Spring 2015 Course Descriptions for Sections of “HON 299. Special Topics” and “HON 401. Advanced Honors Seminar”

HON 299-01 Game Theory
Game theory is the study of strategic interaction. Strategic interaction occurs when one decision maker’s actions not only affect its well-being, but also affects the well-being in others. Consequently, optimal behavior depends on the choices made by others. This strategic interdependence arises in academic problems across numerous fields of study such as, inter alia, Biology, Political Science, Economics, Marketing, Psychology, Management, and History. This course will develop the basic tools of Game Theory and then applies the tools to applications across numerous fields. Special emphasis will be placed on the role of social preferences, as compared to purely self-interested decision making, across cultures.

HON 299-02 Counterfactual Theory
Contemplating alternative realities plays an important part in human thought. This ranges from considering how a sequence of events would have played out if one event had not taken place to speculating on the nature of universes having physical laws different from our own, or what human society would be like with different cultural norms or if the human mind worked differently. Counterfactual thinking and thought experiments have been used in disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, literature, history, political science, and the natural sciences. In this course, we will review the uses of counterfactual thinking in some of these fields, and then engage in extensive counterfactual analysis in a seminar discussion setting. Students will critique counterfactual scenarios presented in fiction and non-fiction works, and will creatively explore a variety of counterfactual scenarios posed to them and of their own invention. Each student will keep a record of their exploration of these scenarios, and will contribute to seminar discussions of them.

HON 299-03 The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams
From around 1934 to 1949 an informal group of friends met weekly in Oxford, England mainly to discuss literature and sometimes to read to each other from various works that they themselves were writing. The group was called “The Inklings” and its most prominent members were Lewis, Tolkien and Williams. In the writings of these three we find a great diversity both in subject matter and approach. Lewis has become famous for his children’s stories (The Chronicles of Narnia), his science fiction novels (The Ransom Trilogy) and his approach to Christian apologetics (Mere Christianity), but by profession he was an Oxford professor whose field was medieval and renaissance English literature. Likewise Tolkien was an Oxford professor whose field was early English language & literature but who gained enormous popularity through his fantasy works (The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings). Williams worked as an editor at Oxford University Press whose main claim to literary fame rests on his series of poems based on the Arthurian legends, & for a series of novels which have been termed “metaphysical thrillers”.

HON 401-01 Honors Advanced Seminar
Are our bodies ourselves? Or are our bodies just there to carry our minds around? Is there something like a soul that is separated from the body? In this class we will revisit the age old question of the body-mind dualism anew. We will study insights of evolutionary biology to learn about our and other animals' bodies; we will study Christianity to discover the sacredness of embodiment in Christianity; we will study art and advertising to analyze body-imagery in Western cultures.

HON 401-02 Honors Advanced Seminar
What is real? Given the unstable, ever-changing, and elusive nature of our reality, this question has occupied humans for as long as they existed. This course examines various approaches to this question, from theological and philosophical to aesthetic to scientific. The “illusion” model of reality in philosophy and theology meets the “simulation” model in neurocognitive science. The worlds of fiction and myth meet the world of physics. The reality of our sense experience, of free will, and ultimately of the human individual are questioned. After taking this course, your view of the world will never be the same!