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.
Phil 1051.12 Introduction to Philosophy
TR 12:45-2:00
Andrea Pedeferri

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 1051.13 Introduction to Philosophy
TR 9:35-10:50
Dimiter Kirilov

This course aims to teach you to think critically: to be able to understand and analyze arguments, to evaluate reasons, to come up with your own arguments, and in general to engage in thoughtful and well-reasoned debate. The course also introduces you to the literature, problems, and methods of philosophy either through a study of some of the main figures in philosophic thought or through an examination of some of the central and recurring problems of philosophy.

Phil 1051.15 Introduction to Philosophy
MW 12:45-2:00
Paul Churchill

The theme of this course is the good life, as posed by the question, “How should we live?” We will explore a wide variety of positions and issues in connection with the course theme: e.g. whether morality can be objective, and whether living happily requires morality, what ethical theories are defensible, is morality a matter of cultural relativism, and does life have any meaning, or purpose, after all? All readings will be appropriate for an introductory course, but will be drawn from classical sources in the Western philosophical tradition, as well as contemporary philosophers. In addition, philosophical readings are interspersed with short works of fiction to spark imaginative thinking about the possibilities explored in the reading. We will have the opportunity to consider the ways ideas discussed in class apply to contemporary social and political issues. Also, we will focus on developing the capacity for critical thinking, especially the ability to develop one’s own position and to defend it against criticism. Students will be expected to come to class ready to discuss the assigned readings.

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

This course will give students an historical overview of how Western philosophy has thought about the relationship between the individual and the group to which she belongs. We will examine this theme in three different historical settings – the ancient polis, the early modern state, and contemporary civil society. And we will situate each of our readings alongside movies that address similar themes. For example, we will use Spike Lee’s Do the Right Thing to orient our discussion of justice in Plato's Republic, Bridesmaids to accompany our discussion of Aristotle's theory of friendship and choice, and Fight Club to guide our reading of Freud's Ego and the Id. Students will develop the ability to closely read philosophical texts, apply themes and ideas from those texts to films, and engage in critical discussion with others about those texts and films.

Class time will be divided between lecture, discussion, and clips from assigned films.
Phil 1153.10 Meaning of Mind
TR 9:35-10:50
Eric Saidel

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 Western philosopher with substantial surviving works, 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, our knowledge of other minds, and the possibility that the mind may incorporate elements outside the skull, like information processing and communications devices.

Phil 2045.10 Introduction to Logic
MW 12:45-2:00
Michèle Friend

We reason every day, and we try to convince other people every day. We get into arguments or have disputes. Some of these are emotionally charged and some are just an attempt at understanding another person's perspective or understand the truth of a difficult question. We can convince others by using psychological tricks or by sloppy thinking and sloppy language, when the other person is sloppy too. Or, we can convince people by using a good, reasoned argument. The advantage of the latter is that it is more systematic, more honest and if something goes wrong, we know where to look for the problem. In other words, conclusions reached by reasoned argument tend to be closer to the truth, or at least, have longevity. They are more efficient in the medium and long run.

There are also perfectly logical arguments, ones against which no one, or almost no one, can argue. These are deductive arguments, or logical demonstrations. We shall look very closely at what it is that makes for the perfect logical arguments, and learn some of the philosophy that goes into making such arguments. The technical work will be quite simple, but the implications for arguing in philosophy and good argument in general are profound. In normal discussions few arguments take this perfect form, but parts of very ordinary arguments do. It is good to be able to recognize these for what they are perfect pieces of a less perfect argument.

We shall also look at less perfect, but nevertheless quite good arguments. These are informal arguments. We shall see how to construct and evaluate these through studying what is a mistake in an argument. These are invaluable skills for anyone who intends to work in an environment where it is important to know the difference between persuading someone for the right (i.e., logical or good and honest) reasons and tricking someone into agreeing. If you know both, you can use both, and you can tell if someone else is trying to trick you!

Phil 2111.10 History of Ancient Philosophy
TR 3:45-5:00
Laura Papish

Our goal in this class is to give a systematic overview of the history of Ancient Greek philosophy, beginning with the Presocratics and ending with Aristotle. We will treat a range of topics in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and political philosophy, but we will preface these topics with a brief look at Hesiod’s Theogony and the ways that Theogony both initiates and resists natural philosophy. After we conclude our discussion of Hesiod and the Presocratics, we will examine the philosophical views of both Socrates and Plato, taking special care to consider both different accounts of the relationship between these two figures and Plato's philosophical development. We then turn to Aristotle, both for his critique of Plato and for his own contributions to metaphysics and ethics.

Phil 2112.10 History of Modern Philosophy
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-psyche 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 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 2125.10 Philosophy of Race and Gender
TR 2:20-3:35
Megan Davis

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. Note: PHIL 2125 also counts towards the Women's Studies major.

PHIL 2131.10 Ethics: Theory and Applications
WF 12:45-2:00
Christopher Venner

The goal of this course is to give students an opportunity to think more deeply about how they live their lives, as well as how those choices impact specific aspects of the contemporary world. We will begin by engaging some of the canonical thinkers in the Western tradition as they attempt to answer the question of what it means to live a meaningful life – should we seek above all to avoid pain or instead strive to achieve goals that might turn out to be unreachable? And along the way, should we try to resign ourselves to the way things are, or instead always seek our own advantage in what life throws our way? Once we have a basic orientation among these positions, we will then turn to questions specific to contemporary society, including issues such as animal research, social justice, and euthanasia.

Class time will be devoted to lecture, discussion, and evaluation of assigned texts.

PHIL 2132W.10 Social and Political Philosophy
MW 12:45-2:00
Vanessa Wills

This course focuses on normative questions concerning the arrangement of economic, political, and cultural institutions. We will cover most of the major normative theories, including utilitarianism, republicanism, liberalism, libertarianism, and socialism. Readings will consist of both classic and contemporary texts. There is a special emphasis on how political and social institutions might be more just. In addition we will investigate matters such as the nature of political and civic liberty, legal and moral rights, the moral significance of inequality, and the relation between democracy and the rule of law.
Phil 2133.10 Philosophy and Nonviolence
MW 4:45-6:00
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 examine the thought and campaigns of such figures as Thoreau, Tolstoy, Gandhi, King, and Chavez, as well as just war theory and myths relating to "peace through power." We also focus on the causes of aggression and violence in human nature as well as the environment. Students will be required to make oral presentations to the class, and to earn civil engagement credit by engaging in a project relating to nonviolent activism and human rights.

Phil 2135.10 Ethics: Business and Professions
WF 9:35-10:50
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 11:10-12:25
Cameron Bassiri

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, animal treatment, and suicide, as well as more current debates concerning 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 civic engagement, analysis (humanities), and oral communication requirements.

Phil 2281.10 Philosophy of the Environment
MW 2:20-3:35
Michael Sigrist

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 3100.80 Selected Topics: Evil
TR 9:35-10:50
Joseph Trullinger

Thomas Aquinas once argued, “If evil exists, then God exists.” We are surely taken by the counterintuitive boldness of this statement; the existence of evil in the world strikes us as strong evidence against any claim that there exists a God who personally cares for us. Any careful thought on this issue requires that we first think through what we mean by funny
little words such as evil and God. Is evil real, and an opposite force to goodness, or is evil only what we label as being less good than something else? Could it be that God benevolently wants to stop evil, but simply lacks enough power to do so—and would such a deity still count as God? What is more central to what people revere: power or goodness?

This class will explore these questions as we wonder whether the idea of God is compatible with the existence of evil, looking both at classical sources as well as philosophical responses to the Holocaust. Significant authors include Plato, Leibniz, Kant, Arendt, Levinas, and Hans Jonas. Our course will also include discussions of philosophical literature, namely parts of Voltaire’s Candide and Dostoevsky’s Grand Inquisitor, which both explore the question of what goodness is good for in a world that suffers.

Phil 3121.10 Symbolic Logic  
MW 2:20-3:35  
Michèle Friend

The aim of this course is to study the formal system of deduction called “natural deduction” both in propositional and in quantificational logic. The course will also have a philosophical part where will be discussed some meta-mathematical results of classical logic. There are three parts to the course. The first is revising natural deduction in propositional logic (a topic that students should recall from their introduction to logic classes). The second part looks at a more sophisticated formal system of logic, and the third part of the course is more philosophical.

Phil 3152.10 Theory of Knowledge  
TR 12:45-2:00  
Avery Archer

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and knowledge-related concepts like justification. In this class we will think about how the term knowledge should be defined, the nature and structure of epistemic justification, putative sources of knowledge, and whether knowledge is even possible. We will explore these questions via a close reading of contemporary texts that have played an important role in shaping the contours of the field. One of the primary goals of this course will be to hone your ability to closely read philosophical texts. Consequently, classes will be largely devoted to the careful analysis and discussion of the assigned readings.

Phil 3153.10 Mind, Brain, and Artificial Intelligence  
TR 2:20-3:35  
Eric Saidel

What is the mind? 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? The goal of this class is 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 classically known as the mind-body problem). There are three basic positions that one might take about the relation between the mind and the body: that they are completely distinct, that they are exactly the same thing, or that they overlap without being identical. But careful attention to the theories spelling out these positions reveals that each theory has fatal flaws. How can that be? Doesn’t one of these theories have to be true? We’ll spend most of the semester trying to figure out which one. In part this will involve delving deeply into issues that are part of the contemporary focus of philosophers studying the mind. These may include (but are not limited to) the nature of mental causation, what it means to be conscious, whether artificial minds are possible, and whether animals have minds.

By the end of the class you should:
- Have a firm grasp on the different philosophical theories of the relationship between the mind and the body,
- Have a good sense of what you think the right understanding of this relationship is,
- Have a deeper understanding of the problems in resolving the mind-body problem,
- Be able to read and discuss contemporary texts in the Philosophy of Mind.
Phil 3161.10 Philosophy and Literature
MW 4:45-6:00
Michael Sigrist

This course will pair readings in literature with texts important philosophical texts primarily drawn from the continental tradition. Partly we will examine how works of literature give expression to philosophical themes, and reciprocally, how philosophical themes inform works in literature, but we will also examine the connection between the forms of writing on a deeper level. Philosophy, after all, is primarily a written, and therefore literary, tradition, while literature cannot help but rely upon concepts and worldviews that are fundamentally philosophical. The relation between the two, therefore, is not incidental. Our approach to this connection will be grounded in existentialist themes. We will examine both literature and philosophy with an eye for how each simultaneously expresses and informs our attitudes and understandings of death, temporality, authenticity, selfhood, and social responsibility. A special focus will be the degree to which narratives reflect, or distort, our lives.

Phil 3251.10 Philosophy of Biology
TR 11:10-12:25
Eric Saidel

It has been 150 years since Darwin published The Origin of the Species and overturned the science of biology. The Twentieth century saw the discovery of the gene, the double helix model, and the Neo-Darwinian Synthesis. One could accurately describe the current era as the Darwinian Age. But what exactly does Darwin claim about the origin and evolution of species? What, for that matter, is a species? How does evolution work? Does “survival of the fittest” mean that the best will flourish? These are some of the questions that philosophers of biology ask. We will strive to better understand evolutionary theory, and then to see what light it can shed on other areas, including our understanding of our own place in nature, and what it can or cannot explain about our characters, as well as core philosophical issues such as the nature of scientific explanation and the relation one scientific theory may have to another. By the end of the semester students will have a solid understanding of the workings of evolutionary theory, and they will be able to think critically about issues in the philosophy of biology as well as about these issues as they arise in both public debate and in other academic areas.

Phil 4192.10 Analytical Philosophy
TR 3:45-5:00
Avery Archer

British and American philosophers of the first half of the 19th century believed that with careful attention to the meanings of the words in which apparent philosophical problems were raised, they would be able to resolve, or more likely, dissolve many of the traditional problems of philosophy. Once these (mostly) metaphysical worries were tended to, what remained would then be the true realm of philosophy: a kind of logico-scientific analysis of language. In many ways, this approach culminated in Saul Kripke's Naming and Necessity (1972) (the title of which is a reference to Carnap's classic and central work of the language-focused tradition: Meaning and Necessity (1947)). The tradition born of this approach to philosophy, known as analytic philosophy, is the strongest component of contemporary British and American philosophical inquiry.

Phil 4198.10 Proseminar in Philosophy: Mindshaping
R 5:10-7:00
Tadeusz Zawidzki

What makes humans unique in the animal kingdom? According to one recent philosophical theory, it is mindshaping. More than any other mammal, we shape each other’s minds to respect prevalent norms of conduct. These multifarious mindshaping practices and mechanisms are arguably the secret to our evolutionary success: they enable us to solve problems of coordination in cooperative projects involving large numbers of other human beings, many of whom are personally unknown to us. We are so much better at coordinating on complex projects than other mammals because, from a young age, we are shaped to act as most expect us to act.
This seminar will involve exploration and critical evaluation of this philosophical hypothesis about what makes humans distinctive. Reviewing both empirical data and philosophical assumptions and implications, the seminar will explore the human drive to shape minds. Topics covered will include the exceptional susceptibility of human infants to mindshaping, through pedagogy and high-fidelity imitation, our irresistible tendency to institute and enforce norms, and our drive to identify with groups and stereotypes, and to tacitly enforce these stereotypes.

Phil 4198.80 Proseminar in Philosophy: Heidegger’s Being and Time
W 3:30-6:00
Mark Ralkowski

“When I left the auditorium, I was speechless. For a brief moment I felt as if I had a glimpse into the ground and foundation of the world. In my inner being, something was touched that had been asleep for a long time.”

That is how one person described the experience of listening to Heidegger present his philosophy in 1929. Our advanced seminar will be an intensive and focused study of Heidegger’s Being and Time, one of the most influential philosophical works of the twentieth century. We will begin the course with an overview of Edmund Husserl’s phenomenological method, and then trace how Heidegger adopts and adapts this new way of doing philosophy in order to address the problems of existence. Second, we will work our way through Being and Time systematically, mastering Heidegger’s arguments and considering their implications for traditional philosophical problems in epistemology and ontology. Finally, we will look at the “turn” in Hiedegger’s later thought, and consider the importance of his philosophy for understanding language, art, and poetry, as well as his profound critique of modernity, which has influenced thinkers as diverse as Sartre, Marcuse, Derrida, Foucault, Lacan, Cavell, Taylor, Agamben, and Žižek.

As Richard Rorty once said, “You cannot read most of the important philosophers of recent times without taking Heidegger’s thought into account.” This course is designed for students who want to know why.

Phil 4199.10 & Phil 6202.10 Readings and Research
Tadeusz Zawidzki

Phil 6231.10 Seminar: Economic Justice
W 5:10-7:00
Vanessa Wills

This course is about inequality. When, if ever, is it just for some to have more than others? We’ll read recent philosophical work critiquing and defending inequalities in wealth and income; as well as empirical and theoretical work on the past, present, and future of inequality.

Phil 6242.10 Philosophy, Law and Social Policy
T 5:10-7:00
Lee Goldsmith

After being raised, educated, and socialized in a constitutional democracy, we tend to take our court system for granted. The courts serve many functions, among the most central being the interpretation of the laws created by our legislatures and the actions taken by our executives. This function—that our courts’ justices interpret our laws and evaluate their legitimacy—we hold to check and balance the powers that reside in the other two branches. The judiciary ensures that the other two branches abide by our Constitution. To us, this basic role the judiciary plays in our constitutional democracy is a commonplace. But throughout the history of this, nation-state politicians, pundits, scholars, and citizens have raised objections to the general powers the judiciary has claimed for itself, to the methods the judiciary has employed to settle disputes, and to the specific policies that the judiciary has crafted. As we can see in today’s political landscape, whether the decision is long-standing, such as Roe v. Wade, or newly promulgated, such as Citizen’s United, critics decry the
Supreme Court for over-reaching its authority, misreading the Constitution, and usurping the will of the people. How can such a venerated and popular institution also be the target of such fundamental criticism? In this course we will delve into the controversies surrounding the scope of the Supreme Court’s authority, the legitimate use of its power, and its proper method for making decisions. We will ask questions such as—but not limited to—the following. What justifies having a judiciary that can invalidate the acts of the legislature and executive? Is the Court a democratic institution or is it an elitist check against the pitfalls of democracy? What is a Constitution and how should one be interpreted? Should values or politics play any role in the Court’s decisions? Must or should the justices consider the policy implications of their decisions?

Theorists offer a perplexing range of answers to these questions. Some see judicial review as an institution of dubious political legitimacy and seek to curtail it. Others welcome it as a vital safeguard against legislative and executive abuses. Some theorists instruct judges to interpret the text of a constitutional provision as that provision would have been understood at the time it was enacted. Others regard such “originalism” as misguided, even incoherent. Some theorists think all constitutional interpretation involves moral and political judgment, others think that only bad constitutional interpretation does. Together we will explore the arguments for and against these theoretical positions alongside actual decisions made, and policies set, by the Supreme Court. We will attempt to see the theory in action and participate in the practice by theorizing.

Phil 6250.10 Topics in Health Policy
R 5:10-7:00
David DeGrazia

Intended for graduate students but occasionally open to undergraduates with the instructor’s prior permission, this course addresses the following topics in health policy from the perspective of philosophical bioethics: (1) human and animal research; (2) the enhancement of human traits; and (3) justice and health care allocation. After introducing the subject matter, clarifying expectations, and reviewing ethical theory in the first two weeks, the course will examine specific issues organized under the themes listed in (1) – (3) above. In examining each specific issue, the class will (a) confront implicated philosophical issues (e.g., moral status, personal identity, distributive justice) and (b) analyze policy dimensions, focusing on relevant laws and regulations as well as proposals for change.

Phil 6998.10 & Phil 6999.10 Thesis Research
Tadeusz Zawidzki