101 Basic Issues in Philosophy [OC-KD/H]

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.

104 Ideal of Democracy [MC-ICL]

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.

112 Language, Logic and Math [MC-QR]

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.
150 Science and Human Culture [Outer Core]

Are men sexually unfaithful because of their genes? Are women "naturally" good mothers? Are certain "races" more aggressive or violent than others? Does race have anything to do with IQ?

Recently, science has begun to play an increasingly important role in explaining how human society works. Sociobiologists propose to extend the same principles of evolutionary biology that apply to all species to human beings and thereby explain both our psychological make-up and our social organization.

This course will begin with an examination of the criteria scientists themselves use to judge the adequacy of scientific theories and scientific explanations. Next, we will investigate the role society (with all of its biases and prejudices) plays in defining what counts as good science and what counts as bad or biased science. At this point, students will be prepared to read and analyze some modern scientific (biological, sociobiological, and evolutionary-psychological) accounts of human society. We will study these scientific theories about culture in light of what we have learned about the role of culture in shaping scientific knowledge.

201 Epistemology, Metaphysics, Mind and Language

Introduction to contemporary issues in metaphysics and epistemology and related issues in philosophy of mind and language.

202 Sex, Values, Human Nature [OC-DKCC/H]

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.
208 Buddhist Philosophy  
(Satisfies Global Studies Graduation Requirement)

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?

224 Meaning & Religious Belief [OC-DKCC/H]

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.
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.

238 Rights and Wrongs [OC-DKCC/H]

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.
In this course, we shall first lay a firm foundation by providing an overview of the historical roots and philosophical foundations of democracy. Throughout the course, we shall pair theory and practice. During this part of the course, we shall examine Pericles and the Athenian assembly, Locke and the English Parliament, Rousseau and Geneva city-state, Madison and the United States Constitution, Marx and soviets. Students will take an examination on the foundational material.

Then, we shall turn our attention to contemporary theories and problems. In particular, we shall explore democracy and its relation to: liberalism, capitalism, Marxism, socialism, feminism, and environmentalism. Students will write critical analyses of contemporary writings covering these topics.

Students will also have hands-on experiences with problems of democratic governance. We shall use the classroom as a vehicle for simulating different democratic procedures, such as proportional representation and consensus. Most of our time during this part of the course will be devoted to designing and implementing a scaled-down version of the national caucus. Students will choose a controversial issue, select a sample population, conduct pre and post deliberative opinion polls, and moderate discussions among participants. Finally, we shall develop projects to compare and contrast democracy and rights in Canada, Mexico, Japan, and Nigeria.

In the remaining part of the course, we shall analyze democracy's relationship to the judiciary. How can we justify granting considerable power to a judiciary in a democracy? Students will be using the Internet to participate in the exciting attempts at constitution building taking place in eastern Europe and throughout the world. Students will choose at least two constitutions and compare them, especially with respect to the role given to the judiciary.
251 Visions of the Self [OC-KD/H]

Human beings have an insatiable desire to understand the universe around them. Yet what is the nature of the cognitive agent who is capable of these inquiries? For thousands of years poets, philosophers, and theologians have drawn on the introspective data of experience in order to understand the nature of “self”. In the Modern period, we know there are rich and complex mechanisms lying well below the surface which introspection reveals. Thus the study of the self has emerged as a major enterprise incorporating a huge variety of data, data drawn from both the “inside” – what it “feels like” to be a person –, and the “outside” – from external points of view such as those characterizing the social and physical sciences. This course is an in-depth study of philosophical issues surrounding these various modes of inquiry. We will draw upon philosophically relevant data arising in fields as diverse as cognitive, experimental, and clinical psychology, literature, psychiatric medicine, neurophysiology, computer science and artificial intelligence, and philosophy itself. This inquiry will confront students with puzzling questions that have wide-ranging practical implications, both personally and socially, including: What is the Mind? Is it a kind of mental stuff, is it physical or is it fundamentally computer software? What is the proper theory of “personal Identity”? What makes the 80 year-old woman “the same person” as the three year old toddler? What is the philosophical significance (ethical, metaphysical, etc.) of certain mental and physical disorders (e.g. multiple personality, dementia, body-alienation, commissurotomy)? What properties must something possess to be a “person”? Could a machine or an animal or an alien be a person? Are “persons” self-contained, atomistic agents or does the integration of the self so depend on connections to other selves that the drawing of boundaries between selves becomes problematic? To what extent do the various conceptions of the self lead to different accounts of our moral and social responsibility to ourselves and others?

255 Modern Philosophy

In this course we will examine the origins and development of the three major movements that dominate modern philosophy in the 17th and 18th 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.
310 Thomas Kuhn and his Critics

This course will examine the theories of Thomas Kuhn about how and why scientific revolutions take place, such as the Copernican revolution. Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* is an important recent classic in philosophy of science which caused a radical shift in how people think both about how science does and ought to work. Kuhn argues that there is a difference between revolutionary and normal science, and in revolutionary science, a paradigm-shift takes places that involves radical conceptual changes. This model has several interesting implications, e.g., that those working within different paradigms might literally be unable to even disagree with one another, since they have in effect adopted different but incommensurable languages, etc. We’ll explore the work of Kuhn at several stages in his development, comparing his ideas briefly to earlier accounts of how science is supposed to work. We will also consider important criticisms of Kuhn’s ideas.

330 The Dark Side Of Human Nature

The great Confucian philosopher Mencius thinks that you’re a fundamentally good person, and he has an argument to back him up. Imagine that you’re walking in a field and you see a “child on the verge of falling down into a well.” Now, ask yourself, what would you do? Mencius is confident that you’d rush to help the child, because you have a natural sympathy for others. And you’re not alone. By nature, Mencius thinks, we’re all good, not just you.

But what if Mencius is wrong? What about those people who ignore pleas for help? What about people who hurt others and feel no remorse? How can an optimist like Mencius make sense of the dark side of human nature?

Taking the ancient debate between Mencius (who thinks we’re fundamentally good) and Xunzi (who thinks we’re fundamentally bad) as our starting point, we’ll try to make sense of the dark side of human nature in this course. While drawing on a variety of philosophical traditions and academic disciplines for inspiration, we’ll carefully explore topics like evil personhood, weakness of will, self-deception, anger, and the death drive, among many others.
IDS 265: Introduction to Cognitive Science: Computers, Minds, Brains, and Robots

This course will introduce students to the interdisciplinary field of cognitive science, a research area dedicated to explaining how minds and other kinds of intelligent systems work. This field draws on work from computer science, neuroscience, psychology, philosophy, linguistics, anthropology, robotics and education. Contemporary developments in cognitive science have provided exciting new ways to explore fundamental questions about the nature of minds (human and animal) and how they work. It is also at the center of research into artificial intelligence and robotics.

Cognitive science provides an excellent opportunity for expanding students' understanding of human knowledge and learning, for providing insights into numerous technological breakthroughs that are changing our world, as well as providing a context in which to explore philosophical questions related to issues of "personhood" and the moral and social consequences of cognitive science research. These questions include: How can you tell if a creature has a mind? How does the brain "learn"? Can a machine be a person? How do we "perceive" the world? Why is language a special feature of creatures with minds? Could your mind be "transferred" into a robotic body? Does artificial intelligence research pose dangers comparable to those of atomic bombs?

This semester, the goal is to team-teach the course with two instructors from the philosophy and psychology departments, together with a number of guest lecturers from computer science, biology, anthropology, and other fields. Students will benefit from a good deal of hands-on experience working with artificial intelligence programs, doing psychology experiments, interacting with robots, and much more. Come join us for an exciting semester!