

Undergraduate Courses » Fall 2008

101 Introduction to Philosophy

General topics in various areas of philosophy showing different sides of issues; develops critical thought and philosophical method.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
101C	MWF	9-9:50 AM	Kah Kyung Cho	Fronczak 422	470257

This will be a topically arranged discussion which spans classical philosophy and cutting-edge modern thinking. The evolution of philosophy from the early Greek beginning to our own age will be surveyed centering around the following major themes: nature of reality, question of God, possibility and limits of human knowledge, ethics and morality, technology and environment. Also due attention will be paid to multi-culturalism in the modern world and the necessity of understanding non-Western philosophy.

Text: 9th edition (new) of Robert Solomon's *Introducing Philosophy* (Oxford University Press)

101H	TTh	11-12:20 PM	Ernesto Rosen Velasquez	Capen 262	411165
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Are there minds? Does God exist? What can we know? What makes an action right or wrong? Why should we obey the law? What is the best form of government? Can we really be free? We will pursue these lines of inquiry by thinking through and critically evaluating a variety of ways philosophers have answered these questions.

101M	MWF	1-1:50 PM	Michael McGlone	Knox 109	174178
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This course will be an introduction to philosophy emphasizing issues concerning the nature of knowledge and reality. We will address a number of important philosophical questions: Are there any good reasons for believing or disbelieving in the existence of God? To what extent are we justified in our beliefs regarding material objects in the external world? To what extent is free will compatible with our modern scientific conception of the world? How are mental entities such as our minds related to material things such as our bodies? We will study a number of traditional responses to questions of this sort, reading both historical and contemporary sources. At each step, we will focus on formulating and assessing arguments for and against the philosophical positions that underwrite these responses.

107 Ethics

Introduces value theory, good and bad, justification of obligations to others, relationship of free choice and determinism, and contemporary moral problems analyzed by ethical principles.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
107D	MWF	10-10:50 AM	Maureen Donnelly	Baldy 101	206133

Nearly everyone assumes that some human actions are morally good or at least morally permissible, while other human actions are morally wrong. However, there is often considerable and bitter disagreement over the moral worth of particular actions. The primary purpose of this class is to examine different principles which have been advocated for distinguishing between morally acceptable and morally unacceptable actions. Special attention will be paid to principles which are based on substantial philosophical arguments and which purport to be independent of

specific cultural practices. We will also consider: i) the extent of a person's responsibility for his or her actions and ii) what reasons can be given for choosing good actions and refraining from bad actions. Students should expect a substantial amount of reading from historical and contemporary sources. Grades will be based on regular class participation and examinations.

107K TTh 9:30-10:50 AM [Carolyn Korsmeyer](#) O'Brian 109 [392956](#)

What does it mean to be a good person? How should one make moral decisions? What kinds of responsibilities do we have towards others, ourselves, and the environment around us? These are just a few of the questions addressed by philosophers interested in moral philosophy. This course will introduce students to several of the major historical approaches to ethics, including Aristotle, Kant and John Stuart Mill. The relatively new concerns regarding ethics, the environment and obligations to nonhuman animals will also be considered. Classes will be conducted through lecture and discussion, and students will be evaluated by their performance on approximately three tests and a short paper.

107S TTh 11-12:20 PM [Kenneth Shockley](#) Baldy 101 [204084](#)

This course is an introduction to moral philosophy. We will consider such broad questions as, how ought we to act? What sorts of lives should we lead? What sorts of things, whether persons, practices, objects or institutions, might rightly be said to be good? In this course we will investigate several different approaches to answering these difficult questions. To this end, and with the goal of making the student broadly familiar with this branch of philosophy, we will read selections from several major moral philosophers and survey the issues and positions in moral philosophy that arise from these readings. We will begin by considering the nature of morality, and the relation of morality to selfishness (or egoism) and cultural relativism. We will then read excerpts from one of the classic works of the history of moral philosophy, Aristotle's NICOMACHEAN ETHICS. Here we will consider what it means to claim someone is virtuous, and examine the relation of the virtuous person to right action. We will then move to the normative theories presented in two classics of the Enlightenment: Immanuel Kant's FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS and John Stuart Mill's UTILITARIANISM. After investigating these classics we will turn to a series of essays dealing with contemporary ethical issues.

108 Knowledge & Reality

Introduces epistemology, metaphysics, knowledge as a reflection of the real world's properties and its relation to different viewpoints, the world as material objects, the mind and matter, and the role of scientific and technical knowledge in today's world.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
108B	TTh	9:30-10:50 AM	Shane Babcock	Capen 262	347428

This course provides an introduction to issues in epistemology, the subdiscipline of philosophy concerning the nature of knowledge and metaphysics, i.e., the sub-discipline broadly concerning the nature and structure of reality. In metaphysics we examine questions such as "Do universals exist?"; does each individual apple have its own particular redness or is there some universal property redness that each red apple shares in? Those inclined to reject such abstract entities must give some other alternative account of how each apple seems to possess the same

color. What is the nature of the external objects in our world? Take a clay statue. Is the lump of clay the same as the statue? Of course, you might say. But if we squash the lump of clay, though we no longer have a statue, we seemingly still have the same lump of clay. Now, if we say they are separate objects, then how can they occupy the same space at the same time? What is the nature of change? Can a material object remain the same object if all of its original parts have been completely replaced? What is the relationship between objects and properties?

With regard to epistemology we will examine the concept of knowledge, as well as related concepts such as truth and justification. What is involved in my knowing that there is a computer screen in front of me right now? What is the nature of the justification for my believing what I do and can my beliefs be justified enough to count as knowledge?

Grades will be determined on the basis of class participation and various short essay assignments (2-3 pages).

108T MWF 12-12:50 PM [Frederic Tremblay](#) Clemens 19 [104834](#)

This course is an introduction to metaphysics and epistemology. Metaphysics is said to be concerned with being, reality, its basic structure, and the categories of entities inhabiting it: particulars and universals, space and time, substances and processes, relata and relations, modality and possible worlds, etc. Discussion of some of these topics will also bring us to reflect on epistemological problems concerning our cognitive access to reality, and to search for criteria of reality and unreality. We might as well discuss the possible scopes and relations of metaphysics and epistemology. Are they separate or overlapping? Since all knowledge of reality mediately or immediately depends on perception, should metaphysics be dependent upon epistemology? Or, since knowledge is in minds, minds 'in' bodies, and bodies in the world, should epistemology be conceived as a special kind of metaphysics, i.e., a metaphysics of knowledge? We will read a selection of historical and contemporary texts in order to become familiar with some of the most standard metaphysical and epistemological questions and evaluate the most truthlike answers to those questions.

115 Critical Thinking

Techniques of problem solving, decision making, and evaluating pros and cons of an issue; organizing data; forming strategies and giving reasons; perceptual, cultural, emotional, intellectual, and expressive blocks to thinking; simple inductive reasoning and statistical fallacies.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
115C	MWF	10-10:50 AM	Dobin Choi	Cooke 127A	334321

In order to be a good athlete in a specific sports game, you should develop your overall physical strength, including muscle power, speed, flexibility, etc. as well as special skill or technique requisite for that field of sports. Likewise, in order to be a good scholar (or student), it is necessary not only to have specific knowledge about your field of study, but also to foster your general ability to think clearly and consistently. The goal of this course is to sharpen your thinking faculty and to harden its basic foundation. Roughly speaking, the former is related to analyzing the results of other people's thinking, one of which we usually call 'arguments' and the latter to building up your own structure of thinking strong and clear enough to persuade others. For these goals, we will (1) learn basic methods of making and analyzing arguments, (2) practice those methods by applying them to various sources which we encounter in everyday life. With these grounds, (3) we will construct our own arguments about current controversial topics. Arm your brain with Critical Thinking!

Grades will be based on exams, homework assignments, and a short paper.

115S MWF 9-9:50 AM [Leigh Duffy](#) Clemens 19 [113700](#)

This course will teach you how to identify and evaluate arguments and communicate clearly and convincingly. We will develop problem solving and decision making skills – important no matter what your major or career goals and equally important in your non-academic life (but especially important for those considering a major in philosophy or law school.) In this class, we will discuss arguments, proofs, validity, basic laws of logic, and common fallacies. Grades will be determined by homework, writing assignments, and exams.

129 Science and Religion

This is a Special Topics CAS Honors Seminar course.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
129	M	6-8:50 PM	James Beebe	Talbert 212	305906

This course will cover a variety of issues concerning the relation between science and religion. We will begin by considering some general questions about whether and how scientific truths can conflict with religious truths. The second part of the course will cover issues surrounding the Big Bang, the large-scale structure of the cosmos and what philosophers and other religious thinkers have had to say about the beginning, age and size of the universe. The third part of the course will consider the current controversy between evolutionary theorists and “intelligent design” theorists (i.e., those who claim that organisms and their parts were originally designed by an intelligent being and did not arise through evolution). In addition to the philosophical aspects of this controversy, we will also consider some of the sticky public policy issues it raises. The final part of the course will consider some recently developed theories in the cognitive sciences (e.g., neuroscience, cognitive psychology) that offer explanations of the nature, function and pervasiveness of religious belief.

212 Philosophy of Religion

Introduces issues and questions in religion, including existence of a deity, religion and science, and functions of religion in personal life.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
212	MWF	12-12:50 PM	James Beebe	Baldy 101	432353

This course will cover a variety of traditional philosophical questions concerning the nature and existence of God. Questions to be covered include: Can the existence of God be proven? If God exists, why isn't his existence more obvious? Does the existence of evil and suffering make it irrational to believe in God? Does science discredit religion? Is it reasonable to believe that only one religion is true? Could a perfectly loving God ever sentence anyone to eternal damnation? Can religious experience provide one with evidence that God exists? What is the relationship between religion and ethics? What is the nature of omniscience, omnipotence and the divine.

215 Introduction to Deductive Logic

Definition, formal and informal errors of reasoning, and principles of deductive reasoning; the Aristotelian tradition.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
215 B1	MWF	9-9:50	Hylarie Kochiras	Baldy 101	046684

In this course, we examine informal material in logic, including definitions, fallacies, and the difference between induction and deduction. We then consider a systematic treatment of syllogistic logic, and a treatment of propositional logic.

215 C	MWF	10-10:50 AM	Elizabeth Compton	Clemens 19	390841
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"In this class we will study some of the general principles available to us for evaluating arguments. We will cover methods of definition, formal and informal errors of reasoning, and principles of deductive reasoning; we will also examine the Aristotelian logic tradition. Grades will be based on regular homework assignments, quizzes, exams, and attendance. No previous philosophy classes are required; students who have taken PHI 115 or 315 previously may wish to consult the instructor regarding the suitability of the course."

215 K	TTh	12:30-1:50 PM	John Kearns	Fronczak 454	307157
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In this class, we will try to get an understanding of arguments which involve reasoning from premisses to conclusions. We will develop our ability to recognize arguments and analyze their structures. We will consider which criteria are appropriate for evaluating different kinds of argument. And we will investigate some relatively simple theories, or systems, of syllogistic logic (these are derived from the system originally developed by Aristotle, but are more sophisticated than his system). There will be frequent homework assignments, midterm and final exams, but no term paper.

236 Business Ethics

Examines current ethical positions and their applications to problems in business.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
236	TTh	12:30-1:50 AM	William Baumer	O'Brian 109	495552

This course addresses central issues and problems in business ethics, including basic approaches to ethics, ethical and cultural relativism, corporations and moral agency, classical and contemporary views of capitalism, employee rights, equal opportunity and affirmative action, environmental issues, advertising, and corporate governance. No previous study of ethics or business is presupposed. Essays and case studies in the course text present and discuss these issues. Course sessions combine lectures and discussion. Course requirements: attendance, three one-hour essay exams, each addressing one segment of the course, and a research essay.

315 Symbolic Logic

Introduces the formal techniques of deductive reasoning.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
315	MWF	11-11:50 AM	Hylarie Kochiras	Fronczak 422	071696

This course is an introduction to symbolic logic, that is, formal logic. Formal logic was developed in the late 19th century, and in the 20th century was used to develop artificial languages, notably those used in computer programming. Our emphasis here will be on problem solving. We will first study truth-functional logic and then move on to quantificational logic. Topics will include: (i) representing English statements in a formal symbolic

language; (ii) mastering relevant distinctions between the syntax and semantics of that language; (iii) truth tables, derivations, and proofs.

Text: Copi, SYMBOLIC LOGIC

328 Philosophy of Language

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
328	MWF	3-3:50 PM	Michael McGlone	Fronczak 422	174510

An introduction to the philosophy of language, examining a number of philosophical issues concerning the nature of meaning, truth, and reference. We will address questions of the following sort: What is the nature of the relationship between linguistic meaning, linguistic understanding, and truth? How are the meanings of the meaningful parts of a sentence related to the meaning of the sentence itself? How is the meaning of a sentence related to the information that speakers use that sentence to communicate? Is linguistic meaning psychologically determined or is meaning partially determined by factors external to and independent of an agent's psychological state?

329 Metaphysics

Explores theories of reality; freedom and determinism; and the reality of the self, the mind, and the body.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
329	TTh	12:30-1:50 PM	Neil Williams	Fronczak 422	134863

Metaphysics is concerned with the most fundamental categories of existence. These include events, particulars, properties, persons, facts, and so on. The aim of metaphysical investigation is to provide a unified account of how these categories are connected with one another, in order to illuminate the basic structure of our world. Within this enterprise, certain relations and processes are of special importance to the metaphysician, these include: causation, persistence, composition, supervenience, and possibility. In some cases it might be argued that certain categories are empty (there is nothing of that type in our world), or that certain relations can be accounted for in terms of the others (they can be 'reduced'). Other times it might be argued that the categories or relations on offer are inadequate for dealing with the world as we know it, in which case new ones may be introduced. The best way to approach metaphysics is through the consideration of certain problems; as one begins to think about how best to solve these problems, the connections between the many metaphysical problems become clear. With that in mind, this course will pay close attention to four major metaphysical issues (the problem of universals; the nature of particulars; and the problem of persistence and the nature of possibility) but in so doing we are likely to touch on most of the topics that fall within the range of metaphysics.

337 Social & Ethical Values in Medicine

Current ethical positions and their application to ethical and social questions in medicine.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
337D	MWF	1-1:50	Lee Dryden	Clemens 103	069874

PM

This course will examine a number of important medical ethical issues from a standpoint that employs ethics, the philosophical study of moral choice, as a point of departure. This course will also examine how religion affects many people's views on medical ethical issues. There will be significant attention to historically important ethical theories (Natural Law, Utilitarianism, and Immanuel Kant's ethical theory) and how they structure moral choice. The course will examine alternate viewpoints for assessing the significance of human life. Attention will be paid to the nature of the physician-patient relationship and ethical challenges that arise in that context. Issues associated with technical advances in human reproduction such as, in vitro fertilization and preimplantation genetic testing will be considered. The controversy about stem cell research will be considered. Controversies revolving around treatment of very sick newborn babies will be considered. The role of medical personnel in causing or assisting the death of their patients will be examined. At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

identify and discuss subjectivism in ethics
discuss the relation of religion to morality

- explain differences between alternative ethical theories
- identify and discuss subjectivism in ethics
discuss the relation of religion to morality
- apply alternative ethical theories to the resolution of moral problems in medicine
- identify significant alternative viewpoints on when human life begins
- list major elements of the Hippocratic Oath
- identify and evaluate four models of the MD-patient relationship
- explain and evaluate “therapeutic privilege”
- explain why benefiting the patient and respecting patient autonomy are sometimes in tension
- identify significant moral consequences of advances in reproductive technology
- evaluate arguments for and against stem cell research
- evaluate arguments for and against denying treatment to or intentionally ending the life of newborn babies
understand the argument for medical euthanasia and responses to it

TEXTS:

Course Packet - available in UB Bookstore

Elements of Moral Philosophy, James and Stuart Rachels (fifth edition) (2007)

Contemporary Readings in Biomedical Ethics, Walter Glannon (2002)

12-
337E MWF 12:50 [David](#) Clemens
PM [Hershenov](#) 322

[387733](#)

This course will deal primarily with ethical dilemmas that arise in medical contexts. The controversies examined will be abortion, embryonic stem cell research, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, the definition and criterion for death, the procurement and distribution of transplantable organs, and commercial surrogacy. Six articles, available through the library electronic course reserve, will be read and thoroughly discussed. The authors are Judith Thomson, David Shoemaker, J. David Velleman, Alan Shewmon, David Steinberg, and Elizabeth Anderson. Students will be exposed to different approaches of ethical reasoning and some basic tenets of critical thinking. Considerable emphasis will be put on the biological, metaphysical and religious underpinnings of medical ethics.

337H W 6-8:50 PM [Steven Halady](#) Baldy 101

For Nursing Students Only: This course is designed to give students a general overview of the field of biomedical ethics. Students completing this course should be able to: (1) understand and apply commonly used ethical principles to problems that arise in a medical context; (2) understand and apply various ethical theories and their implications to a wide range of cases in medical ethics; (3) understand the moral, legal, and theoretical development of a variety of positions on a wide range of cases in medical ethics; (4) critically assess arguments for and against such positions; and (5) understand the fundamental ethical questions and problems that arise in a medical context, and their relationships to moral principles, theories, and each other. While we naturally come to change our views to some degree when studying a topic, changing viewpoints is not the goal of this course. The purpose of this class is to develop a critical understanding of the problems and questions associated with bio-medical ethics, not to convert anyone to a particular position. The main focus of lectures and discussions will deal with evaluating the claims made on various sides of issues, that is, on who has the best supported and logically valid arguments, not on "who is right".

Texts:

Principles of Biomedical Ethics (6th ed.), T.L. Beauchamp & J.F. Childress

Medical Ethics: Accounts of Cases that Shaped and Define Medical Ethics, G.E. Pence

Students registering for this class are expected to have read the first chapter ("Moral Norms", pp1-29) of Beauchamp and Childress's text before the first class."

337P T 6-8:50 PM [Leonard Flier](#) Baldy 101 [018259](#)

This course is designed as a general introduction to issues in bioethics for non-philosophy majors. As such it is intended to give a general, broad, and selective topical overview of pertinent issues within the field. No general understanding of philosophy is assumed, nor is anything else really required for the course except the willingness to engage in some critical thinking and reflection upon certain contemporary issues within bioethics. The objective of this course is primarily to help students get a firmer grasp upon what is involved within areas of contemporary bioethics, better formulate their own reasons for certain positions, and be able to articulate and give reasons for why somebody ought to adopt one position over say another. However, this course will be somewhat writing intensive, in the sense that students will be expected to engage in somewhat frequent short (2-3) page writing assignments arguing either for or against some issue within contemporary bioethics. However there will be very little research requirements in terms of the writings assignments, the goal is critical thinking and ability to present and understand.

337S TTh 9:30-10:50 PM [Mark Lafrenz](#) Clemens 19 [487336](#)

Students will be introduced to some important ethical theories and apply those theories to various issues relevant to those working in health-related professions. We will discuss moral relativism, prominent normative ethical theories and various accounts of personhood. These topics will be discussed in connection with important topics in biomedical ethics, including abortion, euthanasia, informed consent, patient care, privacy and confidentiality.

Students will read selections from Aristotle's NICHOMACHEAN ETHICS, Immanuel Kant's GROUNDWORK OF THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS, John Stuart Mill's UTILITARIANISM and various papers on

contemporary issues in biomedical ethics. Grades will be based on three short papers, quizzes and two exams.

337T M 6-8:50 PM [Adam Taylor](#) Baldy 101

For Nursing Students Only: This course is intended to provide nursing students with the competency in ethical theory demanded by the practice of medicine. The course presumes no prior familiarity with ethics, logic, or philosophy in general, but it does presume academic maturity and intellectual seriousness. The primary issues we will cover will include, but are not limited to: abortion, euthanasia, organ commercialization, treatment of the mentally ill, advanced care orders (DNR's), stem cell research and human cloning. Considerable time and care will be devoted to examining various metaphysical accounts of human persons and the implications of these accounts for medical ethics.

356 Race and Ethnicity

This is a Special Topics course.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
356	T	5-7:50 PM	Jorge Gracia	Norton 218	341160

What is race? What is ethnicity? What is the relation between race and ethnicity? What are racial and ethnic identities? How are racial and ethnic identities related to personal identity? Can the same person have several identities? How are social groups individuated? How can we tell that someone belongs to a particular racial or ethnic group? Does belonging to a race or to an ethnic group entail particular rights? Do ethnic groups have linguistic rights? Can affirmative action policies with respect to racial and ethnic groups be justified? How are race and ethnicity manifested in cultural phenomena, such as literature and art? These are some of the questions we will be dealing with in this course. The readings come from the writings of authors who have recently staked out important, and sometimes controversial, positions on these issues.

359 American Philosophy

Examines early development of American philosophical thought; considers leading movements and thinkers, such as idealism, pragmatism (Peirce, James, Dewey) and realism.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
359	TTh	9:30-10:50 AM	Randall Dipert	Baldy 101	088628

This will be a course that surveys many of the important American philosophers, to include The Federalist Papers in the Post-Revolutionary period, essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Chauncey Wright, C.S. Peirce, Josiah Royce, and William James. We will also discuss some issues in 20th century and contemporary American philosophy, including the views of John Dewey. One interesting side path will be reading about and discussing Abraham Lincoln's ethics. While pragmatism and the major Pragmatists (Peirce, James, Dewey) are usually put forward as the most representative and best 19th century American philosophy, other major veins of American philosophy discuss issues in political philosophy, the nature of God, nature itself and our place in nature. Throughout the course we will especially be looking for a small set of claims and issues that are more distinctive of Americans. In what sense is American philosophy thematically American, or influenced by American culture and history? This will include special roles for nature and the environment, being "practical", common sense, religiosity, community, the

ideas of individualist rights, realism, naturalism, individualism and toughness (even physical toughness), the admiration of the natural sciences, anti-intellectualism, and the roles of sentiment, emotion, and intuition in philosophy and life. There are no prerequisites but it is advisable to have earlier taken one or more previous philosophy courses. Requirements will include reading quizzes, tests and (short) papers. The instructor is open to the possibility of students specializing in one or two philosophers or a specific movement in American philosophy. The instructor is a full professor and a specialist in American philosophy; Buffalo is nationally ranked in American philosophy (tied for 4th in the world) and is the headquarters of the most important journal of American philosophy.

360 Ancient Philosophy

Reviews the history of Greek philosophy from Pre-Socratic philosophers to the Hellenistics.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
360	TTh	3:30-4:50 PM	Jiyuan Yu	Clemens 19	270028

This course will cover the development of Greek philosophy from Pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, to the Hellenistic period. Students are expected to learn and understand the basic assumptions, methods, terminologies, and doctrines of Greek philosophy that have so deeply shaped the whole Western culture. Course sessions will combine lectures, presentations, and in-class discussions. Textbook: INTRODUCTORY READINGS IN ANCIENT GREEK AND ROMAN PHILOSOPHY, Reeve and Miller (eds.) (Hackett, 2006)

398C Eastern and Western Philosophy

This is a Special Topics course.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
398C	MWF	11-11:50 AM	Kah Kyung Cho	Baldy 101	107633

Though courses on Asian or Eastern philosophy have been regularly offered in the past, a SYSTEMATIC comparison of Eastern and Western philosophy has been rarely attempted at our undergraduate level. In this rapidly globalizing century, it is never too early to begin to feel at home in thinking together Aristotle with Confucius, Leibniz with Chu Hsi, or even Heidegger with Lao Tzu.. Where desirable format of publications is lacking, some selected handouts will be provided. Otherwise, we shall have the following two texts as our main guide:

1. David Hall, Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation, SUNY Press (Paperback)
2. Joseph Grange, John Dewey, Confucius, and Global Philosophy, SUNY Press (Paperback)

398L Philosophy and Pop Culture

This is a Special Topics course.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
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Beginning with THE SIMPSONS and ending with THE DAVINCI CODE, this course explores philosophical and religious themes raised by some of the most popular works in contemporary culture. Each of these works offers alternative perspectives on the human condition to both the standard religious orthodoxies and purely secular scientific approaches. The selected works thereby provide the popular imagination with new visions of reality. In THE SIMPSONS MOVIE, Homer Simpson has to be dragged from his couch to church on Sunday morning. But when faced with a family and social crisis, he is guided by an Inuit Shaman woman into a spiritual experience that offers him existential and moral truth. George Lucas, commenting on his preparation for his STAR WARS saga, says that he distilled fifty books on the history of world religions into his concept of "The Force," and then, he says, "I played with it." In the movie version of Dan Brown's best seller, THE DAVINCI CODE, Robert Langdon ponders the traditional alternative of religious orthodoxy: "Why does it have to be human or divine? Perhaps the human is the divine." In each case, as well as in the other works examined here, the standard alternative of orthodox ("fundamentalist") religion and scientific secularism is bypassed for an inventive "third way."

The course presents salient texts, episodes, and summaries from THE SIMPSONS, BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER, Woody Allen's film CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS, THE MATRIX, STAR WARS, and THE DAVINCI CODE. Implicit or underlying philosophical themes are highlighted and brought into relation with what might be called the Platonic trend in philosophy, which in modern times includes the works of Kant and Hegel. A consistent "spiritualist" philosophical orientation from Plato to Hegel is therefore developed, which gives theoretical substance to works of popular culture that might otherwise appear purely fanciful. Like Homer Simpson, Socrates was sometimes visited by a spiritual force which he called his daemon. The Platonic philosophical framework and argumentation offers systematic theoretical support for this kind of unorthodox quasi-religious experience. Kant and Hegel, both of whom criticize a narrow "religious" orthodoxy, defend such a "spiritual" orientation as consistent with a deeper understanding of the origins of the major religions as well as with the most advanced sciences of modern times.

Text: James Lawler, THE GOD TUBE: UNCOVERING THE HIDDEN SPIRITUAL MESSAGE IN POP CULTURE (Open Court: 2008).

489 Existentialism of Simone de Beauvoir

This is a Special Topics course.

Section	Day	Time	Instructor	Room	Reg Number
489	TTh	12:30-1:50 PM	Carolyn Korsmeyer	Baldy 101	394312

Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) was an existentialist philosopher and feminist theorist and a prize-winning novelist. Although her philosophical work has long been overshadowed by that of her close associate Jean-Paul Sartre, recent scholarship has begun to reveal the extent of her independence and originality of thought. This course will cover Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), a major existentialist treatment of moral philosophy; and her most influential book, *The Second Sex* (1949), which advances a systematic analysis of gender and sexual difference. We shall also read one of her novels to discover the ways in which her philosophical and her fictional writings are mutually illuminating. Some background in philosophy and/or feminist theory is recommended.