



## PHI 101 - Basic Issues in Philosophy

This course is an introduction to a wide variety of philosophical issues. We will engage problems in metaphysics (the theory of reality), ethics and politics (the theory of right and good), and epistemology (the theory of knowledge). And we will consider the development of these issues in the history of philosophy.

A variety of class formats is central to the course. While there will be some lecture (as is appropriate), there will also be class discussion, possibly "Roundtable" discussions, panel debates or oral presentations. Required graded assignments include several argumentative papers and one or two exams. As with most humanities courses, grades in this course are largely earned through careful completion of written assignments.

Students are expected to be serious about learning something and open to becoming involved in significant philosophical inquiry.

## PHI 104 - Ideal of Democracy

The purpose of The Ideal of Democracy is to think seriously and critically about the nature and moral justification of democracy and democratic institutions. Conceptions of democracy that are explicit or implicit in the civic traditions and diverse cultures in the United States will provide the primary basis for discussion, though some attention will also be paid to the origins and history of democracy and to its practice in other societies. Students will be introduced to the methodology of moral reasoning and to various conceptions of the person and of human nature that underlie ethical ideals relating to democracy. They will also see how to interpret and integrate work done in a variety of disciplines (e.g., law, economics, political science, history) that bears on the resolution of the fundamental moral questions concerning the justification of democracy that provide the unifying focus for the course. They will also be expected to think in a reasoned way about what their own responsibilities are as citizens in a democratic society.

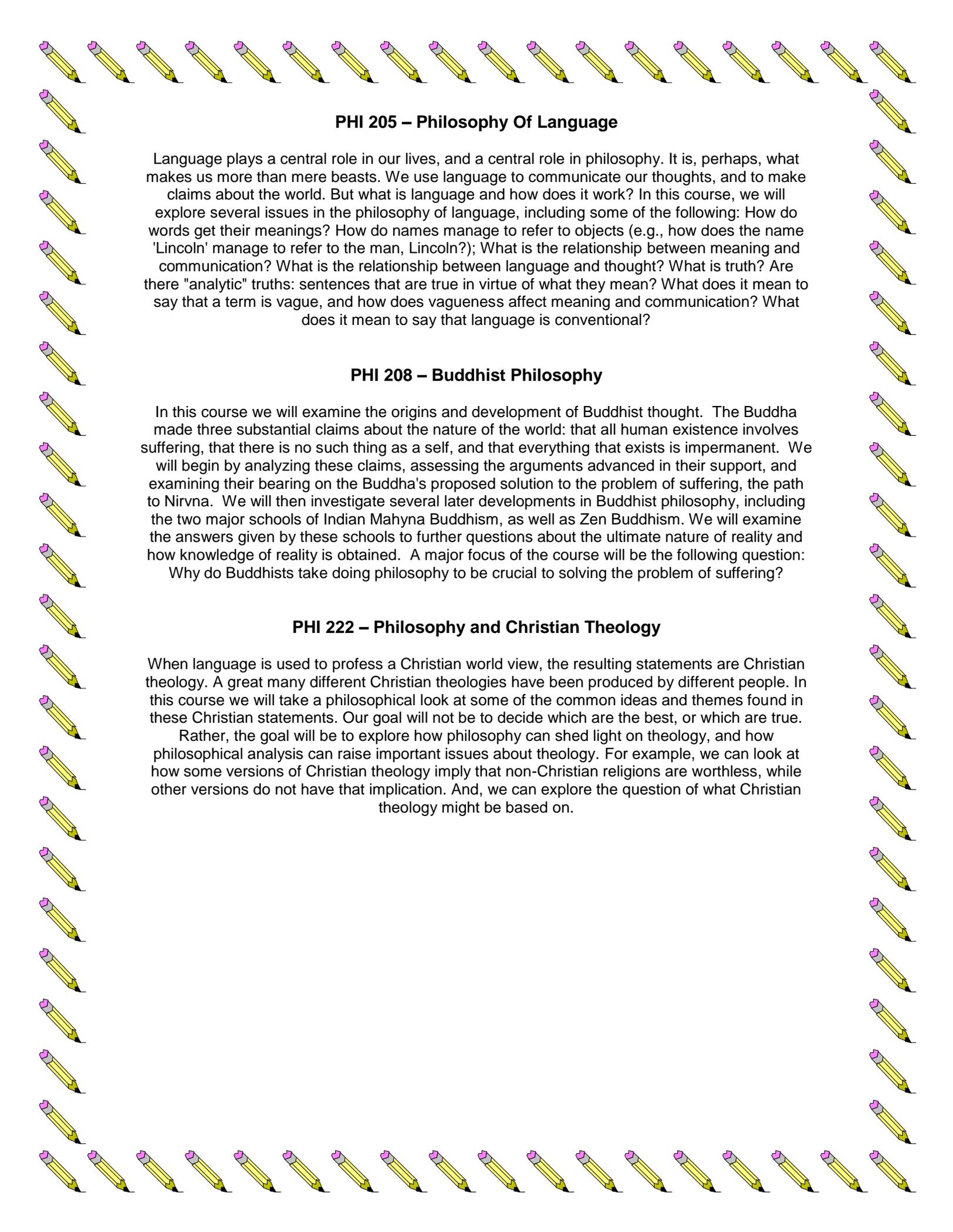
## PHI 112 - Language, Logic and Math

This is a course in modern symbolic logic. The fundamental objective of the course is to provide you with the abilities with which to understand and to apply the principles of formal reasoning. Not only are these principles essential to rational discourse, they are the basis of both mathematical reasoning and (symbolic) computation. Among the issues to be explored are: the nature of arguments, statements, truth, and formal systems; the relation between language (formal and natural), signs, and the world; logical relations and properties; deduction vs. induction; and techniques for evaluating arguments.

## PHI 202 – Sex, Values and Human Nature

This course gives students an opportunity to examine in detail some contemporary issues surrounding sex, gender and sexuality. The course begins by exploring how two quite different approaches to human nature—biological determinism and social constructionism—set about explaining facts about sex, gender and sexuality. So we will raise such questions as whether, for instance, men are biologically determined to be more sexually aggressive than females, or if gender differences like this one can instead be explained by facts about how our society is structured. Having examined two quite different theories about these matters, we will then go on to see how they might affect our answers to some normative questions about sex, gender and sexuality. Should there be gay marriage? What should we do to prevent sexual violence?

Should there be legal restriction of pornography? What kinds of sexual activities should be considered immoral? We will explore how accepting a particular theory of human nature might influence the answers we give to normative questions like these.



## PHI 205 – Philosophy Of Language

Language plays a central role in our lives, and a central role in philosophy. It is, perhaps, what makes us more than mere beasts. We use language to communicate our thoughts, and to make claims about the world. But what is language and how does it work? In this course, we will explore several issues in the philosophy of language, including some of the following: How do words get their meanings? How do names manage to refer to objects (e.g., how does the name 'Lincoln' manage to refer to the man, Lincoln?); What is the relationship between meaning and communication? What is the relationship between language and thought? What is truth? Are there "analytic" truths: sentences that are true in virtue of what they mean? What does it mean to say that a term is vague, and how does vagueness affect meaning and communication? What does it mean to say that language is conventional?

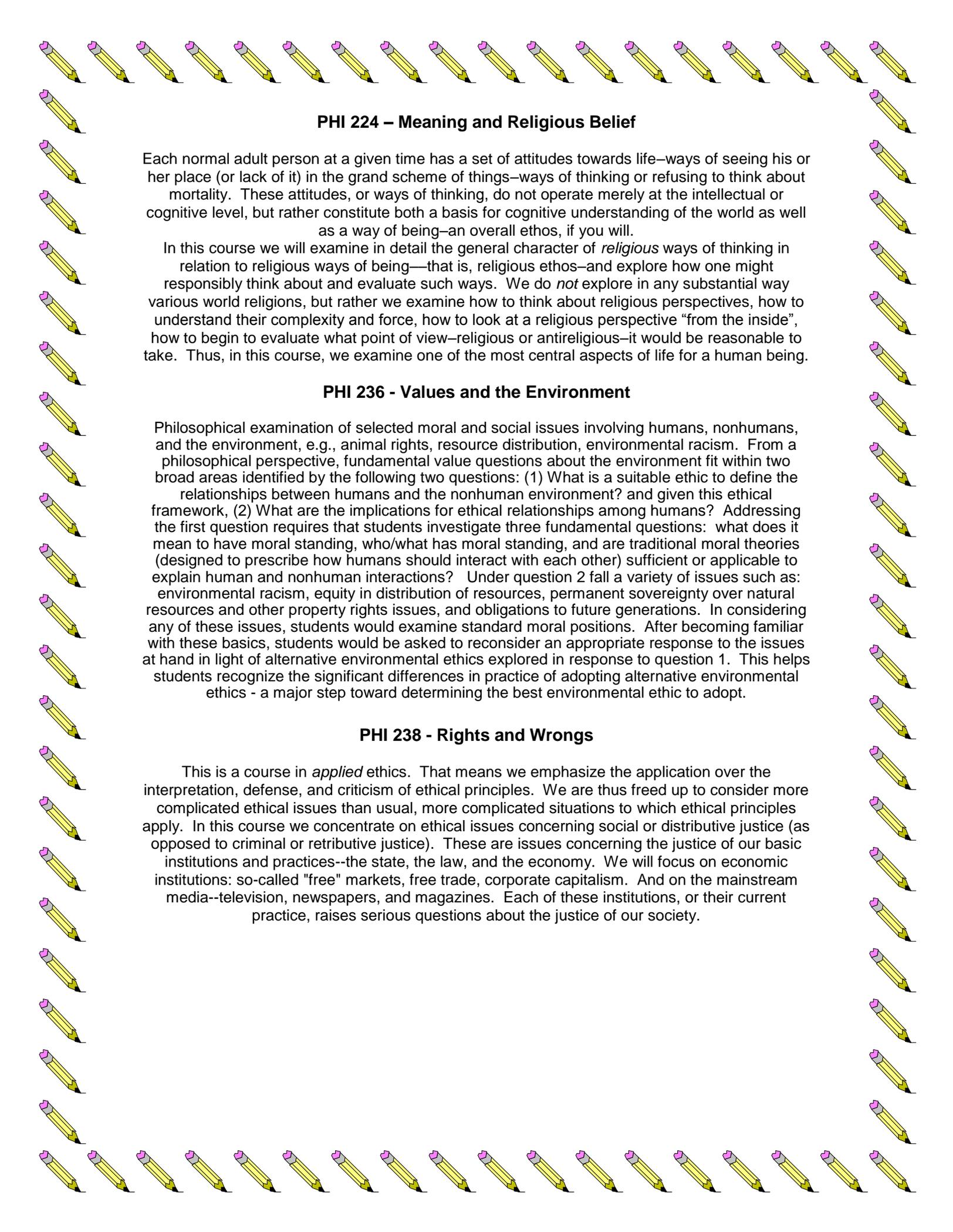
## PHI 208 – Buddhist Philosophy

In this course we will examine the origins and development of Buddhist thought. The Buddha made three substantial claims about the nature of the world: that all human existence involves suffering, that there is no such thing as a self, and that everything that exists is impermanent. We will begin by analyzing these claims, assessing the arguments advanced in their support, and examining their bearing on the Buddha's proposed solution to the problem of suffering, the path to Nirvana. We will then investigate several later developments in Buddhist philosophy, including the two major schools of Indian Mahayana Buddhism, as well as Zen Buddhism. We will examine the answers given by these schools to further questions about the ultimate nature of reality and how knowledge of reality is obtained. A major focus of the course will be the following question: Why do Buddhists take doing philosophy to be crucial to solving the problem of suffering?

## PHI 222 – Philosophy and Christian Theology

When language is used to profess a Christian world view, the resulting statements are Christian theology. A great many different Christian theologies have been produced by different people. In this course we will take a philosophical look at some of the common ideas and themes found in these Christian statements. Our goal will not be to decide which are the best, or which are true.

Rather, the goal will be to explore how philosophy can shed light on theology, and how philosophical analysis can raise important issues about theology. For example, we can look at how some versions of Christian theology imply that non-Christian religions are worthless, while other versions do not have that implication. And, we can explore the question of what Christian theology might be based on.



## PHI 224 – Meaning and Religious Belief

Each normal adult person at a given time has a set of attitudes towards life—ways of seeing his or her place (or lack of it) in the grand scheme of things—ways of thinking or refusing to think about mortality. These attitudes, or ways of thinking, do not operate merely at the intellectual or cognitive level, but rather constitute both a basis for cognitive understanding of the world as well as a way of being—an overall ethos, if you will.

In this course we will examine in detail the general character of *religious* ways of thinking in relation to religious ways of being—that is, religious ethos—and explore how one might responsibly think about and evaluate such ways. We do *not* explore in any substantial way various world religions, but rather we examine how to think about religious perspectives, how to understand their complexity and force, how to look at a religious perspective “from the inside”, how to begin to evaluate what point of view—religious or antireligious—it would be reasonable to take. Thus, in this course, we examine one of the most central aspects of life for a human being.

## PHI 236 - Values and the Environment

Philosophical examination of selected moral and social issues involving humans, nonhumans, and the environment, e.g., animal rights, resource distribution, environmental racism. From a philosophical perspective, fundamental value questions about the environment fit within two broad areas identified by the following two questions: (1) What is a suitable ethic to define the relationships between humans and the nonhuman environment? and given this ethical framework, (2) What are the implications for ethical relationships among humans? Addressing the first question requires that students investigate three fundamental questions: what does it mean to have moral standing, who/what has moral standing, and are traditional moral theories (designed to prescribe how humans should interact with each other) sufficient or applicable to explain human and nonhuman interactions? Under question 2 fall a variety of issues such as: environmental racism, equity in distribution of resources, permanent sovereignty over natural resources and other property rights issues, and obligations to future generations. In considering any of these issues, students would examine standard moral positions. After becoming familiar with these basics, students would be asked to reconsider an appropriate response to the issues at hand in light of alternative environmental ethics explored in response to question 1. This helps students recognize the significant differences in practice of adopting alternative environmental ethics - a major step toward determining the best environmental ethic to adopt.

## PHI 238 - Rights and Wrongs

This is a course in *applied* ethics. That means we emphasize the application over the interpretation, defense, and criticism of ethical principles. We are thus freed up to consider more complicated ethical issues than usual, more complicated situations to which ethical principles apply. In this course we concentrate on ethical issues concerning social or distributive justice (as opposed to criminal or retributive justice). These are issues concerning the justice of our basic institutions and practices--the state, the law, and the economy. We will focus on economic institutions: so-called “free” markets, free trade, corporate capitalism. And on the mainstream media--television, newspapers, and magazines. Each of these institutions, or their current practice, raises serious questions about the justice of our society.



## PHI 253 – Philosophy and the Behavioral Sciences

The course examines philosophical issues in the philosophy of mind, philosophical psychology, and artificial intelligence. We study a wide range of issues as these arise in the intellectual thought of philosophers and psychologists. Central figures are Descartes, William James, Freud, B. F. Skinner, Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan and Daniel Dennett.

Broadly philosophical topics include the mind-body problem, the nature of consciousness, rationality, determinism and freewill, and self-knowledge. Philosophical psychology includes questions about the explanatory status of psychoanalysis, the concept of the "operant" in behaviorism, Kohlberg's "thesis of moral development", Gilligan's critique of Kohlberg, and the like. It also includes the fundamental dispute over the "scientific" standing of psychology, including the contrast between experimental and clinical studies. Later in the course, we turn to some basic ideas behind "artificial intelligence" projects and important philosophical objections to artificial intelligence. The course may further involve some writings of feminist philosophers who concentrate on questions either in philosophical psychology or in the theory of the self.

Graded work consists of a series of argumentative essays and papers. Attendance and participation are assumed in a philosophy class. The reading is fascinating, but difficult.

## PHI 255 – Modern Philosophy

In this course we will examine the origins and development of the three major movements that dominate modern philosophy in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries--rationalism, empiricism, and Kant's transcendental philosophy. We will look at the intellectual and cultural backgrounds of these movements, for instance the way in which the growth of modern science influenced the developments of these philosophical traditions. Our chief focus, though, will be on the philosophical systems themselves, and the answers they give to a range of questions in metaphysics and epistemology. We shall be subjecting the arguments of such major modern philosophers as Descartes, Hume, and Kant to intensive analysis and criticism. Out of this should emerge a clearer understanding of the philosophical underpinnings of our modern view of what the world is like and how we come to know anything about it.

## PHI 305 – Understanding Race and Racism Philosophically

This course is designed to introduce students to historical and contemporary philosophical scholarship race, racism, and social justice. It will explore some of the philosophical assumptions behind the concept of race, how race effects knowledge projects, and the political effects of racial identities.

The course will be divided into four sections. The first part of the class asks students to consider what it means to have a race, and to think about in what sense are races real. The second part asks students to look at racism not as an individual phenomenon, but as sociopolitical and historical structure. Next, we will unpack the meaning of whiteness and examine some of the literature on white privilege, colorblindness, and white ignorance. The last part of the course asks student to examine the impact of racialized thinking on contemporary politics.

**Specific topics include:** Racial formation as an historical colonial project, mixed race identities, critiques of colorblind thinking, testimonial injustice, white talk and ignorance, the role of the emotions in racial conversations, and racial embodiment and perception.



## PHI 330 – Responsibility and Blame

Brad Brisbin was a father of four and a local business owner. He was also feeling his way through his first year as a physical education teacher, and he was doing it with the kind of dedication those who knew him had come to expect. On a Friday in November, however, Brad arranged for a substitute to take his place, so he could skip his afternoon classes and travel 90 miles north to help a friend. He assured his wife and children that he would be home in time for dinner, but Brad never made it back.

In the wake of his disappearance, Brad's children worried about where he was and what it meant for him to be gone. Without Brad beside her at night, his wife struggled to retain her composure, believing as she did that Brad was not just missing, but almost certainly dead. Rumor wormed its way through the small town, but questions remained unanswered.

For a longer time than anyone might have expected, no one knew for certain who was to blame for Brad's disappearance. Was it Brad himself? Had he abandoned his family and started a new life elsewhere? Had some random act of violence cut Brad's young life short? Or had his friend been involved somehow?

The truth turned out to involve Brad's friend, Larry Moore, who had lured Brad to a trailer, shot him twice in the head, and dumped his body in a gravel pit so deep that no one would find it for another four years. Larry lied about his involvement in the case, as anyone would expect, but he went beyond expectations by fabricating an elaborate story, supplemented with forged letters and distracting anecdotes, that Brad had run off on his own to start a new life in a different state with another family. But even before Brad's body was recovered, DNA evidence convinced a jury to find Larry Moore guilty of murder and sentence him to 60 years in prison. Years later, in a plea bargain, Larry finally admitted to murdering his friend and led authorities to that unfathomed gravel pit, where they finally found Brad's body, despite having already searched there a dozen times.

How do you feel about Brad's story? Does it make you angry, or does it just make you sad? Do you think Larry got what he deserved? Or would you want to know more about the case before making any judgments? What could you learn about Larry as a person that would convince you that he was not to blame for murdering Brad? Is blaming Larry the same thing as holding him responsible? Or can responsibility and blame come apart? Is it easy for you to hold someone like Larry responsible for his actions, or does holding anyone responsible make you feel uneasy? Would you feel differently about the case if you knew either Brad or Larry personally? What can a case like this tell us about responsibility and blame?

These are the kind of difficult questions this course will explore. As we'll see, once we start thinking carefully about responsibility and blame, a host of nuanced philosophical issues emerge. To narrow the scope of the course, we will focus on current debates about what it means to hold someone responsible and the conditions under which ascriptions of responsibility and blame are justified. Along the way, we'll also consider related debates about free will, moral psychology, and punishment.

## PHI 363 – A Priori Knowledge

Some of the most central debates in epistemology concern a priori knowledge. What is the difference between a priori knowledge and a posteriori knowledge? What is the relationship between necessary truths, logical truths, analytic truths, and a priori knowledge, if any? Which sorts of things can be known a priori? Why? Does a priori knowledge even exist, or is human knowledge really all covertly a posteriori knowledge, and even mathematics is justified by appeal to the sense somehow? In this course, we will read both historical and contemporary pieces related to central debates about a priori knowledge.