

## Fall 2017 Course Descriptions

### **PHIL 290: Ancient Greek Philosophy (Amy Coplan, M 4:00PM-6:45PM)**

**Fulfills GE category/sub-area C2**

**Required for both the MAJOR and MINOR in Philosophy**

Pantheon, a project from the Macro Connections group at the MIT Media Lab, developed a ranking of the world's most popular and important global figures. Guess who is ranked FIRST? Aristotle. Guess who is ranked SECOND? Plato. Third on the list is not an ancient Greek philosopher. It's Jesus. But who do you think is FOURTH? Socrates.

If you want to find out why ancient Greek philosophers fill three of the top four slots on this list, then take Philosophy 290. This course surveys ancient Greek philosophy from the Presocratics through Aristotle. We begin by considering the relationship between philosophy and mythology in the ancient Greek world. We then consider the work of some of the Presocratic philosophers, including the Milesians, Xenophanes, and Parmenides. From there, we examine some key ideas of the Sophists. Next, we study Socrates and his core views on the value and method of philosophy. The final two parts of the course focus on Plato and Aristotle, whose works form the foundation of Western philosophy. Throughout the course, we reflect upon ways in which ancient Greek philosophy relates to contemporary philosophy and illuminates contemporary experience.

### **Phil 315: Philosophical Argument and Writing (Dr. Andrew Howat, W 4-6:45 p.m.)**

Writing philosophy is difficult. It is not just difficult to *do*, it is also difficult to *teach*, since there is no formula one can construct or follow, that will guarantee one produces clear writing or a compelling argument. However, this class will provide you with the next best thing, and perhaps the only thing that can truly teach you how to write philosophy - lots and lots of *practice!* (As well as constructive *feedback* on that practice). We will practice all of the various skills that you will need for writing good philosophy, including: reading philosophy (and how it differs from reading other things), taking effective notes, outlining and summarizing philosophical texts and arguments, formalizing arguments using basic logical techniques, evaluating the validity, soundness and inductive strength of arguments, creating your own objections and counter-examples, spotting common fallacies, and so on. The focus of our practice will be the study of argument and inquiry itself. We will read classic, and on the whole brilliantly written works in epistemology, metaphysics and logic. Our focus will be on the idea that philosophical inquiry aims at the truth. What is truth anyway? Is the truth really knowable for creatures like us? How would we even recognize the truth when we discover it?

### **PHIL 323: Existentialism (Dr. Matthew Calarco, TuTh 2:30PM - 3:45PM)**

This course is an introduction to existentialist perspectives on such themes as potentiality, meaning, authenticity, community, and bad faith and their relationship to ontology, ethics, and politics. To this end we will examine the writings of seminal existentialist philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger before turning to an analysis of subsequent developments, applications, and critiques of their thought in the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Frantz Fanon, and Emmanuel Levinas.

### **PHIL 325: Philosophy of Sex and Love (Amy Coplan, TuTh 1:00PM-2:15PM) Fulfills GE category/sub-area C3**

What is love? Can it help us fulfill our potential as human beings? Is romantic love a myth? Is love destined to grow stale over time? Why is it so common to fall in love with inappropriate partners? Why do Disney princesses almost always end up getting married? And can considering these questions philosophically make any difference in one's life? We'll attempt to answer these questions and more in Philosophy of Sex and Love.

This topic based course will explore a variety of philosophical, psychological, and scientific accounts of love and sex, as well as depictions of romantic love in poetry and film. The first part of the course will concentrate on historically important discussions of love and sexual desire, including work by Plato, Augustine, Freud, and Shakespeare. The second part of the course will focus on theories of love and desire developed in contemporary empirical science, contemporary philosophy, and 20<sup>th</sup> century existentialist philosophy, including work by Jean Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Karen Horney, Carl Jung, Ronald de Sousa, Thomas Nagel, and Helen Fisher. Throughout the course, the study of philosophical and theoretical work on love will be combined with will analysis and evaluation of representations of love, desire, and gender roles in contemporary popular culture.

- The primary text for the course is *The Philosophy of Erotic Love* (ed. Robert Solomon and Kathleen Higgins). University Press of Kansas, 1991. Additional readings will be made available via Titanium. We will also be studying several films, which will be made available as streaming content, including *Closer* (Mike Nichols, 2004), *Crazy, Stupid, Love* (Glenn Ficarra and John Requa, 2011), *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004), *The Little Mermaid* (Ron Clements, John Musker, 1989), *Maleficent* (Robert Stromberg, 2014), *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (David Hand et al, 1937), *Romeo and Juliet* (Baz Luhrmann, 1996), and *Tangled* (Nathan Greno and Byron Howard, 2010).

### **GE Phil 377 Philosophy of Race, Class, and Gender, Dr. Emily S. Lee, TH 10:00-11:15**

Despite the history of analyzing race, class, and gender as separate phenomena, the three are integrally connected. Perhaps because our present analysis predominantly treats them as three wholly separate entities, we have yet to achieve an encompassing understanding of them. This class will focus on the interstitial connections among the three.

Students will gain knowledge of texts regarding the formation of race, class, and gender. Students will be introduced to the structure of power in the social construction of identifying features such as sexuality. Beginning from the binary that usually defines studies of race—the black-white binary—we shall continue to ask how gender, class, sexuality and the Latin-American and Asian-American identities disrupt and force the dialogue to change and expand its parameters.

**PHIL 383 Postmodernism (Dr. Matthew Calarco, Tuesdays 4:00PM - 6:45PM)**

This course examines the transition from “modernism” (roughly, the period of philosophy running from Descartes to Kant and Hegel) to “postmodernism” (which begins with Nietzsche’s critique of the presuppositions of modernity and continues in twentieth-century Continental thought). Our guiding thread for this examination will be the question of the “subject,” that is, the self that underlies cognition, ethics, and politics. Some of the questions that are posed in the transition from modernism to postmodernism include: What is the relationship between subjectivity and knowledge? And between subjectivity and morality? What occurs to classical conceptions of knowledge and morality when traditional conceptions of the subject are displaced? Does postmodernism signal the end of ethics and knowledge *tout court*, or does it create the conditions for another ethics and form of life? We will close the course by examining how recent decolonial critiques of Eurocentric notions of subjectivity uncover aspects of modernity that European postmodernism has tended to overlook.

**Philosophy 450, Normative Theory and Public Affairs (Dr. John Davis)**

This course is intended for upper division philosophy majors, particularly those enrolled in the Concentration in Social, Moral, and Legal Philosophy for the Professions, for whom it is required and will serve as a capstone course. Students in this course will develop and demonstrate the ability to take the philosophical theories they have learned in other courses required in the Concentration and use them to analyze and discuss normative issues arising in public policy and the professions. We will explore moral principles and other elaborations of moral theory to help us decide how to respond to policy questions in such areas as climate change, modern military methods such as drone warfare and cyberwarfare, immigration and refugees, the distribution of healthcare, the normative foundations of particular areas of law, and other issues of public concern. This course is suitable for upper-division philosophy students in general. Prerequisite: six units of upper-division philosophy.

## **PHIL 440: PHILOSOPHY OF MIND (MW 1:00-2:15PM) DR. JEELOO LIU**

What is the nature of human mind? Could artificial intelligence be said to have our mind? What is the best theory to analyze the relation between the mind and the brain? What is the nature of consciousness? Could neuroscience ever give us a complete explanation of our experience, including how we feel and what we sense from the first-person point of view? This course is designed to present contemporary philosophical approaches to the nature of mind. In the first half of this course, we will do a survey on the development of this field, and introduce the various positions that are popular among contemporary philosophers of mind. Theories such as substance dualism, the mind-brain identity theories, functionalism, reductionism and nonreductive physicalism will be explained and analyzed. In the second half of this course, we will focus on various analyses of the nature of consciousness.

Texts:

1. David Chalmers 2002. (Ed.) *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*. Oxford University Press.
2. William Jaworski 2011. *Philosophy of Mind: A Comprehensive Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell.

Thomas Nagel 2012. *Mind & Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature Is Almost Certainly False*. Oxford University Press.

## **Phil 490 Seminar in Contemporary Philosophy: Feminist Epistemology, Dr. Emily S. Lee, TH 11:30-12:45**

Feminist theory challenges traditional accounts of knowledge claims. Specifically, feminist theory has poignantly highlighted the function of sociality in knowledge claims. Numerous feminist theorists have insisted that knowledge is first and foremost social, and individual claims to knowledge follow. In the first half of this course, we will examine the initial historical feminist engagements with epistemology, particularly in the most sacrosanct area of knowledge, philosophy of science. In the second half of this course, we will discuss the more recent contributions made by second wave feminist theorists to epistemology in light of the claim that knowledge is social.

## **GE Phil 303 Philosophy of Science, Dr. Emily S. Lee, TH 2:30-3:45**

As a form of knowledge, science enjoys a privileged status. Its discoveries are widely regarded as uniquely objective, value-neutral, rigorously established, and consequently true. Yet in recent times, sociology, postmodernism, and feminist theory have challenged the conceptions of objectivity and rationality that underlie scientific claims to knowledge. This course examines the ongoing debates within philosophy of science about the claims, the reach, and limits of scientific knowledge and the scientific method.