

James Pearson

## Descriptions of Courses Taught

I have designed, taught, and evaluated each of the following courses as an independent Instructor.

### Bridgewater State University

#### ***Metaphysics (PHIL 405): Fall 2015, Spring 2014***

After winning a grant in Summer 2015 to revise this course, students in its current iteration are working on individual research papers from the beginning of the semester. We began by examining positivist attacks on the cogency of metaphysical inquiry, and have proceeded to explore the reasons for and causes of the revival of metaphysics in our current moment. Other main units will explore space, time, change, and personhood. We shall read articles by W.V. Quine, David Lewis, Max Black, Hilary Putnam, Kristie Dotson, and Luciano Floridi.

#### ***Knowledge and Truth (PHIL 402): Fall 2014***

After a brief introduction to Descartes' skeptical method and the Gettier cases, this upper-level class focused on four recently important epistemological questions: Can skepticism be refuted? Is truth a norm of inquiry? Should we "naturalize" epistemology? When should we trust our epistemic peers, and what are our rational obligations in cases of peer disagreement? We read articles by Ernest Sosa, Donald Davidson, Catherine Elgin, Linda Zagzebski, Jonathan Kvanvig, and Elizabeth Fricker. Students wrote a term paper based upon a question of their own design.

#### ***Philosophy of Mathematics (directed study) (PHIL 399): Fall 2014***

A talented philosophy major, Bradford Holmes, who had enrolled in my Metaphysics and Symbolic Logic classes in Spring 2014, became interested in logicism and requested that we do a directed study together. We are reading a variety of source texts from Paul Benacerraf and Hilary Putnam's classic anthology together with contemporary introductions by Stewart Shapiro and Mark Colyvan.

#### ***Symbolic Logic (PHIL 310): Fall 2015, Spring 2015, Fall 2014, Spring 2014, Fall 2013***

In this extension of Bridgewater's basic logic course, we discussed the merits and dangers of using an artificial notation to analyze arguments couched in ordinary language. We used a natural deduction system to prove simple theorems, pausing to note some puzzles about the material conditional. We closed the course by reflecting on the relation of identity, and Frege's logicist proposal. Our text was Warren Goldfarb's *Deductive Logic*.

#### ***Philosophy of Language (PHIL 288): Spring 2015***

In this introductory level course, we discussed classic disputes about the ways names and descriptions work before turning to the nature of truth and meaning. We closed by examining conversational implicature and what it means to follow a rule. We read articles by Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Saul Kripke, H.P. Grice, and Donald Davidson.

#### ***Foundations of Logical Reasoning (PHIL 111): Fall 2015 (three times), Spring 2015 (twice) Fall 2014, Spring 2014 (twice), Fall 2013 (three times)***

Every student at Bridgewater is required to take this basic logic class, which is designed to promote critical thinking and analytical reasoning. Required topics include syllogistic reasoning and the identification of fallacies in informal arguments. I also teach the critical evaluation of statistical reasoning, and introduce students to propositional logic.

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### Harvard Summer School

#### ***Deductive Logic* (PHIL S-140): Summer 2015, Summer 2014, Summer 2013**

In this intensive seven-week course, we focused on paraphrasing English arguments in propositional and polyadic logic, and used a natural deduction system to prove statements of implication and equivalence. Students were encouraged to work together in small groups outside of class to complete the weekly problem sets, and finished the course with the ability to use a variety of logical techniques (including truth-tables, justified truth-functional analysis, expansions, and interpretations) to approach problems. We used Warren Goldfarb's *Deductive Logic*.

### William Jewell College

#### ***Philosophy of Science* (PHIL 357): Spring 2012**

Beginning with the rise of logical positivism, we explored major shifts in twentieth century philosophy of science. Against the background of Hempel and Carnap, students investigated the new attention paid to the history of science by post-positivist philosophers such as Kuhn, Lakatos, and Feyerabend, before considering feminist and social critiques of scientific practice. We ended the course with a detailed examination of contemporary philosophy of the special sciences, and a critique of Quine's call to naturalize epistemology.

#### ***Ethics* (PHIL 202): Fall 2012**

The focus of this class was close textual analysis of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, and Mill's *Utilitarianism*. After a brief introduction to what philosophers mean by "ethics," we took these texts in turn and read them in class together, paragraph by paragraph. Students were required to give an oral presentation, and critically honed their own ethical theories in their term paper.

#### ***History of Philosophy II: Kant-Davidson* (PHIL 216): Spring 2012**

We traced major developments in metaphysics and epistemology by closely reading primary texts. Students completed sequenced take-home exams on important periods (e.g. nineteenth century continental philosophy, American philosophy), and developed their own research questions to guide their term papers. We read selections from Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Marx, Nietzsche, Peirce, James, Dewey, Frege, Russell, Carnap, Ayer, Wittgenstein, Ryle, Austin, Anscombe, Husserl, Sartre, Beauvoir, Derrida, Foucault, Quine, and Davidson.

#### ***History of Philosophy I: Plato-Kant* (PHIL 215): Fall 2011**

We examined how great thinkers have shaped the discipline of philosophy by closely reading primary texts. The course culminated in an exploration of Kant's attempt to bring together rationalism and empiricism. Students regularly completed assignments on major periods (e.g. medieval philosophy), and created their own final research projects. We read selections from Plato, Aristotle, Sextus Empiricus, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, William of Ockham, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant.

#### ***Critique of the Tradition: Philosophical Peripheries* (OXQ 423): Fall 2012, Fall 2011**

In this honors tutorial, we worked to clarify the nature of philosophy by considering problems, figures, and texts that lie at the periphery of mainstream work. Topics included the relationship between philosophy, oratory, and poetry in Ancient philosophy; Richard Rorty's critique of epistemology; and Iris Murdoch's critique of moral philosophy. We read articles by Alexander Nehamas, Donald Davidson, John McDowell, and Cora Diamond.

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***Moral Epistemology (OXQ 414): Spring 2012***

In this honors tutorial, we examined a variety of theories about the nature of moral knowledge, including skepticism, relativism, realism, intuitionism, naturalism, emotivism, coherentism, and constructivism. Students wrote biweekly 8-10 page papers throughout the semester, which we critically discussed in considerable detail. We read articles by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, J.L. Mackie, Bernard Williams, Simon Blackburn, Ralph Wedgewood, Kieran Setiya, Margaret Urban-Walker, and Louise Antony.

***Endangerment: Species, Languages, and Cultures (CTI 405): Spring 2013***

In this interdisciplinary capstone class, students examined our responsibility to “endangered” things. In addition to philosophically examining the concepts “species,” “language,” and “culture,” we explored the way extant social structures endanger these things together. Students considered arguments drawn from a variety of media, including plays, movies, and philosophical articles. We read pieces by W.V. Quine, Peter Singer, Brian Friel, Doris Lessing, and Jean-François Lyotard.

***The Responsible Self (CTI 100): Spring 2013 (twice), Fall 2012, Fall 2011***

Every student at William Jewell College is required to take this class, which considers what it means to be a responsible self by critically engaging the arguments of five major texts: Mill’s *On Liberty*, Augustine’s *Confessions*, Wilson’s *Consilience*, Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood*, and *The Bhagavad-Gita*. My class paid careful attention to how to identify and critique arguments found in different formats: an essay, a memoir, a manifesto, a novel, and an epic poem.

University of Pittsburgh

***20<sup>th</sup> Century Philosophy: Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein (PHIL 1210): Spring 2010***

We explored the analytic approach that came to dominate 20<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-American philosophy by closely examining its origins in the work of Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein. By locating their triumphs and failures in epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of logic and language, students were positioned to better understand the extent to which these figures have shaped our current investigations. Beyond closely reading primary texts, including *Foundations of Arithmetic* and *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, we read contemporaneous criticism by G.E. Moore, P.F. Strawson, Wilfrid Sellars, and W.V. Quine.

***Theory of Knowledge: Contemporary Debates (PHIL 1460): Summer 2010***

We critically engaged currently active debates in epistemology so that students could situate their own views within the contemporary philosophical landscape. In the first half of the course we considered skepticism, justification, and the internalism/externalism debate. We read articles by Jonathan Vogel, Richard Fumerton, Catherine Elgin, John Greco, and Richard Feldman. In the second half of the course, students used the background knowledge they had developed to choose debates upon which to focus. They presented work by Earl Conee, Stewart Cohen, Donald Davidson, Richard Rorty, Akeel Bilgrami, Alvin Goldman, and Charles Mills.

***Social Philosophy: The Philosopher’s Role in Environmentalism (PHIL 0320): Fall 2010, Fall 2009, Summer 2009***

We uncovered the impact of philosophy upon the environmentalist movement by considering both what the social philosopher can, and cannot, achieve through her inquiry. Beginning with literature engaging Cora Diamond’s recent critique of the limits of philosophical argument in making contact with the social reality of human experiences—such as her objection to

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an overly intellectualized discussion of “animal rights”—we proceeded to investigate how philosophers grapple to conceptualize the human “ownership” of nature, human “responsibility” to non-humans, and the possibility of an “ecological” political theory. We read selections from Aristotle, Descartes, Hobbes, Leopold and Locke, and contemporary work by John Rawls, Thomas Pogge, Peter Singer and Peter Unger.

***Social Philosophy: Race, Class, and Gender (PHIL 0320): Fall 2008***

We focused on how social philosophers distinguish themselves from ethicists and political theorists. After looking at how ethicists approach social problems by modeling the good act for the group upon the good acts of individuals, and how political theorists consider social problems in terms of the values cherished in the ideal state, we interrogated arguments from social philosophers that purport to address social problems of race, class, and gender, directly. We read articles by Kwame Anthony Appiah, Cheshire Calhoun, bell hooks and Richard Rorty. Topics included experimental philosophy, marriage, gender, religion, race, globalism and freedom of speech.

***Introduction to Symbolic Logic (PHIL 0500): Summer 2011, Spring 2011***

After using truth tables to introduce propositional logic, we used a natural deduction system to prove simple theorems. We extended our deduction system first to monadic and then to full polyadic predicate logic. We explored how to express necessary and sufficient conditions within a logical system, and investigated the properties of relations. Our text was Warren Goldfarb’s *Deductive Logic*.

***Introduction to Ethics (writing intensive) (PHIL 0300): Spring 2007***

We began by considering the history of moral philosophy, closely reading excerpts from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Kant’s *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and Mill’s *Utilitarianism*. In the second half of the course we applied these ethical theories to contemporary issues chosen by the class, which included terrorism, abortion, euthanasia, sex, and the environment. Students circulated drafts of their term papers in class, and through peer review and workshop learned how to strengthen their written arguments.

***Introduction to Political Philosophy: Liberty and Equality (PHIL 0330): Summer 2005***

We considered how the state should promote the sometimes competing values of liberty and equality. We read selections from Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau, but focused upon the critical literature concerning John Rawls’ *Theory of Justice*, including essays by Adam Swift, Will Kymlicka, Robert Nozick and Michael Walzer. We also considered how ideal state theory has been satirized in dystopian literature, taking Kurt Vonnegut’s *Harrison Bergeron* as an example.

**Courses Taught as Teaching Assistant**

I assisted teaching these courses at the University of Pittsburgh, with full responsibility for leading recitation sections and evaluating students’ work.

***Introduction to Symbolic Logic (assisted Prof. Markos Valaris) (PHIL 0500): Spring 2009***

We began by introducing the syntax and, using truth tables, the semantics of propositional logic. After discussing the limitations of this language, we introduced first order predicate logic, and extended our natural deduction system to construct derivations involving quantifiers. Students learned how to translate English arguments into both languages in order to establish whether or not they were valid, and concluded by investigating the characteristics of equivalence relations.

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***Introduction to Philosophical Problems* (writing intensive, assisted Prof. Michael Perloff) (PHIL 0082): Fall 2006**

We introduced the method of analysis, and explored its application to perennial philosophical problems. We began by reading Plato's *Crito*, *Apology*, and *Euthyphro*, and critiqued the Socratic method. We then studied skepticism using Descartes' *Meditations*. We read St. Aquinas, St. Anselm and William Paley looking at classic arguments for and against the existence of God, and concluded by reading John Hospers, William James and Brand Blanshard on the problem of freedom and determinism. Through peer review, students critiqued each others' written work, and for their final assignment revised a developed version of an earlier paper.

***Introduction to Symbolic Logic* (assisted Prof. Michael Perloff) (PHIL 0500): Spring 2005**

We opened the course by introducing syllogistic logic, and reviewed valid argument forms using the heuristic of Venn diagrams. Having discussed some of the limitations of syllogistic reasoning, we moved on to consider the syntax and semantics of propositional and first order predicate logic. Using truth trees, students learned to identify valid arguments and counterexamples. Students practiced translating English arguments into these languages, and concluded by critiquing the translation of the English "if" with the material conditional.

***Introduction to Political Philosophy* (assisted Prof. Jason Dickenson) (PHIL 0330): Fall 2004**

We closely read selections from classic works of political philosophy, centering on the question of whether civil disobedience is justifiable. Our texts were Plato's *Crito* and *Apology*, Hobbes' *Leviathan*, Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* and Rousseau's *The Social Contract*. We analyzed the rhetoric surrounding the US Presidential election, comparing the American system to other Western democracies, and tied current practices to the theories we were considering. We completed the course by questioning which sorts of political activism constitute civil disobedience.