GRADUATE LEVEL PHILOSOPHY COURSES

SPRING 2014

PHIL 505: History of Medieval Philosophy
Dr. Doug Kries
TR 1:15-2:30

The period commonly designated “medieval” in the history of philosophy is both long (over a millennium) and rich in philosophical literature. It is marked by the transmission of the works of ancient Greek philosophy to many non-Greek peoples, but it is also characterized by the encounter of philosophy with revealed religion. Thus arose the three religious contexts and literary traditions of medieval philosophy: the Christian (written in both Latin and Greek), the Islamic (written especially in Arabic), and the Jewish (written especially in Arabic and some Hebrew).

This course will offer a sample of the philosophical writings of this period. While a broad range of philosophical issues will be discussed, the course will be loosely organized around the themes of the encounter of ancient philosophy with the three traditions of revealed religion, programs of education as understood in medieval philosophical writings, arguments for the existence of God and natural theology generally, and the problem of universals. Students will have the opportunity to study, in English translation, representative readings from the works of medieval Islamic, Jewish, and Christian, thinkers—especially Alfarabi, Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas.

The goals of this course include [1] providing the student with a general knowledge of the major philosophical figures and movements of the medieval period, [2] introducing the student to some of the major themes of medieval thought, [3] training the student to read historical texts with understanding and sympathy, and [4] inspiring the students to a zealous pursuit of the philosophical quest.

PHIL 520: Contemporary Philosophy
Dr. Thomas Jeannot
MWF 2:10-3:25

This course is a survey of major figures representing several contemporary approaches to philosophical investigations, including: the phenomenological movement, existentialism, and hermeneutics; analytic philosophy; American philosophy; feminist philosophy; African-American philosophy; and postmodernism. Requirements will include brief reflective essays and midterm and final take-home essay exams.

The existentialist movement defies simple definition, but can be characterized roughly as the attempt to philosophically understand fundamental issues concerning the meaning and structure of human existence. The existentialists tend to regard abstract, conceptual systems of metaphysics as unable to account for concrete reality of individual human beings. Thus, in place of metaphysics, the existentialists investigate human existence through themes such as the relationships between the individual and the crowd; the significance of anxiety, dread, and death; the meaning and scope of individual freedom; and the quest for meaning and direction as it relates to God and absolute values. This course will examine such themes as they are addressed by major “existentialist” thinkers: Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus.

Formal logic is a relatively recent development in the history of logic. Gottlob Frege (1848-1925) is credited with developing the tools for integrating the syllogistic logic of Aristotle with the propositional logic of the Stoics. In this class, we will learn about the syntax and semantics of first-order logic. Students will learn to translate arguments using the tools of first-order logic and to do logical proofs. Additionally, we will learn about the syntax and semantics of modal logic—the logic of possibility and necessity. Graduate students enrolled in the course will work with the instructor in developing a greater understanding of more advanced topics in logic.

It is a commonplace of contemporary thought that Christianity and science have a relationship that is contentious as best, outright war at worst. In particular, battles concerning evolution and creation (now additionally involving efforts by members of the Intelligent Design or ID movement) seem to show fundamental and intractable conflict between, on the one hand, established scientific claims about the emergence and governance of living things by mechanical natural processes and, on the other, deeply-held beliefs about God’s intervention in the world. While modern theories in physics seem to some to be more compatible with Christian notions of creation, others suggest that progress in cosmological theories has the effect of chipping away at any possible divine role in the origins of the physical universe.
In this course we will examine the historical roots of the relationship between Christianity and science, with particular attention to the philosophical principles that animate both. We will focus on key events that shed light on the relationship between Christianity and science, such as the Galileo case and the emergence and scientific success of Darwinism in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Along the way, we will critically consider a variety of models that have been proposed to describe the Christianity-science relationship, from conflict to compatibility to integration.

PHIL 567: Faith and Reason
Dr. Brian Clayton
TR 9:25-10:40

That faith and reason are either completely unrelated to each other or related only in conflict with each other seem be among the commonplaces of the age. In the Christian theistic tradition this view has been held by only a minority of those who have reflected on the matter; the majority view has been that faith and reason can be, should be, and are integrated. The Christian heritage of faith seeking understanding (or reason) offers an alternative to both the secularist and the fideist separation of the life of reason from the life of faith. This course will philosophically exploit this heritage as it pursues investigations of the relationships between the life of faith and the life of reason. Among the topics studied will be the following: the classical (Christian) theistic conception of God; classical and contemporary objections to (Christian) theism, such as those based on the experience of evil and suffering; classical and contemporary proofs for the existence of God, the latter proofs drawn particularly from the mathematical and physical sciences; and contemporary defenses of and objections to the tradition’s majority position on the faith and reason relationship.

Course Requirements: The final course grade will be determined as follows: (1) Electronically “signed” academic honesty pledge; (2) Course attendance and participation; (3) Discussion board postings, quizzes, etc.; (4) Essays.

Course Texts: The texts will include Peter Kreeft, A Summa of the Summa (1990); C.S. Lewis, A Grief Observed (2001); online readings.