

Department of Philosophy

Fall 2016 Course Descriptions

philosophy news

One in five teenagers will experiment with philosophy
Talk to your kids about philosophy: philosophynews.com

Doubting is a gateway to thinking. Stop it before it starts.

"I found copies of Kant in your room. I'm concerned."

Parents who use logic, will raise kids who use logic

"You've been doing thought experiments haven't you?"

Learn to recognize the early warning signs.

Please note that the fall 2016 schedule is subject to change. Check the GW Schedule of Classes online for the most up-to-date information.

Phil 1051.10 Introduction to Philosophy
MW 4:45-6:00
Michael Sigrist

At some point, nearly every field of study turns philosophical, so we can introduce philosophy from almost anywhere. Somewhat arbitrarily, in this course we'll start with these questions: Who is a good person, and who is a good knower? Our first readings will come from the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, who argues that Socrates was a good person because Socrates was a good knower. We'll read at least one philosopher who disputes that Socrates was a good person (Friedrich Nietzsche), and another who disagrees that Socrates was a good person because he was a good knower (David Hume). We will also read essays by some contemporary philosophers on these issues from Susan Wolf, Rae Langton, Martha Nussbaum, and others.

Phil 1051.11 Introduction to Philosophy
TR 9:35-10:50
TBD

Readings from major philosophers and study of their positions on the most basic questions of human life. Topics include such issues as: What is justice? What is knowledge? What is reality? Does God exist? What is the mind? Do humans have free will?.

Phil 1051.13 Introduction to Philosophy
MW 2:20-3:35
Andrea Pedferri

This course is an introduction to Western philosophy. The aim of this course is to introduce students to the basic concepts of philosophy, to examine and assess the main philosophical theories and to understand the philosophical methods. The course does not aim to be an exhaustive account of the history of philosophy and philosophical ideas. Instead, it aims to focus on some key concepts, themes and theories, trying to engage students in "doing philosophy", that is, by means of conceptual analysis and argument. To accomplish this goal the course is organized by philosophical topics rather than in an historical sequence. This cross temporal approach will help to show how key concepts were treated and developed within different philosophical theories and frameworks in different moments of the history of philosophy. By the end of the class, students should have a good knowledge of philosophical concepts and ideas and, ultimately, they should be able to present their philosophical arguments both in writing and in class discussions.

Phil 1051.14 Introduction to Philosophy
TR 12:45-2:00
TBD

Readings from major philosophers and study of their positions on the most basic questions of human life. Topics include such issues as: What is justice? What is knowledge? What is reality? Does God exist? What is the mind? Do humans have free will?.

Phil 1051.15 Introduction to Philosophy
MW 12:45-2:00
Rebecca Carr

Readings from major philosophers and study of their positions on the most basic questions of human life. Topics include such issues as: What is justice? What is knowledge? What is reality? Does God exist? What is the mind? Do humans have free will?.

Phil 1062.10 Philosophy and Film**M 3:30-6:00****Christopher Venner**

The goal of this course is to give students an introductory overview of major figures in the history of Western philosophy. And to aid in understanding their theories, we will treat a variety of movies as case studies of the ideas in question. For example, we will use Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* as a springboard for discussion of Plato's theory of justice in *The Republic*; *Downton Abbey* will orient our discussion of the theories of Karl Marx; and *Wristcutters* will guide our discussion of the Existentialist philosophy of Albert Camus.

Phil 1153.10 The Meaning of Mind**TR 3:45-5:00****Dimiter Kirilov**

The sciences of the mind are proliferating at an accelerating pace. Developmental psychology, comparative psychology, cognitive psychology, neuropsychology, social psychology, linguistics, artificial intelligence, cognitive neuroscience, and neuroeconomics are all rapidly growing, established sciences, generating thousands of discoveries about the mind every year. At the same time, the nature of the human mind is one of the oldest questions of philosophy. For example, Plato, the earliest author with substantial surviving works to write systematically about philosophical issues in the Western tradition, devoted considerable attention to the nature of the mind, and many of his ideas continue to be influential. This course will introduce students with no background in philosophy or the sciences of the mind to the central questions, assumptions and hypotheses about the human mind. Subjects covered include: the nature of thought, the nature of consciousness, the relationship between the mind and the brain, the implications of the sciences of the mind for freedom of the will and responsibility, the nature of the self, and our knowledge of other minds.

Phil 1193.10 Introduction to Existentialism**MW 2:20-3:35****Michael Sigrist**

This course will cover the popular movement in philosophy, literature and culture known as “existentialism”. As the name implies, existentialists believe that philosophy should remain grounded in the individual’s existence and experience. Accordingly, the topics that we will examine—including death, value, selfhood, responsibility, and choice—are all themes that not only interest philosophers but also matter to our personal and everyday lives. We begin with the claim—common to all existentialists—that who you are—your “self”—is not given (no existentialist believes in an ‘inner’ or ‘true’ self, for example) but an accomplishment achieved in constant confrontation with the world, with other persons, and with mortality. As Søren Kierkegaard says in one of our first readings, “a human being is still not a self.” We will investigate how selfhood can be maintained in the face of impersonal social systems, universal moral codes, religious orthodoxies, and the forces of history. Our course will examine this set of problems not only by a close reading of key philosophical texts but also through important works by novelists, poets, and filmmakers.

Phil 2045.10 Introduction to Logic**TR 2:20-3:35****Andrea Pedferri**

Philosophy can be thought of as the systematic study of arguments. That entails understanding the claims and demands that an argument is making. Some of these claims are made explicitly, by the assertions in the premises of the argument. Some of these claims are made implicitly, by the form and the structure of the argument. We will start this semester by talking about what an argument is and learning to distinguish arguments from non-arguments. We will then move into learning about argument structure. This will support our exploration of informal reasoning, which will focus on fallacies in reasoning. As the semester proceeds, we will move from informal reasoning to more abstract forms of formal reasoning, finishing the course with an in-depth study of one system of formal reasoning and proof (propositional, or

sentential, logic).

By the end of the semester you should be able to:

- identify and reason about argument form and content,
- identify fallacies in reasoning,
- read and write fluently in the symbol system of propositional logic,
- read sentences in logical notation as if they were sentences in English, and
- complete complex proofs of arguments.

Phil 2111.10 History of Ancient Philosophy

TR 3:45-5:00

Mark Ralkowski

“The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.” —Alfred North Whitehead

This course is an introduction to ancient Greek philosophy. We will begin with the fragmentary writings of the Presocratics, which date back to the 6th century BCE. And we will finish with the meditations of Marcus Aurelius and the handbook of Epictetus, two of the most famous stoics from the first and second centuries CE. Along the way, we will spend most of our time studying the thought of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Our discussions will cover issues in ethics, politics, psychology, aesthetics, religion, metaphysics, and epistemology. As we will see, in the ancient world these concepts were often treated together and studied as a way of life.

Phil 2112.10 History of Modern Philosophy

TR 11:10-12:25

Joseph Trullinger

What is modern in the works of the dead? Like us, Western European philosophers in the 17th and 18th centuries cease to accept traditional conceptions of mind and world on faith alone, and instead tend to cultivate the insights of mathematics and the new science. This course offers a critical introduction to the metaphysical and epistemological theories of Modern Philosophy, with particular attention to how its practitioners used various conceptions of reason and sense experience to ask fundamental questions about knowledge, perception, and reality. We focus on the following figures and themes: Descartes' indictment of the senses and his arguments for both the existence of God and mind/body dualism; the pan-psychic materialism of Cavendish; pantheism, geometrical method, and the interaction of imagination and reason in Spinoza; Leibniz's re-envisioning of atoms as monads and its implications for freedom and the ideality of space and time; Locke's embrace of corpuscularian mechanics and the empiricist way of ideas; the varieties of skepticism urged by Berkeley and Hume, and resisted by Mary Shepherd; and Reid's defense of common sense. We shall conclude by examining Kant's Copernican Turn and its attempted closure of metaphysics and modern philosophy. A question we shall ask throughout the course is whether this period in the history of philosophy contains any lost or strange conceptual possibilities that illuminate how we do philosophy now.

Phil 2124W.10 Philosophies of Disability

TR 3:45-5:00

Megan Davis

Disability presents an intense and interesting challenge to traditional philosophical presuppositions and principles. This course will examine various philosophical approaches to disability—both historical individual or medical paradigms as well as those that rely on frameworks of social or human rights that rely on emerging concepts of justice and sustainability. While disability studies has become more prominent in the fields of historical and literary studies, philosophical approaches have been more recent. Work in feminist philosophy, critical race theory and queer theory has challenged such presuppositions and, therefore, provides a the foundation on which we can consider the disabled body itself along with larger social and political considerations related to cultural treatment and understanding of disability.

Phil 2125.80 Philosophy of Race and Gender

TR 12:45-2:00

Gail Weiss

This course examines differing perspectives on how race, gender, class, and ethnicity inform individual as well as group identities. Despite their diverse views, all of the assigned authors are united in the belief that race, gender, class, and ethnicity are formative influences on both people and cultures, and many of them focus on the consequences of being marginalized because one is deemed to be a member of the "wrong" race or the "wrong" gender. This course takes up the question of whether and how individuals and society can rectify social and political inequities associated with specific marginalized identities.

Phil 2131.10 Ethics: Theory and Applications

TR 2:20-3:35

Cameron Bassiri

Examination of leading ethical theories (e.g., utilitarianism, deontology, virtue ethics), and methodology in ethics. Engagement with contemporary problems.

Phil 2132W.10 Social and Political Philosophy

MW 3:45-5:00

Vanessa Wills

Philosophical theories about how economic, political, legal, and cultural institutions should be arranged. Topics include the meaning and significance of liberty, the legitimate functions of government, the nature of rights, the moral significance of social inequality, and the meaning of democracy.

Phil 2133.10 Philosophy and Nonviolence

MW 2:20-3:35

Paul Churchill

The course offers philosophical approaches to civil disobedience, nonviolent activism, ahimsa, and pacifism as ways of living as well as political strategies. We will engage in readings by Gandhi, King, Fanon, Arendt, and Butler, among several others. We will explore nonviolence at the international level, the institutional level, the interpersonal level, and the environmental level. Questions around how to recognize violence, and to the appropriateness of violent responses will also be examined. Students will be expected to give an oral presentation, along with class discussion and papers.

Phil 2134.10 Philosophy of Human Rights

MW 12:45-2:00

TBD

Although the discourse of human rights has become the *lingua franca*, or primary category, for discussions of the morality of human relationships, much confusion still surrounds human rights. Four major questions predominate in debates: "What are human rights?", "Which rights can be claimed as human rights?," "Why are human rights important?," and "How do human rights apply to contemporary problems and issues?"

The first third of the course focuses on the development of conceptual and logical issues as well as justifications of human rights of human rights from the Enlightenment through the contemporary era. The balance of the course focuses on the universality of human rights and respect for cultural and social diversity. In addition, there will be an emphasis on the application of human rights to global problems such as: poverty, development and the global economy; human rights to environmental equality, self-determination and rights to democratic government; humanitarian intervention, and gender violence and women's human rights.

Phil 2135.10 Ethics: Business and Professions

MW 2:20-3:35

Lloyd Eby

This is a course in applied ethics. It deals with questions and problems of ethics that occur in business – the workplace, marketplace, and business place – and in the professions. We will first consider ethics in general and theories and views of ethics, and then go on to examine and discuss many ethical issues that arise in business and the professions. We will attempt to use some of those ethical theories to solve some of those ethical problems. A great deal of in-class discussion will occur, and all students are expected to participate in those in-class discussions.

Phil 2136.10 Contemporary Issues in Ethics

TR 3:45-5:00

Laura Papish

The goal of this course is to introduce you to a range of debates in applied ethics, including classic debates on the permissibility of abortion and the treatment of animals, as well as more current debates concerning racial justice, incarceration, and police violence, our interactions in digital space, our interactions with the environment, and our obligations to the poor in a global context. This course is a green leaf designated course and counts toward the Sustainability minor (Track C). This course also fulfills the GPAC requirements for civic engagement and analysis (humanities).

Phil 2281.10 Philosophy of the Environment

TR 12:45-2:00

Megan Davis

It is taken as a basis for this course that there might be a problem with our relationship to the natural environment we live in. We will not assess this claim, only acknowledge it as fact or as mistaken perception. Nevertheless, as a mistaken perception, it is one held by enough people that we should learn about it, by looking at what it would take to alleviate the concern. There are three components to this course. The first is to fix the supposed or actual problem with technology, the second is to fix it culturally, ethically or spiritually, the third is to fix it economically. The three components inform each other. We spend more time on the economic fix, since this is conceptually more complicated and unusual. In particular, students will be exposed to the thinking of ecological economists, who reject standard neo-classical economic thinking.

Phil 3113.10 19th Century Philosophy (Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard)

MW 4:45-6:00

Rebecca Carr

In contrast to Kant, whose accent falls on the objective, the transcendental, the necessary, and the certain, our 19thC. Philosophers accent the subjective, the concrete, the existential, and the uncertain. Such a subjective accent blurs the lines between literature and philosophy, between works that aim to tell the truth about the human relationship to facts and the disinterested truth about the actual nature of things. Not only is this a course with philosophical content, but a course about philosophy itself and how it might be best expressed.

Phil 3142W.10 Philosophy of Law

MF 9:35-10:50

TBD

We govern ourselves with laws. They help us to coordinate our lives with one another and to feel secure in our person and possessions. As long as they operate behind our backs we hardly notice their effects. But when, for example, a person robs a bank, a corporation pollutes, or a government official denies someone her rights, the legal system must step in and

sometimes how it steps in and whether it should step in are matters of controversy. In this course we are going to study some of the many eruptions of controversy that the law has incited in the 20th century through the lens of 20th century Western legal philosophy. We start with some basic questions of law such as: how should we resolve disputes over property? and how should we punish criminals? We will then move to deeper questions concerning rights, specifically: how far does the right to privacy extend? and how much does the law protect us from discrimination? And we will finish by considering some of the deepest questions of law: how should we interpret a constitution? what is the connection, if any, between morality and law? and what makes the rule of law different from the rule of individual human beings? With each segment we dig up a little more of our concept of law and examine law's nature a little more closely

Phil 3151.10 Philosophy and Science

TR 12:45-2:00

Dimiter Kirilov

Analysis of the structure and meaning of science, including scientific progress and theory change, objectivity in science, the drive for a unified science, and ways science relates to everyday understandings of the world. Attention given to various sciences, including physics, biology, and neuroscience. Prerequisite: PHIL 1051 or a 2000-level philosophy course.

Phil 3153.10 Mind, Brain, and Artificial Intelligence

TR 11:10-12:25

Avery Archer

What is the mind? I'm not really sure, but it seems to me that if you're reading and understanding this, you have one. (You may disagree. Maybe you agree with those philosophers who claim that there really are no minds.) Where is it? How is it related to your brain? What does it do? How does it do what it does? Can we make artificial minds? Our goal this semester will be to get a firmer grasp on the answers to these questions. We'll start by thinking about the relationship between the mind and the brain (what is commonly known as the mind-body problem). Then we'll delve more deeply into issues which are part of the contemporary focus of philosophers studying the mind. These may include (but are not limited to) the nature of mental causation, whether the mind reduces to (is identical with) the brain, whether artificial minds are possible, and whether animals have minds. Finally, we'll use what we've learned in the first two thirds of the semester to read and critically discuss a recent book.

Phil 3162W.10 Philosophy of the Arts: Aesthetics

TR 2:20-3:35

Christopher Venner

The goal of this course is to give students an overview of major theories in the philosophy of art in the Western intellectual tradition. We will begin with the ancient Greek approach to art as an imitation of reality as outlined in texts by Plato and Aristotle. We will then focus on texts in the German Idealist tradition that theorize art as a particular type of cognitive response - in contrast to the ancient Greeks, Idealists like Kant, Hegel, and Schopenhauer use art to explore how the mind processes data, rather than judging the art object by its adherence to an external reality. Finally, we will examine a number of movements in the contemporary philosophy of art, including phenomenology, psychoanalysis, structuralism, and postmodernism, looking to each for concrete methodologies for analyzing artistic works.

PHIL 4198.10 Proseminar in Philosophy: Desire, Pleasure, and Action

M 11:10-1:00

Avery Archer

Does desiring to do something give you a reason to do it? Can it be irrational to have a certain desire? What is the relationship between desire and pleasure? Is pleasure the ultimate motivation for everything we do? These are some of the questions we will address in this course. More generally, we will be looking at some of the exciting recent work on the rational and moral significance of desires, with an emphasis on the debate between desire-based and value-based

theories of reasons for action. Our examination of desires and intentions will proceed in two stages. First, we will examine the debate between desire-based and value-based theories of practical reasons. Second, we will explore the relationship between desire and pleasure. Throughout the seminar, special attention will be paid to the similarities and differences between reasons for belief and reasons for action.

PHIL 4198.80 Proseminar in Philosophy: Disciplining Bodies

T 3:30-6:00

Gail Weiss

In the decades since Michel Foucault published his classic text, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* in 1975, an increasing number of continental philosophers have turned their attention to what Angela Davis has called “the prison-industrial complex,” that is, the incredibly lucrative for-profit prison industry in the U.S.. Several recent texts have focused, in particular, on the mass incarceration of people of color, a phenomenon that Michelle Alexander has famously referred to in the title of a recent book as “the new Jim Crow.” Beginning with Foucault’s account of the production of “docile bodies” through increasingly sophisticated surveillance techniques that take place outside as well as within prison walls, we will examine the ethical implications of recent work by a variety of contemporary authors and activists on the racial, gender, class, and sexual politics of U.S. prison life in the early 21st century.

Phil 4199.10 & Phil 6201.10 Readings and Research

Tadeusz Zawidzki

Phil 6230.10 Ethical Issues in Policy Arguments

T 6:10-8:00

Laura Papish

This course is meant to serve three goals. First, it aims to introduce you to those theories of normative ethics most dominant in the Western philosophical tradition. Second, this course will acquaint you with theories of democracy, the common good, and rational choice so that you can engage in ethical analysis of policy questions in contemporary American life, as opposed to ethical analysis of applied topics most generally. Third, this course will survey several areas where philosophers have much to contribute to public policy discussions, including: race policy, how gender intersects with public policy, campaign finance reform, and contemporary debates regarding corporate personhood and the social responsibility of corporations.

The course is intended primarily for graduate students, but undergraduate philosophy majors and upperclassmen with a special need or interest in the course may be admitted with prior approval of the instructor.

Phil 6236.10 Moral Status

R 6:10-8:00

David DeGrazia

Intended for graduate students but occasionally open to undergraduates with the instructor’s prior permission, this course examines the question of what sorts of beings matter morally in their own right and how much they matter. In addition to considering persons—the paradigm bearers of moral status—the course will consider competing ways of thinking about the possible moral status of human nonpersons, nonhuman persons, great apes and dolphins, other sentient animals, nonsentient lifeforms, the environment, future people, and advanced forms of artificial intelligence. At a more general theoretical level, the course will ask whether the concept of moral status is genuinely useful and, if so, whether there are degrees of moral status. Class members will strive to develop a coherent and plausible overall account of moral status, which they will present both orally and in the form of a term paper.

Phil 6252.10 Advanced Introduction to Philosophy of Cognitive Science

W 6:10-8:00

Tadeusz Zawidzki

An advanced introduction to philosophical issues raised by the scientific study of the mind, this course covers philosophical issues raised by the nature of thought and consciousness; artificial intelligence; models of reasoning and decision-making; the emergence of thought in childhood and human evolution; our knowledge of others' minds; non-human animal minds, and variations in thought patterns across cultures.

Phil 6294.10 Special Topics in Continental Philosophy: Hegel and Post-Hegelian Philosophy

M 5:10-7:00

Vanessa Wills

TBD

Phil 6998.10 & Phil 6999.10 Thesis Research

Tadeusz Zawidzki