

# The Lantern

UNIVERSITY of  
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Philosophy Newsletter for Students

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## Moral Disagreement and Moral Confusion

In *After Virtue*, a work some believe to be among the most important philosophical writings of the twentieth century, Alasdair MacIntyre begins with a sobering and somewhat depressing claim concerning the prevalence of moral disagreement in contemporary discourse: “There seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement

“I am doubtful there are clear answers to the problem of widespread moral disagreement, but it seems apparent that one level of confusion can be removed—the mistaken notion that we’re beginning from the same place.”

in our culture.” In the course of addressing this problem, MacIntyre calls for a return to an Aristotelian-inspired virtue ethics, a way of thinking about ethical discourse less in terms of right and wrong, and good and bad actions, and more in terms of the traits of ethical agents that help them flourish or prevent them from flourishing as human beings.

Most of us are all too familiar with moral disagreements in our world today; think Chik-Fil-A and gay marriage or the 99% vs. the 1%. Moral disagreements are concrete, in our face, and quite non-theoretical. Yet when we think about a reasoned response, we push back a level to the theoretical and ask about

what is good and right or, in the case of virtue ethics, what conduces to human flourishing, and so on. What both approaches do in seeking answers to these questions is make assumptions that are more fundamental than the ethical questions themselves. They are assumptions about what it means to be human. Aristotle deliberately approached ethics by thinking first about what it means to be human. His approach was to examine what makes humans unique from other things and, consequently, what their function as humans is.

Philosophers now generally dismiss the idea of a human function or a human ‘telos’—a purpose, but that does not mean that philosophers don’t bring assumptions about what it means to be human into their ethical theorizing. It makes no small difference whether humans are 1) rational animals (Aristotle), 2) civic beings (also Aristotle), 3) thinking things (Descartes), 4) image-bearers of God (Judaism and Christianity), 5) not a self (Buddhism), 6) not a given self (existentialism), or what-

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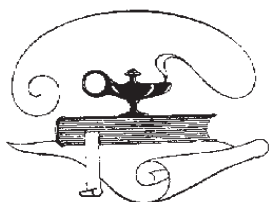
## PHILOSOPHY HONORS SOCIETY

The Georgia Iota chapter of Phi Sigma Tau is West Georgia's philosophical link to the world of honor societies. The chapter consists of students who have demonstrated outstanding academic achievement and a sincere interest in philosophy. Founded to recognize and reward philosophical scholarship, the chapter provides both an academic and a social environment for its members.

### Criteria for Membership:

- ◆ a 3.0 overall GPA,
- ◆ the completion of at least two philosophy courses,
- ◆ a GPA higher than 3.0 in all Philosophy courses,
- ◆ the completion of 45 hours of coursework.

For more information, visit [www.westga.edu/~pst](http://www.westga.edu/~pst) or contact Dr. Lane at [rlane@westga.edu](mailto:rlane@westga.edu) if you are interested in applying for membership.



ever various branches of psychology or evolutionary biology tell us we are. Regardless of what we do with Aristotle now, each of us has conceptions—some thought out, others just assumed—about what it means to be human, and these conceptions often include stories about our origins, stories about our future, and claims of purpose—why we're here at all.

The claim I wish to make is that for all of the arguing at the 'surface' or concrete level of everyday life—whether it's the moral justification of military intervention or the morality of tax policy—we are naïve and confused if we think that more subterranean differences about what it means to be human are irrelevant. If to be a human is more or less “the outcome of the accidental collocation of atoms” (B. Russell) or, in a radically different vein, atman is Brahman (Hinduism), it is more than reasonable to suppose our ethical disagreements will be greatly influenced by these 'anthropological' disagreements (*anthropos* is Greek for human person).

I am doubtful there are clear answers to the problem of widespread moral disagreement, but it seems apparent that one level of confusion can be removed—the mistaken notion that we're beginning from the same place. Perhaps if we first asked of one another these more basic questions about what it means to be a human, we would be more likely to understand why we disagree with those who come down on the other side of ethical questions. Perhaps we'd be more likely to see them as, well, human.

—By Mark A. Tietjen

## PHILOSOPHER'S WISDOM

“Think left and think right  
and think low and think high.  
Oh, the thinks you can think  
up if only you try!”

~Dr. Seuss

**Phil 2010-01                      Introduction to Philosophy                      Dr. Thomas Brommage**  
**MW 11:00 a.m.-12:20 p.m. TLC 1200**

This course will survey some of the most important figures in Western philosophy, from the ancient Greeks all the way through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Emphasis will be placed on understanding each thinker within historical context. The student will develop an understanding of the historical tradition of Western philosophy, as well as a grasp of the basics of each figured covered. The course will trace the dialogue concerning epistemological and metaphysical problems through the ancient, medieval and modern periods, ending with a brief survey of some more recent 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century figures. Required for philosophy majors. May count for credit in Core Area C2.

**Phil 2010-02                      Introduction to Philosophy                      Dr. Thomas Brommage**  
**MW 2:00-3:20 p.m. TLC 1200**

Same as above. Required for philosophy majors. May count for credit in Core Area C2.

**Phil 2010-03                      Introduction to Philosophy                      Dr. Thomas Brommage**  
**MW 3:30-4:50 p.m. TLC 1200**

Same as above. Required for philosophy majors. May count for credit in Core Area C2.

**Phil 2020-01                      Critical Thinking                      Dr. Walter Riker**  
**MWF 10:00-10:52 a.m. Paff 109**

Do we mistreat animals when we eat them or use them in experiments? Many philosophers argue that we do. In this class, students will learn to recognize and evaluate different kinds of arguments, and will then apply these skills to assessment of philosophical arguments for and against different uses of animals. This course satisfies the Oral Communication part of Core Area B, so students will discuss these issues both formally and informally. Required for philosophy majors. May count for credit in Core Area B1. Required for philosophy majors. May count for credit in Core Area B1.

**Phil 2020-02                      Critical Thinking                      Dr. Thomas Brommage**  
**TR 12:30-1:50 p.m. Paff 109**

This course is designed to strengthen students' skills in reasoning about problems and issues of everyday life by helping them to distinguish between good and bad arguments. Students work to achieve these goals through studying the structure of inductive arguments, rhetorical fallacies, and the connection between logic and belief. The second half of this course will stress information literacy, developing critical thinking skills necessary for each. Topics will include television and print media reports, advertising, maps and the internet. Throughout the course, the student will develop the skills necessary to become a better consumer of information. Required for philosophy majors. May count for credit in Core Area B1.

**Phil 2030-01                      Introduction to Ethics                      Dr. Robert Lane**  
**TR 12:30-1:50 p.m. TLC 1200**

Everyone has beliefs about morality, and to some extent we all agree about what actions are right and wrong; for example, we all agree that murder is wrong and that helping those less fortunate than us is right. But there are many moral questions about which people disagree: is abortion immoral? what about physician-assisted suicide? is it wrong to spend money on expensive cars and homes when people in other parts of the world are dying from malnutrition? do non-human animals have rights? This course will enable you critically to evaluate your own beliefs about concrete ethical issues like these. We'll also be dealing with more theoretical questions, such as: where does morality come from? (God? society? or somewhere else?); what makes an ethical argument good or bad?; and what general rules or principles ought we to live by? No prior experience in philosophy is necessary, so if you want to start thinking critically about morality, this course is a great place to begin. Required for all philosophy majors and minors. May count for credit in Core Area C2.

**Phil 2030-02 Introduction to Ethics**  
**TR 2:00-3:20 p.m. TLC 1200**

**Dr. Robert Lane**

Same as above. Required for all philosophy majors and minors. May count for credit in Core Area C2.

**Phil 2130-01 Introduction to World Religions**  
**TR 9:30-10:50 a.m. TLC 1200**

**Dr. Mark Tietjen**

This course is a comparative study of the beliefs and practices of several world religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Students will explore not only the history of these faiths and their early doctrinal and communal development but their place in today's world. Toward that end, practitioners of several of these religions will make guest presentations to the class. May count for credit in Core Area E4.

**Phil 3110-01 Modern Philosophy**  
**MWF 11:00-11:52 a.m. Paff 109**

**Dr. Walter Riker**

This course in the history of Western philosophy examines the metaphysical and epistemological theories of influential 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century philosophers. We will examine work by Rene Descartes (1596-1650), John Locke (1632-1704), David Hume (1711-1776), and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), among others. We will also examine work in Feminist Philosophy that responds to or challenges the modern philosophers and their influence on contemporary thought in the West.

**Phil 3120-01 American Philosophy**  
**TR 9:30-10:50 a.m. Paff 109**

**Dr. Robert Lane**

What is truth? What is the best way for me to form beliefs about the world? Is absolute certainty possible, or must we be satisfied with beliefs that are not certain? What is philosophy, and what is its relationship with science? This course tackles those questions and others by examining how they were treated by the thinkers who founded pragmatism, America's distinctive philosophical tradition. In particular, we will study the works of three classical American pragmatists: Charles Peirce, William James, and John Dewey. We will also study the ideas of two more recent pragmatists: Hilary Putnam and Richard Rorty.

**Phil 3220-01 Christian Thought**  
**TR 11:00-12:20 a.m. Hum 209**

**Dr. Mark Tietjen**

This course examines the central doctrines and themes of Christian Thought, including God, the church, sin, and love. Students will be introduced to a wide range of primary texts from both classical and contemporary theologians. Attention will also be given to the practical implications of Christian Thought for human existence.

**Phil 4115-01W Political Philosophy**  
**MWF 2:00-2:50 p.m. Hum 209**

**Dr. Walter Riker**

Liberal democracy is centrally important to contemporary political philosophy. We will start this course by considering the three main approaches to defending liberal democracy: Utilitarianism, Liberal Equality (Rawls), and Libertarianism. We will then consider important critical responses or alternatives to these mainstream theories, including Feminist and Communitarian approaches. We will pay particular attention to the ways these mainstream and other approaches understand and evaluate 'equality' (or what it means to treat everyone with 'equal concern and respect') and 'responsibility' (or who is responsible for different needs, costs or choices).

**Phil 4230-01 Philosophy of Religion**  
**TR 2:00-3:20 p.m. Paff 109**

**Dr. Mark Tietjen**

In this course we will examine philosophical arguments about religious questions such as the existence of God, the problem of evil, the relationship between faith and reason, religious pluralism, and the relationship between religion and science.

## Registration is Nearly Here!

Remember, if you are a philosophy major, you are required to meet with your advisor before you will be able to register for classes next spring. You may have already heard from your advisor, but if you haven't, you may want to swing by his or her office to see if you can sign up for a time for advising. The registration schedule is listed below, so be sure to meet with your advisor before your time to register.

### On-Time Registration Dates for Currently Enrolled Students:

Current *Seniors* & all *Graduate students* – Oct. 29  
 Current *Juniors* ss# ending in 00-49 – Oct. 30  
 Current *Juniors* ss# ending in 50-99 – Oct. 31  
 Current *Sophomores* ss# ending 00-49 – Nov. 1  
 Current *Sophomores* ss# ending 50-99 – Nov. 2  
 Current *Freshmen* ss# ending 00-24 – Nov. 5  
 Current *Freshmen* ss# ending 75-99 – Nov. 6  
 Current *Freshmen* ss# ending 50-74 – Nov. 7  
 Current *Freshmen* ss# ending 25-49 – Nov. 8  
**Open Registration\*\* is Nov. 12–Jan. 13.**

## Philosopher's Advice

Dear Nietzsche,

My girlfriend and I have been together for over two years, and we love each other very much. I'm thinking about proposing, but there's just one problem. Ever since she was a little girl, she's had this dream of a big church wedding. I'm agnostic, and both of my parents are atheists. I just don't see that working out. Can you help?

Signed,

In Love but Not In Church

Dear Superman,

Ah, women. They make the highs higher and the lows more frequent. Every church is a stone on the grave of a god-man: it does not want him to rise up again under any circumstances. Is life not a thousand times too short for us to bore ourselves? It is not a lack of love, but a lack of friendship that makes unhappy marriages. Love is blind; friendship closes its eyes.

What I'm saying here is just rent out the local VFW Hall.

Signed,

F. Nietzsche

(taken from <http://mnsho.wordpress.com/2012/07/27/dating-advice-from-philosophers/>)

## INTERESTED IN PHILOSOPHY?

### Join the West Georgia Philosophical Society

Interested in philosophy? Enjoy open discussions on every imaginable topic? Then you should join the Philosophical Society. The Society is a registered student organization that meets every other week for lively discussions of philosophical topics. In the past, discussion topics have ranged from the role of technology in our lives, to the apparent incompatibility between determinism and the belief in human free will, to the question whether man is naturally good or bad. Members of the society have also been involved in canned food drives, bake sales, and trivia nights at local restaurants. All students, regardless of their background or experience, are invited to join. Meetings are typically held every other Friday in TLC. If you would like more information about the Society's meetings or other activities, or to be added to the Society's email list, contact Dr. Riker ([wriker@westga.edu](mailto:wriker@westga.edu)) or check out the Society's Facebook page.

## Upcoming Undergraduate Conferences

Remember, if you are interested in submitting something to one of these conferences, your philosophy professors are always willing to help you clean up one of your term papers to make it appropriate. Talk to us!

### 16th Annual Northeast Florida Student Philosophy Conference

University of North Florida

Conference date: March 2, 2013

Submission deadline: January 1, 2013

### Fifth Annual Southeast Philosophy Congress

Clayton State University

Conference dates: February, 2013

Submission deadline: January 31, 2013

### UNC Undergraduate Philosophy Conference

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Conference dates: February 9-10, 2013

Submission deadline: December 17, 2012

New announcements about upcoming conferences can always be found on the philosophy department website at [www.westga.edu/~phil](http://www.westga.edu/~phil).

## Philosophers Can Joke?

A renowned philosopher was held in high regard by his driver, who listened in awe at every speech while his boss would easily answer questions about morality and ethics.

Then one day the driver approached the philosopher and asked if he was willing to switch roles for the evening's lecture. The philosopher agreed and, for a while, the driver handled himself remarkably well. When it came time for questions from the guests, a woman in the back asked, "Is the epistemological view of the universe still valid in an existentialist world?"

"That is an extremely simple question," he responded. "So simple, in fact, that even my driver could answer that, which is exactly what he will do."

(Do Philosophers really have drivers?)

