

PHILOSOPHY at RICE || UNDERGRADUATE COURSES || Spring 2024

PHIL 150: Technology, Society and Value. (Robert Howell) MWF 10am-10:50am. Emerging technologies are transforming the moral landscape in ways that seemed mere science fiction only a few decades ago. Social media has changed how we communicate and come to know our world, and algorithms amplify our ideologies. Artificial Intelligence potentially threatens not only our jobs but our senses of self and other. Our ability to modify and manipulate our brains and bodies raises serious ethical questions about fairness, freedom and authenticity. Technology, Society and Value is a course that introduces students to these issues and the philosophical considerations that might help us address them.

PHIL 210: Logic. (Brian Miller) MWF 3pm-3:50pm. Introduction to the formal theory of reasoning, which will be used to assess the validity of arguments in natural languages. Study of general properties of logical implication and logical truth.

PHIL 231: Animal Minds. (Alex Morgan) MW 2pm-3:15pm. Philosophers of mind explore very general questions about the nature of the mind. In doing so, they tend focus on the specific kinds of minds that are most familiar to us – our own human minds. This is understandable, since we presumably have far better access to our own minds than the minds of other animals. But one might worry that this leads to a somewhat limited and parochial view of the nature of mental phenomena. Over the last few decades, the science of animal cognition has given us insights into minds that are very different from our own. In this course, we'll explore how some of these insights might help to illuminate philosophical questions about the nature and value of the mind, such as whether non-human animals are conscious or rational, and what implications this might have for how we ought to treat them. We'll also explore philosophical questions about the science itself, such as whether science could ever fully reveal what's going on in the minds of beings that are very different from us. This is a discussion-focused course, and will cover both philosophical and scientific readings.

PHIL 267: Philosophy of Sex and Love. (Elizabeth Brake) TTh 10:50am-12:05pm. What is love? Is romantic love necessarily exclusive? What do we owe those we love? What are the ethics of sex and dating, especially in light of new technologies? And how do historical, social, and political forces shape our attitudes towards sex, love, and gender? This course will introduce the philosophical history of concepts of love, sex, and marriage. Drawing on a range of perspectives, including feminist philosophy, it will explore contemporary debates over sexual ethics, sexual harassment, consent, pornography, sex work, marriage, polyamory, gender, and more. It will encourage students to develop and articulate their own viewpoints in written work and in dialogue with their peers.

PHIL 269: Markets and Morality. (Thimo Heisenberg) TTh 1pm-2:15pm. Markets are everywhere today: if you want to find a job, if you want to buy some good, or if you want to sell some service, you will inevitably have to submit yourself to their norms. Yet, this omnipresence of markets raises fundamental ethical questions. Is it really good that we organize exchange and production largely through markets? How are societies and individuals impacted by centrally relying on them? Should we, much rather, prefer a planned economy? Or would such a planned economy unduly constrain people's freedom? And, if we opt for markets, what are their moral limits? Should human organs or access to lawmakers be distributed via a market? Should access to health-care be governed by market principles? This seminar explores these questions through contemporary and historical readings, drawing on a broad set of ideas in order to tackle the philosophical, moral and existential challenges that markets pose.

PHIL 281: History of Philosophy I. (Victor Saenz) TTh 2:30pm-3:45pm. Are humans just atoms in the void, who simply dissolve upon death? Or are they meant to live forever? Is morality objective, or just a matter of social convention? Does reality have an intrinsic order, one to which I should conform? Or are 'reality' and 'order' in the eye of the beholder? How would you know? What would it look like to live a life that is genuinely fulfilling, thriving, happy in a deep way, especially when faced with an uncertain world? Would that mean looking out for number one, doing whatever you happen to like? Or perhaps it must mean becoming a certain kind of person: committed to the truth, courageous, generous, self-possessed, with deep ties to friends, family, and the broader community? These and related questions were the ones that animated the major Greek philosophers and Roman philosophers who are the focus of this course. We'll focus on careful reading and discussion of their main lines of argument about these questions. Though much of the course will focus on Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, we'll also read from the work of pre-Socratic philosophers as well as the Hellenistic schools: the Epicureans, Stoics, and Sceptics. What arguments or accounts seem closest to the truth and why? And what might they have to teach you about how to live your life?

PHIL 318: Philosophy of Language. (Brian Miller) MWF 1pm-1:50pm. Words refer to things; they're *about* things. That's odd: rocks aren't about anything, and neither are stars or toes or pudding cups. How is reference possible in general? How does a particular word get its particular reference? Why does 'Rice University' refer to Rice University and not to the smell of coffee or to the number seven? A second oddity: meaning isn't limited to reference. 'Triangle' and 'three-sided polygon' refer to the same set of things, yet differ in meaning. What is this extra component of meaning, and how is it related to reference? A third oddity: since words are often about things in the speaker's physical or social environment, does it follow that changing that environment changes those word-meanings? Even if the speakers' thoughts and intentions do not change? Language is odd and fascinating -- a ripe target philosophical investigation.

PHIL 321: Women Philosophers in the 19th Century. (Thimo Heisenberg) TTh 4pm-5:15pm. The history of 19th century European philosophy is often told exclusively as a history of male voices – as a story 'From Kant to Hegel', 'From Hegel to Marx' and so on. By contrast, the voices of women philosophers (such as Karoline von Günderrode, Bettina von Arnim or Clara Zetkin) are rarely remembered, and even less frequently taught. This course aims to change that. Reading a wide array of texts written by women intellectuals of the time, we will aim to understand their philosophical contributions to German Idealism (e.g. Günderrode and Arnim), Feminism (e.g. Zetkin and Hedwig Dohm) and classical Socialism (e.g. Rosa Luxemburg). We will also examine their relationship to, and, more importantly, their critique of the work of some of their male counterparts (such as Fichte, Schelling, Marx and Nietzsche). Finally, we will consider why these women's voices have been so frequently neglected – and why it is, from a contemporary philosophical standpoint, worthwhile to discover them again.

PHIL 325: Philosophy of Art. (Logan Wigglesworth) TTh 10:50am-12:05pm. This class will survey different philosophical questions and issues concerning artworks and beauty, including the natural environment. Can you define what art is? Is there anything unique to aesthetic experiences? What is the relationship between art and morality? Why do people seek out sad experiences in artworks and how could this possibly be enjoyable (paradox of tragedy)? How can we have emotional experiences to events we believe not to be true (paradox of fiction)? Why did we evolve to appreciate and create artworks? We will also be focusing on specific artforms such as punk rock, Japanese packaging, and street art.



PHIL 330: Philosophy of Mind. (Charles Siewert) TTh 10:50am-12:05pm. 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 sure could we be that we had succeeded? Are our minds literally in our heads? Or can they extend into our environments? When we die can our minds be uploaded onto computers, giving us a kind of immortality? How can our minds cause what we do? How could evidence show they do (or don't) make us free and responsible for what we do? These are some of the questions addressed in the course, by a critical analysis of readings drawn from the mid-twentieth century to the present.

PHIL 345: Theory of Knowledge. (Brian Miller) MWF 2pm-2:50pm. This course examines the question: What is knowledge, and how is it possible that we have it? Topics include: analysis of knowledge, justification and evidence, skeptical challenges, and relativism.

PHIL 353: Philosophy of Biology. (Alex Morgan) MW 4pm-5:15pm. In investigating the natural world, biologists encounter difficult theoretical questions that cannot be settled simply through empirical observation or experiment; questions that lie at the boundary between biology and philosophy. In this course we'll explore such questions, including but not limited to the following: How did life first emerge, and what does "life" even mean? Living organisms are made of the same basic constituents as inorganic matter, yet they seem categorically different; they actively resist death. What does this difference consist in? Organisms seem to become better 'designed' as they adapt to their environments through natural selection, but does the overall arc of evolution on Earth exhibit a progressive increase in the adaptive complexity of organisms? How do we understand notions of design or function in the absence of an intelligent designer anyway? Genes are often said to play a special role in evolution because they encode developmental information, but is this literally true? Who or what 'reads' this information? Can the contributions of genes in development be sharply distinguished from the contributions of the environment, or are concepts like innateness too confused to be helpful in biology? This is a discussion-focused course, and will cover both philosophical and scientific readings.

PHIL 360: Ethics. (George Sher) MWF 3pm-3:50pm. 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 361: Metaethics. (Wan Zhang) TTh 4pm-5:15pm. Ethics deals with questions about what's right and what's good. Metaethics deals with questions *about* questions about what's right and what's good. In doing metaethics we explore the nature of our ethical thought and discourse, and the sense of normative "reality" our ethical thought and discourse is about. For example, is there an objective normative reality? Do ethical claims express beliefs about the way the world really is, or are they just expressions of pro or con attitudes that can't be true or false? Is moral knowledge possible, and how should we respond to moral disagreement? We'll see how questions in metaphysics, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and epistemology all converge on the subject matter of ethics.

PHIL 363: Ancient Moral Psychology. (Joy Chen) TTh 10:50am-12:05pm. This course offers a survey of ancient Greek moral psychology from Socrates to, at the very least, the Hellenistic period. The aim is to study in detail the central philosophical theories concerning human motivation provided by key ancient thinkers (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, the early Stoics, and Epicurus), and to position these theories within the context of their psychological and ethical frameworks. The main texts to be studied include Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. We will also have occasions to read Plato's *Timaeus*, which provides important clarifications on the theory of the tripartite soul, as well as Aristotle's *Eudemian Ethics*, which presents Aristotle's moral psychology and, in some respects, aligns closely with Plato's ideas in the *Republic*.

PHIL 370: Social and Political Philosophy. (George Sher) MWF 2pm-2:50pm. 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 430: Consciousness & Sense of Self. (Charles Siewert) W 2pm-4:30pm. It can seem that we are each conscious of ourselves in a special way in which we are conscious of no one and nothing else. But efforts to say what that "way" is raise challenging questions. These comprise the topic of this seminar. Is a basic self-consciousness somehow built into *all* consciousness, as some have claimed? How should we assess the idea that the self is in fact "elusive" to consciousness—and relatedly, that the self is an *illusion*? Does our "sense of self" take diverse forms—for example, in *introspection*, in the experience of our own *bodies*, and of *agency* and *perspective*, and in *emotions* like pride and shame? Is the self somehow "self-constituting" in virtue of such experience? Is our sense of self constructed out of a *narrative* we tell ourselves about ourselves? What might *disorders* of self-consciousness—such as experiences of dissociation, thought insertion, body dysmorphism and asomatognosia—tell us about the *familiar* sense of self? What, if anything, do our responses to all these issues tell us about *nature* of the self, and of self-*knowledge*?

PHIL 470: Feminist Political Philosophy. (Elizabeth Brake) T 2:30pm-5pm. The first part of this course will introduce you to central topics in feminist political philosophy, including debates among liberal, radical, Marxist, and intersectional feminist philosophers. The second part of the course will focus on marriage, family, and intimate partner violence. The family has long been a focus of feminist social criticism. How have traditional theories of justice neglected justice within the family? What do the different feminist philosophies surveyed imply for justice in the family?