



**PHILOSOPHY at RICE
UNDERGRADUATE COURSES
Spring 2017**

PHIL 100: Problems of Philosophy (Darren Medeiros) MWF 10-10:50 This class will examine the nature of consciousness as well as the ethical implications that result from different theories of consciousness. Some questions we will explore include: What is the “hard problem” of consciousness? Did consciousness evolve? Can a robotic (artificially intelligent) system be designed to possess consciousness? Are only humans and higher animals conscious, or does the realm of consciousness extend below to simpler organisms, or possibly above to include non-living systems? What moral obligations do we have to these different entities as a consequence of their being (or not being) conscious?

PHIL 101 (001): Contemporary Moral Issues. (Peter Zuk) TR 10:50-12:05 What makes a life go better or worse? Which things are worth doing or pursuing? What obligations do we have toward others? Do the ends justify the means? Are some actions absolutely prohibited, no matter what? These are the sorts of questions that we ask when we engage in ethical theory. This course introduces students to the basic concepts of ethical theory and applies its lessons to specific moral issues of our time. Some of the issues that we will explore together are the moral standing of animals, the permissibility of abortion, economic fairness, punishment, and the justifiability of war.

PHIL 101 (002): Contemporary Moral Issues (Gwen Bradford) MWF 2-2:50 How should we live our lives? What we eat, what we buy, and how we choose to live our lives are all moral choices – from eating our vegetables to sex, drugs, and rock and roll. Should we consider the lives of the animals we eat? Is abortion morally permissible? Should drugs be legalized? How should we treat other people? This class examines the ethics of consumption, and life choices as they affect others, ourselves, and the world around us. We learn about various moral theories and discuss how these theories help us handle the pressing issues that confront us every day.

PHIL 103: Philosophical Aspects of Cognitive Science (Alex Morgan) TR 9:25-10:40 In seeking to understand the nature of the mind, thinkers throughout history have used metaphors inspired by the technology of their time. Plato likened memory to the process of stamping an image onto a wax tablet. Freud’s theory of the unconscious evokes steam engines and hydraulic mechanisms. In our own age, scientists have attempted to understand the mind by comparing it to a computer. Indeed, the idea that the mind is a kind of biological computer is often said to be one of the foundational assumptions of the modern science of the mind, cognitive science. But what exactly does it mean to say that the mind is a computer? What is a computer anyway? Could a computer ever really have beliefs, emotions, or conscious experiences? Must we understand the mind as a computer if we are to explain it scientifically? In this course, we will critically engage with these and related questions by actively reading and discussing relevant literature in philosophy and cognitive science.

PHIL 202: History of Philosophy II. (Brian Miller) MWF 11-11:50 An introduction to the early modern period. Philosophers studied will include Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant.

Phil 301- Ancient & Medieval Philosophy (David Riesbeck) TR 10:50-12:05 Plato’s *Republic* is one of the greatest and most influential works of philosophy ever written and one of the very few that is also a first rate piece of literature. What begins as an inquiry into the nature and value of justice goes on to address fundamental principles of ethics, politics, psychology, aesthetics, epistemology, and metaphysics. In each case the dialogue develops bold, innovative, and challenging lines of thought that subsequent generations of readers have continued to find variously insightful, perplexing, inspiring, offensive, brilliant, ridiculous, or even all of those at once. This seminar will focus on a careful reading of the whole of the *Republic*, supplemented by some recent and classic philosophical scholarship. The goal will be not only to understand and appreciate the dialogue within the context of classical Greek philosophy and culture, but to assess the value of its leading ideas for us today.

PHIL 303 Theory of Knowledge (Brian Miller) MWF 10-10:50 An introduction to the theory of knowledge. We will address questions such as: What is knowledge, and how do we get it? Why is it valuable? Are there any limits to what we can know?

PHIL 306: Ethics. (George Sher) MWF 2-2:50. This course will deal with the philosophical questions that are raised by claims about how people should act, about what's good for them, and about what sorts of people they should be. We'll discuss theories of right action that focus on the consequences of acts, theories that emphasize duties, and theories that put character and virtue first. We'll also discuss different theories of human well-being, as well as a number of more abstract questions about the objectivity of values, the relativity of values to social norms, and our ability to acquire knowledge about what's right and good. Many of the readings will be recent, and we'll discuss work by major contemporary figures such as Christine Korsgaard, Thomas Scanlon, and Thomas Nagel as well as original works by Kant, Mill, Bentham, and Ross.

PHIL 307: Social and Political Philosophy (George Sher) MWF 3-3:50 This course will deal with the philosophical questions that are raised by the fact that we live in an organized society, under a state, and that the way we organize our political and economic institutions will profoundly affect the lives that are open to all of us. The class will begin with a set of questions that concern the state's authority--that's the political part of social and political philosophy. We'll ask whether (and if so why) agents should obey the law when they can get away with disobeying, what sorts of laws the state may legitimately enact, and what justifies the state in following through on the coercive threats that it needs to make in order to secure general obedience to law. Then, in the social philosophy part of the course, we'll move along to questions of justice in the distribution of wealth and other goods. The course readings are almost all contemporary, and will include work by such important recent authors such as Robert Nozick, Charles Taylor, and Ronald Dworkin. In the last three weeks of the course, we'll study the first third of John Rawls's contemporary classic, *A Theory of Justice*, which provides a unified perspective on all the topics that we will have discussed earlier.

PHIL 312: Philosophy of Mind. (Charles Siewert) MWF 1-1:50 What is the difference between beings with minds and literally mindless ones? How should we conceive of the relation between mind and brain? What is consciousness? Does its "subjective" character make it especially difficult to explain scientifically? What would it take to make an artificial mind, and how would we know we had succeeded? Are our minds literally in our heads? Or do they or can they extend into our environments? Do our minds make us responsible for what we do? Is this the same as free will? How could evidence show we do or don't have it? These are some of the questions we will address in this course, through a critical analysis of readings drawn from roughly the last fifty years.

PHIL 326 History of Ethics (Baruch Brody) W 2:30-5 An examination of the moral philosophy of Aristotle, Cicero, St Thomas, the secular natural law theorists (Locke, Puffendorf), Hume, Mill Kant and Ross. Registration in 326 requires being a major in Philosophy.

PHIL 339: Death and Dying (Vida Yao) TR 9:25-10:40 Death is an inescapable feature of the human condition. Not only will we all die, we also – perhaps unlike all other animals – are aware of this fact. In reflecting on the significance of death, a number of philosophical questions arise. Is it possible to survive the physical destruction of one's body? Is death bad for the person who dies? Does death detract from the meaning of our lives, or does it make meaning possible? Moreover, there are a number of pressing practical questions surrounding death: What role should grief and mourning for the dead play in our lives? Is it morally permissible to commit suicide? To enable another to do so? And given technological and medical advances, would it be good for human beings to extend their natural lifespans, or to achieve immortality? These questions will form the basis of our inquiry on death and dying.

PHIL 357 Incompleteness, Undecidability & Computability (Richard Grandy) MWF 10:00-10:50 We study proofs of Godel's Incompleteness Theorems for number theory in several forms and by various methods, to clarify the exact content of the theorems. Frequent misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the theorems are analyzed. We also develop several definitions of "algorithm". Includes proof of the unsolvability of the Halting Problem and analysis of Church's thesis, as well as exploration of extensions of logic to plural quantification, second order logic and fractional quantifiers. Prerequisite: Phil 305 or 505 or their equivalent.

PHIL 407 Undergraduate Research Seminar: Self-Knowledge. (Charles Siewert) F 2:30-5 This course focuses on some area of current research in philosophy in order to familiarize students with how it is now practiced and to help them enter more deeply into on-going debates. This semester's topic will concern how we know our own minds and the character of self-consciousness. We will spend the initial part of the term studying and discussing a series of contemporary writings addressing questions such as: Do you know your own thoughts, experiences, and attitudes in a way that no one else can? If so, what is special about this "way"? For example, is it kind of "inner" perception? How fallible are claims to self-knowledge? How is it related to consciousness? To rationality? The latter part of the term will be devoted to students' presentations on their chosen research topics, relating in some way to the themes covered earlier. The course is recommended for majors; non-majors should have had taken at least one upper division philosophy course (preferably more).