

# Spring 2016 Undergraduate Philosophy Department Courses

## **PHIL-UA 2; Great Works in Philosophy; T/TH 9:30-10:45; Alex Worsnip**

This course is two things at once: an introduction to some classic works of philosophy on one hand, and an introduction to the art of reading, understanding and philosophically engaging with historical works of philosophy on the other. We will focus particularly on classic works of social and political philosophy, but it will be an aim of our course to set these ideas in the context of the systematic philosophical doctrines about knowledge, reality, thought and language, out of which they grew. Readings will include works by (among others) Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, Mill, Marx and DuBois.

## **PHIL-UA 4; Life and Death; M/W 6:20-7:35; Max Barkhausen**

In this class, we will study some of the essential philosophical questions and issues having to do with life and death:

- Personal identity
- Could there be an afterlife?
- What makes a life good?
- What is the meaning of life?
- The absurdity of life
- Is death a harm?

Readings will be from a wide range of authors including but not limited to Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Mill, Parfit, Scheffler, Nagel and the Buddha.

## **PHIL-UA 5; Minds and Machines; T/TH 2-3:15; David Chalmers**

This course will be an introduction to some central issues in philosophy through the lens of modern technology. We will consider issues such as "How do we know about the external world?", "What is the relationship between mind and body?", "How can we know about other minds?", and "Can machines be conscious?" in part by thinking hard about technologies such as virtual reality, smartphones, the Internet, and artificial intelligence.

You must sign up for one of the following recitation times:  
Andrew Lee: Mondays 9:30-10:45; Tuesdays 9:30-10:45

## **PHIL-UA 6; Global Ethics; T/TH 9:30-10:45; Anthony Appiah**

This course aims to accomplish two things. The first is to introduce three broad traditions of normative thinking about social issues from around the globe: a Confucian tradition, one based in Islamic legal traditions, and one derived from European liberalism. The second is to address three current areas of normative debate: about global economic inequality, about gender justice and human rights. We shall explore these first-order questions against the background of the three broad traditions. Our aim will be to understand some of differences of approach that shape the global conversation about these issues that concern people around the world.

The class will be taught in a virtual classroom in conjunction with Taneli Kukkonen and a group of students in NYU AD. Professor Kukkonen will be here for two weeks of the class and Professor Appiah will be in Abu Dhabi for two weeks of the class.

## **PHIL-UA 21; History of Modern Philosophy; T/TH 3:30-4:45; Anja Jauernig**

This course offers an introduction to modern philosophy and central philosophical problems addressed in the modern period (late 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century). The course will focus on topics in metaphysics and epistemology. These topics include the nature and relation of mind and body, the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, the existence of the external world, causation, the scope and limits of knowledge, the existence of God, and the apparent conflict between freedom and determinism. We will be studying selections from the works of the following philosophers: Galileo Galilei, Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia, Baruch Spinoza, Anne Conway, Nicholas Malebranche, Robert Boyle, Margaret Cavendish, John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume, Johann Gottfried Leibniz, Lady Damaris Masham, and Immanuel Kant.

Readings: *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, edited by Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, Hackett (2009); *Women Philosophers of the Early Modern Period*, edited by Margaret Atherton, Hackett (1994).

You must sign up for one of the following recitation times:

Yu Guo: Mondays 11:00-12:15 and 4:55-6:10

Michelle Dyke: Fridays 9:30-10:45 and 11:00-12:15

*Prerequisite: one Introductory course.*

## **PHIL-UA 39; Recent Continental Philosophy; M/W 3:30-4:45; John Richardson**

Examines selected works by some of the major figures in German and French philosophy in the second half of the 20th century. Beginning with later Heidegger, the course will go on to treat Lacan, Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, and perhaps one or two others.

You must sign up for one of the following recitation times:

Alex Rigas: Fridays 9:30-10:45 and 11:00-12:15

*Prerequisite: one introductory course*

## **PHIL-UA 41; The Nature of Values; T/TH 3:30-4:45; Sharon Street**

The course's central question will be the nature of value and where to "place" it with respect to our scientific conception of the world. On the one hand, we regard ourselves as capable of recognizing, and being guided in our thought and action by, evaluative truths—truths concerning how there is most reason to live, what there is most reason to believe, what ways of life are good, valuable, morally required, and so on. On the other hand, we regard ourselves as part of the world of cause and effect—as beings whose evaluative states of mind are part of the natural order and subject to scientific study and explanation. It is not obvious how to fit these two understandings of ourselves together, nor even whether they are jointly tenable in the end. Are there objective truths about what is good and bad, moral and immoral? Is it possible to understand evaluative truths such as "happiness is good" on the model of scientific truths such as "water is H<sub>2</sub>O"? Or is the subject matter of evaluative discourse very different from that of scientific discourse? Do evaluative claims amount to nothing more than sophisticated ways of saying "boo" and "hooray" about the things we happen to like and dislike? The course will survey some of the most prominent contemporary thinking on these questions. Readings will include works by Moore, Ayer, Mackie, Railton, Sturgeon, Nagel, Blackburn, Gibbard, Korsgaard, and others.

You must sign up for one of the following recitation times:

Mike Zhao: Fridays 9:30-10:45 and 11-12:15

*Prerequisite: one Introductory course.*

## **PHIL-UA 45; Political Philosophy; M/W 11-12:15; Samuel Scheffler**

This course will deal with central questions about the justification of political and social institutions. The primary focus will be on contemporary philosophical thought in the liberal tradition, with special emphasis on the work of John Rawls.

You must sign up for one of the following recitation times:

Emilio Mora: Thursdays 12:30-1:45 and 2-3:15

Ben Holguin: Fridays 9:30-10:45 and 11-12:15

*Prerequisite: one Introductory course.*

## **PHIL-UA 60; Aesthetics; M/W 4:55-6:10; Robert Hopkins**

This course discusses some of the philosophical issues thrown up by the arts, and our appreciation of them. What is art, and why is it important to us? What is representation in art? Does representation vary from one art-form to another, so that, for instance, pictures and artworks involving words represent in very different ways? How does this affect the value of painting and literature? And what of photography? Is it an art at all, or just the mechanical recording of reality? What is it for art to express emotion? Experience seems crucial to art, but does it follow that if a perfect forgery is experienced in exactly the same way as the original, then, as works of art, the two are equally good? And what of our judgements about art? Are they all subjective—is beauty in the eye of the beholder? Can there be rational argument about artworks?

You must sign up for one of the following recitation times:

Chris Prodoehl: Mondays 2-3:15 and 3:30-4:45

*Prerequisite: one Introductory course.*

## **PHIL-UA 70-001; Logic; M/W 12:30-1:45; Max Barkhausen**

In order to make up your mind on any given question or subject, it is important to be able to evaluate arguments. Modern symbolic logic provides us with formal techniques for representing and evaluating arguments. This course is an introduction to the techniques of modern symbolic logic, in particular to sentential and predicate logic. The successful student will learn how to put arguments from ordinary language into symbols, how to construct derivations within a formal system and how to ascertain validity using truth tables or models.

## **PHIL-UA 70-002; Logic; T/R 11-12:15; Ian Grubb**

An introduction to the basic techniques of sentential and predicate logic. Students learn how to put arguments from ordinary language into symbols, how to construct derivations within a formal system, and how to ascertain validity using truth tables or models.

## **PHIL-UA 78; Metaphysics; T/TH 12:30-1:45; Cian Dorr**

Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of reality at the most general level. Although it deals with questions about many quite specific phenomena or aspects of reality, the interest of these questions often derives from their relevance to the formulation and evaluation of theories that claim to provide some kind of comprehensive description of reality as a whole. For example, one recently influential picture of reality conceives it as consisting, fundamentally, of a four-dimensional manifold of points distinguished by various physical fields; many of the questions about the passage of time and the nature of change which metaphysicians debate have in common the fact that their answers are potentially relevant to arguing for or against this picture, or precisely articulating it.

This course will be a rigorous introduction to metaphysics from a contemporary point of view. The topics covered may include: physical law and chance; causation; time and change; time travel; necessity and possibility; identity and distinctness; existence; material objects; parts and wholes; properties and other abstract objects; fundamentality and derivativeness. The readings will be by philosophers working in the analytic tradition, mostly writing in the last few decades.

You must sign up for one of the following recitation times:

Samuel Lee: Fridays 11-12:15 and 12:30-1:45.

*Prerequisite: one Introductory course.*

## **PHIL-UA 81; Consciousness; T/R 2-3:15; Ned Block**

The philosophy and science of consciousness. Topics covered will include: The concept of a neural basis of consciousness and how we could discover what it is; whether there are different kinds of consciousness; the relation between consciousness and attention, cognitive accessibility, intentionality and agency; the function of consciousness; the unity of consciousness; whether the representational contents of perception are just colors, shapes and textures or include "rich" properties such as facial expressions and causation. The course will also cover some theories of consciousness such as mind/body dualism, behaviorism, functionalism, physicalism and theories of consciousness as representation. Among the topics discussed will be some famous thought experiments, such as whether there could be an

inverted spectrum and whether Wittgenstein's views of the mind make room for an inverted spectrum; zombie thought experiments; Jackson's example of the scientist raised in a black and white environment who sees red for the first time and learns something about color vision that she could not find out from textbooks. Readings from philosophers such as Thomas Nagel and David Chalmers and neuroscientists such as Hakwan Lau and Stanislas Dehaene.

Course website: <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/courses/consciousness2016/>

You must sign up for one of the following recitation times:

TBA: Mondays 12:30-1:45; 2-3:15

### **PHIL-UA 85; Philosophy of Language; M/W 9:30-10:45; Crispin Wright**

This course will concentrate on a small number of central questions in recent and contemporary philosophy of language. Some familiarity with elementary formal logic may be helpful. Topics to be covered include skepticism about meaning, with special reference to writings of Quine and Kripke; the nature of knowledge of a language, with special reference to the work of Davidson and Dummett; and the competing paradigms of singular reference deriving from Frege and from Kripke. Grades will be awarded on the basis of two mid-term papers, and a take-home final exam.

You must sign up for one of the following recitation times:

Kyle Blumberg: Fridays 9:30-10:45; 11-12:15

*Prerequisite: one Introductory course*

### **PHIL-UA 94; Philosophy of Physics; M/W 9:30-10:45; Kevin Coffey**

This course will examine the roles of space, time, and motion in physical theorizing, and various puzzles and questions associated with those concepts. Among the questions we'll investigate are: Do space and time (or spacetime) exist in the same sense as material objects? Are there objective facts about the geometry of physical space, or are they in some way conventional? Does time (unlike space) 'pass' or 'flow' in a particular direction, such that only the present moment is real? And is time travel possible, conceptually and physically? Indeed, how do the considerations relevant to addressing these questions change as we move from Newtonian physics to the modern spacetime frameworks of special and general relativity? No background in physics or philosophy is presupposed, but students should be prepared to engage with material from both disciplines.

You must sign up for one of the following recitation times:

Daniel Hoek: Fridays 11:00-12:15 and 12:30-1:45

*Prerequisite: one introductory course*

## **PHIL-UA 101; Topics in The History of Philosophy; T/R 11-12:15; Marko Malink**

The concept of logical consequence plays a central role in philosophical logic and has important applications in other areas of philosophy. This course will examine the concept of logical consequence from a historical perspective. We will discuss its development from antiquity, through the medieval ages and the early modern period until the 19th century. We will study the work of philosophers such as Aristotle, the Stoics, Abelard, Leibniz, and Bolzano. In addition, we will discuss the most important developments in the 20th century, including Tarski's influential paper 'On the Concept of Logical Consequence' (1936) and Etchemendy's (1990) criticism of Tarski's account of logical consequence. The course can serve as an introduction to the history of logic.

*Prerequisite: History of Ancient Philosophy (PHIL-UA 20) or History of Modern Philosophy (PHIL-UA 21).*

## **PHIL-UA 102-001; Topics in Ethics and Political Philosophy; T/R 12:30-1:45; Peter Unger**

Even as compared to what he or she can do, almost all well-to-do people do little, or nothing, over the course of their lifetime, to prevent the early deaths and great suffering of people in the poorest parts of the world. Is it morally wrong for a well-to-do person to behave like this - perhaps about as horribly wrong as committing negligent homicide, as with fatal drunken driving? In the main, this course will center on this question, though it will also involve us in many other moral questions. The main part of this course will be, in about equal measure, a course in both normative ethics and in applied ethics.

After the main part of the course, we will investigate questions about what it is that, just for herself, and with all moral considerations placed aside, a person relevantly like each of us most strongly or deeply values: Is it a very long and experientially happy life that we each most prize - or do we also value, at least as greatly, being in certain relations with others? It is very hard to get a credible answer to this question, and also to other questions we will encounter here. In this second part of the course, our investigation will be very largely work in psychology, more so than it is work in what's currently considered philosophy.

*Prerequisite: Ethics (PHIL-UA 40), The Nature of Values (PHIL-UA 41), or Political Philosophy (PHIL-UA 45)*

**PHIL-UA 102-002; Topics in Ethics and Political Philosophy; M/W  
12:30-1:45; Miriam Schoenfield**

Philosophy of Race and Gender: An exploration of leading theories in the philosophy of race and gender and their ethical and political implications.

*Prerequisite: Ethics (PHIL-UA 40), The Nature of Values (PHIL-UA 41), or Political Philosophy (PHIL-UA 45)*

**PHIL-UA 103-001 Topics in Metaphysics and Epistemology; M/W 11-  
12:15; Jane Friedman**

KNOWLEDGE. In this class we'll focus on a central character in epistemology -- knowledge. To this end, we'll think a little bit about how to define and analyze knowledge, and then look to a number of recent debates in epistemology centered largely around knowledge and knowing. Some of the topics we'll read about: contextualism about 'know', closure and counter-closure principles for knowledge, "knowledge-first" epistemology, epistemic defeat, some puzzles and paradoxes related to knowledge (and rational belief), and more.

*Prerequisite: Epistemology (PHIL-UA 76) or Metaphysics (PHIL-UA 78) or Philosophy of Science (PHIL-UA 90)*

**PHIL-UA 104; Topics in Language & Mind; T/R 3:30-4:45; Stephen  
Schiffer**

We'll study foundational issues about the nature of linguistic and mental representation, and we'll look at how those issues are framed both in classical writings of Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Saul Kripke, David Kaplan and others and in the very recent literature on those topics. Some—but only some—of the questions we'll be asking are:

- A belief *that Brutus killed Caesar* (mental representation) and the sentence 'Brutus killed Caesar' (linguistic representation) both represent the world as being such that Brutus killed Caesar, but they do so in quite different ways. Is either mental or linguistic representation conceptually prior to the other, so that the other can be explained in terms of it, or is each needed to explain the other?

- Are believing and asserting relations to objective but nonphysical entities called *propositions*, as many philosophers hold? If so, what's the nature of those propositions, and how must one be related to a proposition in order to believe or assert it?
- The computer revolution that occurred after World War II had a profound influence on the way cognitive scientists and philosophers think of the mind, and one result of that influence is that many in cognitive science and philosophy—e.g. Noam Chomsky and Jerry Fodor—hold that we think in a “language of thought.” What exactly does it mean to say that we think in a language of thought? If we do think in one, what's the relation between one's language of thought and one's public language?
- Expressions whose semantic role is to refer to things in the world are called *singular terms*. Most philosophers agree that pronouns such as ‘I’, ‘you’ and ‘she’ and demonstratives such as ‘this’ and ‘that’ occur as singular terms, but there is debate about whether proper names (e.g. ‘Bertrand Russell’) are singular terms, and even more debate about whether so-called “definite descriptions” (e.g. ‘the noisy boy’) are singular terms. What sorts of considerations are relevant to resolving these issues, and how should they be resolved?
- Many expressions—‘I’, ‘you’, ‘he’, ‘that girl’, ‘now’, ‘here’ and ‘tomorrow’ are among the most obvious examples—are *context sensitive*: they may refer to or express different things in different contexts of utterance. Which expressions are context sensitive? Philosophers often speak of the references of context-sensitive terms being determined by the contexts in which they're uttered. How exactly does “context” determine reference? What's the relation between the meaning of a context-sensitive term and its contextually-determined references? What's the role of the speaker's intentions in determining the reference of a contextually-sensitive term?

There will be a short paper and take-home mid-term and final questions that will be answered in class.

*Prerequisite: Logic (PHIL-UA 70) and one of the following: Philosophy of Mind (PHIL-UA 80) or Philosophy of Language (PHIL-UA 85)*

## **PHIL-UA 200; Junior Proseminar; W 12-2; Paul Horwich**

A seminar taken in spring of junior year. Introduces core readings in selected areas of current philosophy and provides intensive training in writing philosophy papers. See the description of the honors program

*Prerequisite: open to junior majors with approval of the department; see requirements in the description of the departmental honors program*

## **Related Courses:**

### **ENGL-UA 800**

**Topic: The Literatures of Hope and Despair: From the Eighteenth Century Until Now**

**Rebecca Goldstein**

**Tue,Thu 4.55 PM - 6.10 PM**

How do conceptions of human nature affect the course of literature? In the golden age of the novel, the nineteenth century, the ideas of two philosophers had an outsize influence. Between them, they engendered two currents—one hopeful, the other pessimistic—that explain much of nineteenth-century European literature and continue into our day. Spinoza's view of human nature was hopeful, emerging from his belief that our minds and selves can be reconfigured through reason. Schopenhauer's conception of human nature was far more tragic; existence is characterized by ceaseless striving that, lacking purpose, can never be satisfied. For Spinoza, the human intellect held out the possibility of our salvation; for Schopenhauer the human intellect only serves to deepen and darken our capacity for suffering. These contrasting visions will be explored both in themselves and in relation to their profound influence on literature. Readings will include Spinoza, Schopenhauer, George Eliot, Herman Melville, Jorge Luis Borges, Thomas Mann, Leo Tolstoy, Thomas Hardy, Cormac McCarthy, David Foster Wallace, and Zadie Smith.