

Fall 2015
Department of Philosophy
Graduate Course Descriptions

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

PHI 556 Topics in History of Modern Philosophy

Professor Lewis Powell
Friday 1:30-4:20
Class #22317

David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* is among the most influential works of philosophy ever written. Though Hume was disappointed in its reception during his lifetime, scholars have come to appreciate the work's depth and richness. In this seminar, we will be doing a close, careful reading of the first book of the *Treatise*, "Of the Understanding", in which Hume articulates his approach to philosophy, and develops his treatment of human cognition. Readings from the *Treatise* will be supplemented with readings from other early modern figures, and from contemporary scholarship on Hume.

PHI 578 Kant's Ethics

Professor James Lawler
Tuesday 4:00-6:50
Class #23807

Kant's ethics occupy a central place in his three critiques. The first Critique prepares 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 "to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith" as he says in the Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Since the first Critique establishes that knowledge is limited to appearances, we cannot *know* that we have free will. But 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 perspectives 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 589 Contemporary Philosophy: Levinas

Professor Richard Cohen
Wednesday 1:00-3:50
Class #23814

Close reading of selections from the two chief works of Emmanuel Levinas: *Totality and Infinity* (1961) and *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (1974), to discover what is original and profound in his thought. What does Levinas mean, and what are the ramifications of arguing that ethics is first philosophy? Therefore close intellectual confrontations with the epistemology of Kant, the phenomenology of Husserl and the ontology of Heidegger., as well as with the history of philosophy.

PHI 596 Graduate Dissertation Seminar

Professor Lewis Powell
Wednesday 4:00-6:50
Class #21080

"The Graduate Dissertation Seminar is a course designed to assist students as they make progress on their dissertations, and approach the job market. The course focuses on presenting one's work, giving and receiving feedback to other students on their work, and professionalization."

PHI 598 Special Topics: Race and Ethnicity

Professor Jorge Gracia

Tuesday 7:00-9:50

Class #23793

What is race? What is ethnicity? What is the relation between race and ethnicity? What are racial and ethnic identities? How are these identities related to personal identity? Can the same person have several identities? How are racial and ethnic groups individuated? How can we tell that someone belongs to a particular racial or ethnic group? Does belonging to these groups entail particular rights? Do ethnic groups have linguistic rights? Are groups entitled to reparations for past wrongs committed against members of the groups? Can affirmative action policies with respect to racial and ethnic groups be justified? What is racism? These are some of the metaphysical, epistemic, and ethical questions we will be dealing with in this course. The readings come from the writings of well-known philosophers who have recently staked out important, and often controversial, positions on these issues. Among the authors to be read are: Appiah, Haslanger, Garcia, Gracia, Corlet, Arthur, Alcott, Glasgow, Blum, Bernstein, Pogge, Young, McGary, and Zack. All but two of these authors are actively working in this field and several readings will come from recent debates among them.

PHI 598 Topics in Ethics: Value and the Environment (combined with PHI 489)

Professor Kenneth Shockley

Tuesday 12:30-3:20

Class #23789

Aldo Leopold famously said it is wrong to undermine the “integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community.” But are there sufficient philosophical grounds for this claim? If not, what are the relevant alternatives?

The attribution of value to the environment is fraught with conceptual difficulties. Aside from concerns about the moral realism presupposed by Leopold’s famous claim, there are related concerns about coherently ascribing intrinsic value to objects of environmental concern, concerns over the right way to frame the relation between the human and the nonhuman world, and concerns over the relation between environmental values and other value schemes (e.g., economic value). There are also worries over how to express those values normatively. Are environmental values to be responded to consequentially, such that those values are to be promoted? Are they, rather, to be respected? Are they best thought of as reflections of human character? And, however they are to be understood, how do we explain differences between the way we treat values in “environmental” contexts and the way we treat values in more interpersonal, traditional contexts where the exclusive concern is with human values? In this advanced course in environmental ethics we will explore these difficulties and their relevance to a range of practical problems.

PHI 634 Time, Tense, and Temporal Perspective

Professor Maureen Donnelly

Monday 1:00-3:50

Class #23809

In this class, we will focus on the debate in the philosophy of time between detensers (or, B theorists) and tensors (or, A theorists). Very roughly, tensors hold that times/events have objective *changing* 'A properties' (pastness, nowness, futurity) which can be captured only by tensed claims like 'It is (now) March, 2015', or 'Elizabeth Warren will be elected president of the United States'. Detensers deny this, holding in that all objective facts about temporal position reduce to *unchanging* ordering relations between events or between events and times.

We will spend part of the semester looking at some influential arguments for and against tensed or tenseless theories of time. In particular, we will look at McTaggart's early argument for the incoherency of changing A properties, along with contemporary assessments or reconstructions of McTaggart's argument. We will also look at Prior's 'Thank goodness that's over' argument for A properties along with more recent developments of and responses to it. But the main focus of the class will be on getting a feel for what tensed or tenseless theories might look like--what, in particular, they might say about how the world is structured. To this end, we will read most of Mellor's *Real Time II* and probably also parts of Craig Bourne's *A Future for Presentism* as examples of, respectively, tenseless and tensed theories of time. Grading for this class will be based on short written assignments, one class presentation, and one final paper.

PHI 637 Pro-Seminar

Professor Neil Williams

Thursday 1:00-3:50

Class #22320

This course is a writing intensive seminar required of all incoming philosophy graduate students. The content for this year's 1st year writing seminar centres on background readings for a manuscript draft in contemporary metaphysics. That manuscript re-approaches the problem of persistence from within a distinctly non-neo-Humean metaphysic based on causal powers. Our main focus will be the first half of the manuscript, which deals with the alternative metaphysic, but we will still spend some time dealing with its applications. Readings will be taken mostly from the associated literature, but may include drafts of chapters. Weekly meetings will involve discussion of the readings, student presentations, and discussions of student writing.

Students will be expected to submit 8 critical response essays of at least 1500 words each, and two major responses essays of at most 3000 words. The 3000 word essays will be substantial revisions of two of the 8 shorter critical responses. The first 3000 word essay

will be due half way through the term, the second at the end of term. There will also be a series of brief exercises to help students focus and refine their writing skills.

The main readings for the course will be placed (free!) on UB Learns, but it is strongly recommended that you purchase the following guide to help you with general issues in metaphysics that will come up in the course:

Beebe, Effingham, and Goff (2010) *Metaphysics – The Key Concepts*. New York: Routledge.

PHI 599 Graduate Tutorials (Arranged with Professor)

PHI 701 MA Thesis Guidance Tutorials (Arranged with Professor)

PHI 703 Dissertation Guidance Tutorials (Arranged with Professor)

Revised 4/1/15 PH