Fall 2014 Philosophy Course descriptions – Upper division

351: Political Philosophy:
Professor: Max Rosenkrantz: max.rosenkrantz@csulb.edu

We will read selections from the following classic texts that discuss politics as a distinctive mode of human existence:
Aristotle, Politics
Hobbes, Leviathan
Constant, “The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns”
Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Purpose,” “Perpetual Peace” and The Metaphysics of Morals

352: Philosophy of Law
Professor: Amanda Trefethen: atrefeth@csulb.edu

TOPICS: This course will introduce students to the study of philosophical topics related to law and its adjudication. Some of the questions we will address include: What is law? Why, when, and how are we constrained by the law? Is there an essential relationship between law and morality? Can there be a "right answer" in legal disputes? And what does it mean to have "liberty"? Toward this end, we will analyze the more theoretical debates between legal positivism and natural law, as well as engage in a discussion of more specific legal and normative topics such as tort law, the insanity defense, free speech rights, paternalism, and the duty to rescue. Our readings will be drawn primarily from the historical development of the philosophy of law, including pieces by such philosophers as Thomas Aquinas, J.S. Mill, John Austin, H.L.A. Hart, Lon Fuller, John Rawls, and Ronald Dworkin.

REQUIREMENTS: To meet the University requirements for IC courses, students will have a writing assignment no later than the fifth week of the semester, with sustained writing throughout the course. Requirements for the course include: significant class participation, three written case briefs, a short paper (5 pages), a take-home examination, an in-class mid-term examination, and a comprehensive, two-hour, in-class, final examination.


381: Philosophy of Science
Professor: Charles Wallis: charles.wallis@csulb.edu
(TBA)
405: Philosophy of Literature
Professor: Nellie Wieland: nellie.wieland@csulb.edu

This course will look at philosophical questions such as:
What is literature?
What is an author?
What is the ontology of fiction?
We will also look at philosophical problems in fictional settings; topics might include free will and moral agency, personal identity, conceivability and possibility, human flourishing, and moral imagination. The fictional work we will read will probably include work by Edith Wharton, Jorge Luis Borges, P.K. Dick, Mark Twain, Franz Kafka, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Italo Calvino, Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, Virginia Woolf, Gustave Flaubert, and Milan Kundera. We might read work from Chinua Achebe, Richard Yates, Sophocles, Kazuo Ishiguro, Henry James, or Jane Austen. I hope to also include some poetry and films. Some of this work will be excerpted, and some will be merely recommended. We will also read a number of philosophical essays on our themes.

There will be a staggering amount of reading for this course. And it will be difficult. We're not reading airport books or philosophy lite. If you don't love to read, this is not the course for you. But if you do love to read, and want to learn more about philosophical perspectives on literature, then this course will be awesome.

No special philosophical or literary background is required for this course. But, in general, both kinds of background will add to your enjoyment. We will write regularly, maybe every week or so building up to an original intensive term paper. And there will be lots of in-class discussion.

Philosophy 413/513: Continental Rationalism
Professor: Lawrence Nolan: Lawrence.nolan@csulb.edu

Descartes, Malebranche and Leibniz were three of the most systematic philosophers who ever lived. They thought on a grand scale, and tried to develop philosophical systems that would provide solutions to every conceivable philosophical problem. They are known to us today primarily for their epistemologies, especially for their shared view that reason is the primary source of knowledge. For this, they are known as “rationalists”. But equally important for understanding their work, and the relation between them, are their metaphysics. This course will examine both aspects of their work.

We shall begin by examining Descartes’ famous attempt to attain scientia or “perfect knowledge,” defeat skepticism, and ground the new mechanistic science. We will then turn
to some fundamental issues in his ontology, including his account of the nature of God, human and divine freedom, the status of universals, etc. Though his work is less well known than the other two, Malebranche is an important transitional figure. On the one hand, he accepts many of the basic Cartesian doctrines, most notably that a human being is a union of two radically distinct substances—a mind and a body. On the other hand, he anticipated many of the doctrines that Leibniz later developed with greater precision and sophistication, e.g., the view that this is only one of an infinite number of possible worlds that God could have created. Malebranche and Leibniz were also very concerned with theodicy, i.e., with the effort to reconcile the presence of evil in the world with the existence of a supremely perfect creator.

Malebranche and Leibniz both offer fascinating critiques of Descartes' philosophy on different fronts, and this will be one of the emphases in this course. As a Cartesian himself, Malebranche offers the most interesting and important “insider” criticisms of Descartes’ theory of the mind and self-knowledge, the method of doubt, the theory of innate ideas, and human and divine freedom. Leibniz develops some of Malebranche’s criticisms and then offers one of the most original critiques of the Cartesian theory of individuation, showing that Descartes is unable to account for the identity and individuality of substances of the same type. As we shall see, many of Malebranche and Leibniz’s criticisms rest on very different conceptions of the nature of God and of creation from that of Descartes.

Course requirements:
a) Regular attendance and frequent participation
b) Two take-home assignments
c) Final exam
d) Optional debates for extra-credit

451: Race, Ethnicity and Gender in American Law
Professor: Amanda Trefethen: atrefeth@csulb.edu

This course will examine the nature of basic constitutional notions, such as liberty, justice, and equality, against the backdrop of an American legal history too frequently blighted by systematic and pervasive human inequality. In short, this course will examine the social construction of race, ethnicity, and gender and consider when and to what extent this construction has served as a legal sanction for perpetuating an exclusive, rather than inclusive, interpretation of "justice." In the process we will ask (and find surprising answers to) such questions as: Does Race Exist? What is Justice? Can the Sexes be Equal?

GENERAL EDUCATION: This course can be "triple-counted," as (1) 3 units of the University Interdisciplinary (IC) requirement, (2) 3 units of the University Human Diversity (HD) requirement, and (3) 3 unit credits for the philosophy major OR 3 units of C.2.b. "Philosophy" for non-majors.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS: The University IC requirements include substantial writing. To comply, the course will require (1) a 1000-word essay on the assigned readings due at the end of the fifth week, (2) an in-class essay mid-term exam, (3) a take-home exam, (4) an in-class essay final exam, and (5) additional points for legal briefing and in-class participation.

TOPICS: We will begin by considering the nature of "justice," with special attention to issues of race, ethnicity, and gender. We will then consider how the law historically has identified and distinguished these groups, how these distinctions have been justified and implemented by the law, and how the law has developed to reject different treatment. We will read both philosophical texts and extensive court decisions. We will read philosophical texts by Catherine MacKinnon, John Stuart Mill, Naomi Zack, Thomas Nagel, Susan Okin, John Rawls, Alex de Tocqueville, Richard Wasserstrom, and others. To comply with the University HD requirements, we will consider court decisions which address African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, and women.

TEXT: Ethical Issues in the Courts: A Companion to Philosophical Ethics (Julie Van Camp, Wadsworth Publishing, 2000) We also will use a course supplement, available at the University Bookstore in late August, e-reserve materials, and public domain readings.

419/519: Analytic Philosophy
Professor: Keith Kaiser: kkaiser@csulb.edu

(TBA)

493/593: Special Topics in Metaphysics (Color and Color Perception)
Professor: Wayne Wright: wayne.wright@csulb.edu

This course examines philosophical and empirical research on color experience and the nature of color. Much of the course will center around philosophers’ handling of the issue of whether colors exist and, if they do, what they are and what we might know about them. Considerable attention will be given to the question of what a theory of color ought to look like, particularly if such a theory is supposed to be relevant to scientific research. Other topics to be considered include color constancy and color language.

Graduate students will be required to do regular short writing assignments and will have the option of either writing a term paper or completing a comprehensive take-home final exam. Undergraduate students will have their grade based on a small number of short writing assignments and take-home mid-term and final exams. Undergraduate students interested in writing a term paper (in lieu of some of the required assignments) may do so after consultation with the instructor.
For my metaphysics seminar (Phil 640), you can use the following:
Patrick

In this course, we will be exploring issues concerning persons and personal identity. The central questions in this course are: What are persons? What makes a person the same person over time? While our primary focus is on various attempts to address these questions, given the cross-disciplinary nature of these issues, we will also be considering their impact on other areas of philosophy. Most notably, we shall consider the impact that various answers to these questions have on important issues in normative ethics. Accordingly, students are expected to have a passable understanding of historically prominent theories in normative ethics, e.g., Virtue Ethics, Kantian Ethics, Utilitarianism.