Julian Savulescu, Ingmar Persson, Aubrey DeGray, Anders Sandberg, Hans Moravec, Eric Steinhart, David Chalmers, Allen Buchanan, Michael Sandel, Frances Kamm, Frances Fukuyama, David Oderberg, Eric Olson, Barry Smith, David Hershenov, and Alfred Archer. Students who want an easy, fun, popular introduction to Transhumanism could peruse Mark O'Connell's *To Be a Machine: Adventures Among Cyborgs, Utopians, Hackers, and the Futurists: Solving the Modest Problem of Death*. More philosophically serious introductions that include a good portion of the seminar's readings are Max Moore and Natasha-Vita Moore's *The Transhumanist Reader* and Allen Buchanan's *Beyond Humanity?*

## **PHI 579 Philosophy on Rails: An Introduction to Ontology**

Dr. Barry Smith

Monday, 1:00 PM – 3:40 PM

Delivery mode – HyFlex: all class instruction and activities occur on campus (in person and are also live-streamed and recorded. Students can flexibly choose, on any given day, to participate in any class activity in person.

Class #: 24202

Progress in philosophy has been hampered by the fact that philosophers have no shared, controlled vocabulary which they can use as a common starting point when defining their terms. Even mundane terms like 'world,' 'fact,' and 'harm' have such a variety of meanings

that when competing theories use such terms their defenders can often be accused of engaging in merely verbal disputes.

This course will address three goals. **First**, it will explore how to create and use a standard philosophical vocabulary. This will include exploiting modern developments in computational ontology, including the world's first international standard ontology. **Second**, it will explore the ways in which building a restricted philosophical vocabulary can help to arbitrate philosophical disputes in areas such as time, mental content, modality, and obligation. **Third**, it will provide an introduction to the methods of contemporary applied ontological methods that are being used both inside and outside philosophy.

### 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)