

SUNY Buffalo State Philosophy Course Offerings

Spring 2017

JANUARY TERM 2017

PHI 103: Introduction to Logic
CRN 1063 ONLINE

Dr. Justin Donhauser

In this course students will learn strategies for evaluating the many sorts of information and arguments we encounter in every aspect of our personal and professional lives. The course will begin with a brief introduction to the key roles that language, rhetoric, and logic can and do play in the world. In the remainder of the course, we will focus on learning the basics of propositional logic and how it is useful as a tool for understanding and critically evaluating new information and common forms of argument. At every step in the course, we will learn a bit of logical theory and then focus on practical applications of the bits of theory that we are learning. The course will end with a section on academic research strategy--with a focus on sufficiently supporting written arguments and writing strong argumentative research papers.

TEXTS: There are no required textbooks for this course. I will make electronic files of all readings and other course materials freely available on blackboard

SPRING SEMESTER 2017

PHI 101: Introduction to Philosophy

Dr. Kimberly Blessing

CRN 1344 10:50 am – 12:05 am TR Freshman only
CRN 3058 1:40 pm - 2:55 pm TR Freshman only

This course is specifically designed for first-year freshmen who are looking for an *intellectually rigorous and challenging course*. This course will introduce students to some of the major figures and issues in Western Philosophy. We shall consider various topics in metaphysics (the study of reality), epistemology (the study of knowledge), and ethics (the study of morality). Some of the Big Questions we'll consider include: What is the point of education?; Are things always as they seem?; What is real and what is not?; Does God exist?; Am I free or ruled by fate?; Is there an afterlife?; Do I have a moral obligation to help strangers, such as children in Africa who are dying of starvation?; What is happiness?; Am I living a good life?; Who am I and what do I value?; What is the meaning of life?; What is the nature of friendship?; Etc. Emphasis will be placed upon reading philosophical texts and recognizing and evaluating arguments. Students will also develop and enhance critical thinking skills and apply them in reading and discussing philosophical texts. Students who successfully complete this course should develop a deeper understanding of yourself, and a heightened sense of wonder about the world in which we live. Maybe even a love of wisdom. Students who do well in this course enjoy reading and writing, and they relish being challenged intellectually; they are typically students who are placed into CWP 101 in their first semester.

Required Course Texts: Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Oxford); Plato, *Five Dialogues* (Grube, trans.; Hackett); Voltaire, *Candide* (Wooton, trans., Hackett); Warburton, *A Little History of Philosophy* (Yale University Press, 2011).

PHI 101: Introduction to Philosophy

Dr. Leigh Duffy

CRN 3059 9:00am-9:50am MWF
CRN 2814 1:00pm-1:50pm MWF

This course will take a thematic approach to some basic philosophical topics including the nature of knowledge, God/religion, the nature of mind, and morality. This course will expose students to basic philosophical issues and develop their ability to think critically about such issues. This exposure will probably challenge some basic beliefs, so an open mind and a willingness to consider other beliefs are necessary.

Required Course Text: *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 6th Edition, John Perry, Michael Bratman, and John Martin Fischer, eds. (Oxford University Press)

SUNY Buffalo State Philosophy Course Offerings Spring 2017

PHI 103: Intro to Logic
CRN 2078 11:00am-11:50am MWF

Dr. Julian Cole

Every day we are bombarded with information that attempts to persuade us to act in various ways. This information includes material from newspapers and magazines, political broadcasts, pamphlets on various causes, television ads, details of investment opportunities, and many other sources. The primary aim of this course is to provide students with some of the intellectual tools that are available for evaluating this information. Specifically, we shall be considering a number of common fallacies to which arguments in these media often fall prey. A secondary aim of this course is to aid students in clearly understanding, representing, evaluating, and writing arguments, particularly arguments found in everyday contexts.

Required Course Text: *No Textbook Required*

PHI 107: Intro to Math Logic
CRN 4242 1:00pm – 1:50pm MWF

Dr. Julian Cole

This class will introduce two types of mathematical models for assessing the formal correctness of reasoning. In particular, Venn diagrams will be discussed as geometric models for assessing categorical syllogisms, while sentential and monadic predicate logics will be discussed as algebraic models for assessing the types of arguments associated with these logics.

No texts required

PHI 110: Meaning of Life
CRN 4243 10:00am – 10:50am MWF

Dr. Leigh Duffy

In this course, we examine the ways different thinkers throughout history have approached the question of the meaning of life. We consider philosophers who argue for meaning based on God, religion, or spirituality; those who claim that meaning can be found without religion in a variety of different ways, such as in purpose or happiness; and even some who argue that life is in fact meaningless. We discuss these different approaches and try to use the best views to answer related, applied questions, such as “how can I best live my life?”, “who would I want to be my model for living a meaningful life”, “how do I consider others when making decisions about how to live a good life?”, “is there a difference between a meaningful life, a happy life, a good life, and a purposeful life?”.

Required Text: *The Meaning of Life: A Reader* ed. E.D. Klemke and Steven M. Cahn

PHI 111: Ethics for Scientists
CRN 4244 9:25am -10:40am TR

Dr. Jason Grinnell

PHI 111 Ethics for Scientists is the descendant of courses I team-taught with Associate Professor of Biology Amy McMillan in 2010 and 2013. It is specifically designed to appeal to the academic interests and needs of students majoring in the sciences. We shall study ethics by focusing on scientific issues, problems, and controversies. Among other things, we will explore scientific reasoning and skepticism, Darwinism, egoism, altruism, some traditional ethical theory, and a range of particular topics in applied ethics. As of now, I plan to use *Human Nature After Darwin: A Philosophical Introduction*. I'll supplement that text with a variety of specific articles from classic and contemporary sources.

Required Text: *Human Nature After Darwin: A Philosophical Introduction*. Janet Radcliffe Richards (2000).

PHI 308: Love and Sex
CRN 3745 1:40pm – 2:55pm TR

Dr. John Draeger

This course explores the nature of intimate interpersonal relationships with friends, family, and romantic partners. For example, what is the difference between a friend and a lover? Is it the sex or is it an alternative form of love? In the process of considering how to characterize intimate relationships, we will examine a variety of related ideas, including love, trust, sex, and compassion.

SUNY Buffalo State Philosophy Course Offerings Spring 2017

PHI 310: History of Ethics
CRN 4246 **6:00pm – 8:40pm**

M

Dr. John Abbarno

Historical study of the writings of great Western philosophers as they examine ethical questions about self-interest, freedom, duty, and happiness in regard to the moral life. This course will include assignments that demonstrate the impact of these theories on contemporary moral problems. Includes Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Mill, and Hume.

PHI 312: Philosophy of Mind
CRN 4252 **12:00pm – 12:50pm**

MWF

Dr. Leigh Duffy

This course is an introduction to the philosophy of mind—the study of the nature and existence of minds. We will begin with Cartesian dualism and examine how thinking about the mind has developed since that time, considering foundational positions. We then turn to the contemporary questions and positions in the field, including the following: the nature of thought, the nature of consciousness, minds and computers, animals and consciousness, knowledge of the minds of others, the possibility of being conscious of our own consciousness, and the objects of beliefs.

We will discuss brain transplants, philosophical zombies, conscious machines, brains in vats, dreams, and other non-traditional topics. However, this is all in order to come to a better understanding of the nature of one's self as a conscious being.

Required Text: *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, Edited by David Chalmers. ISBN13 9780195145816
ISBN10: 01951458

PHI 318W: Modern Philosophy's Greatest Hits **M**
CRN **3:00pm – 5:40pm**

Dr. Kimberly Blessing

If all of Western philosophy is a long footnote to Plato, then all of modern philosophy is a long footnote to Descartes. But just who is Descartes: Heretic? Devout Catholic? Why were his *Meditations on First Philosophy* placed on the Index of Prohibited Books? Cogito, ergo, sum; what does this mean? How does this seemingly simple phrase go on to shape the rest of modern philosophy? How does “the Cogito” shape the way we view ourselves and our place in the world? How do we even know that an external world exists at all? How do I know that what I think is true is in fact true? What if I'm being deceived by an Evil Genius? Does God exist? What is God: (a) an independently existing infinite substance, i.e., theism, or (b) is God one with nature, "Deus sive Natura," i.e., pantheism? How would we even know God's true nature much less the true nature of the world? Is the mind at birth a blank slate, tabula rasa, or are some ideas or knowledge innate? “To be is to be perceived,” esse est percipi; in other words, if a tree falls in the forest does it make a noise? Can we ever know reality or the world as it really is, i.e., the ding-an-sich (“thing in itself”)? Ex nihilo, nihil fit (“from nothing nothing comes”) – how do we know that this is true? Why do we believe that the sun will rise tomorrow; is just by custom or force of habit? “Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind”; huh? What exactly is the transcendental unity of apperception? Are synthetic a priori truths possible – what does that even mean? Modern philosophy sure ain't easy. But to quote the last line of the great Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics*: Sed omnia praeclara tam difficilia, quam rara sunt (“All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare”). Join us this semester to explore the texts and ideas of some of the Greatest Intellectual Giants of the West: DESCARTES, SPINOZA, LEIBNIZ, LOCKE, BERKELEY, HUME, AND KANT. I'm sure you “k'ant” believe all of this... in just one course! AMAZING!

PREREQUISITES: CWP 102 AND JR/SR or PHI 317.

Required Course Text: Beauchamp, David Hume: *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford); Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge/ Three Dialogues* (Oxford); Cottingham, *Descartes: Selected Writings* (Cambridge); Parkinson, *Spinoza Ethics* (Oxford); Thomson, *Bacon to Kant* (Waveland).

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PHI 401W: Senior Seminar: W
CRN 2150 3:00pm – 5:40pm

Dr. Julian Cole

This is a seminar in *metaphysics*—the systematic study of what there is and what the fundamental nature of those things that there are is. After roughly fifty years of metaphysics being dominated by so called “hard” approaches, in recent years, there has been a steady return to more traditional, “easy” approaches. We will be reading some of the recent literature in the new, “easy” tradition, beginning with debates over the existence of ordinary, everyday objects such as tables, chairs, planets, and trees, and progressing to more abstract objects such as corporations, borders, numbers, and possible worlds. As most students will be unacquainted with “easy” approaches to metaphysics, the focus of this seminar will be on helping students develop the ability to read sophisticated philosophy that employs unfamiliar concepts and terminology, a prerequisite for their continuing study of philosophy after graduation.

Required Reading Material: Amie L. Thomasson, *Ordinary Objects*, Oxford University Press 2007 and Julian C. Cole, *Collapsing the Abstract and the Social: A Preliminary Investigation of Representational Surrogacy Functions*, available from the instructor as an electronic manuscript.