

Spring 2017 Undergraduate Philosophy Department Courses

PHIL-UA 3; Ethics and Society; T/TH 2-3:15; Edwin Green

In this course we will critically examine positions on a number of contemporary moral issues. Topics to be covered include our duties to the needy, the ethics of genetic enhancement, moral issues raised by artificial intelligence, the ethics of torture, and the ethics of animal consumption and experimentation. Along the way, students will also be familiarized with traditional philosophical theories of value and right conduct.

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

PHIL-UA 5; Minds and Machines; T/TH 3:30-4:45; Ned Block

This course examines the conflict between computational and biological approaches to the mind. Is the mind the software of the brain or to be found more in the hardware? Topics covered this semester will be: whether a machine could think or be conscious, the Turing Test, whether thinking could be symbol processing, mental imagery, arguments that artificial intelligence is not possible, the inverted spectrum, functional role semantics, whether there is a self, whether the mind is just in the head or partly in the body and the world and whether there is more capacity in consciousness than in cognition. The emphasis will be on whether computational and biological approaches are complementary or whether they conflict; that is, whether the mind is fundamentally computational or whether it is fundamentally neural or whether it can be fundamentally both.

You must sign up for one of the following recitation times:
Jake Zuehl: Mondays 11-12:15; Mondays 4:55-6:10
Annette Martin: Fridays 9:30-10:45; 11-12:15

PHIL-UA 6; Global Ethics; M/W 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.

PHIL-UA 21; History of Modern Philosophy; M/W 11-12:15; Tim Maudlin

We will read works by the central figures of philosophy in the 17th and 18th centuries: Descartes, Hume, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley and Kant. We will pay special attention to the nature of ideas and how ideas represent things.

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

David Storrs-Fox: Thursdays 12:30-1:45; 2-3:15

Andreas Ditter: Fridays 9:30-10:45 and 11:00-12:15

Prerequisite: one Introductory course.

PHIL-UA 32; From Hegel to Nietzsche; T/R 12:30-1:45; Tuomo Tiisala

After some attention to the background of German Idealism, the course will examine the ideas of Hegel, Marx, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. Our interest will be both in understanding the relations of influence and reaction among these very different thinkers, as well as in assessing their ideas and arguments.

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

TBA: Fridays 11-12:15; 12:30-1:45

Prerequisite: one introductory course

PHIL-UA 40; Ethics; T/TH 11-12:15; Samuel Scheffler

An introduction to the philosophical study of morality. Topics to be considered may include: traditional vs. consequentialist moral outlooks; contractualism; the nature of moral motivation; the rationality of morality; the objectivity or subjectivity of ethics; moral relativism; the explanatory role of morality; the compatibility of morality with a purely naturalistic understanding of human beings. Readings will be drawn from a variety of classical and contemporary sources.

You must sign up for one of the following recitation times:
Nathan Pensler: Fridays 9:30-10:45; 11-12:15

Prerequisite: one Introductory course.

PHIL-UA 60; Aesthetics; M/W 3:30-4:45; Asya Passinsky

This course will explore philosophical issues concerning the nature of beauty and art. We will begin by thinking about some foundational questions in the field of aesthetics: Is beauty in the eye of the beholder, or are there objective facts about what is beautiful? If there are objective facts, what makes something beautiful? And what is the nature of aesthetic experience? Is it cool and detached, or is it rather impassioned? We will then turn to a more contemporary debate that asks: What is art? Is art anything that produces a particular aesthetic experience in us, is it whatever the institutions of the art world say is art, or is it something else? In thinking about these questions, we will consider various art movements of the past century, as well as less traditional art forms such as electronica and street art. In the final part of the course, we will turn to some philosophical puzzles concerning specific art forms. If Anna Karenina is not real, then are we being irrational when we mourn her death? What is Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata? Is it a performance, a score, or an abstract entity that is discovered rather than invented by a composer? Readings will be drawn from both historical and contemporary sources, including works by Plato, Hume, Kant, Tolstoy, Bell, Danto and Nussbaum.

You must sign up for one of the following recitation times:
Harjit Bhogal: Fridays 11-12:15; 12:30-1:45

Prerequisite: one Introductory course.

PHIL-UA 70-001; Logic; M/W 4:55-6:10; Asya Passinsky

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 2-3:15; Ang Tong

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 76; Epistemology; M/W 12:30-1:45; Miriam Schoenfield

Considers questions such as the following: Can I have knowledge of anything outside my own mind? for example, physical objects or other minds? Or is the skeptic's attack on my commonplace claims to know unanswerable? Does the fact that there is widespread disagreement about many important issues (religion, morality, politics) require us to abandon our beliefs on these issues? Or can we rationally maintain a view while recognizing that other, perhaps equally knowledgeable and intelligent people disagree with us?

Ben Holguin: Mondays 2-3:15; 3:30-4:45

Prerequisite: one Introductory course.

PHIL-UA 85; Philosophy of Language; T/R 3:30-4:45; Una Stojnic

We find meaning everywhere: in natural phenomena ("these footprints mean that someone was here"), in conventional signals ("the red traffic light means that you should stop"), in words and sentences (the sentence "La nieve es blanca" in Spanish means that the snow is white), in gestures (as in various hand and finger movements and positions), in figurative speech (the meaning of a metaphor, a riddle, a joke), and in works of art (in a poem, a novel, a painting, a film). What is it about each of these media that makes them meaningful? Is there but one kind of meaning in each of these cases? Or are there different kinds? And how do we figure out for each what its meaning is? This course provides an introduction to the theory of meaning, through readings in philosophy, linguistics, and cognitive science.

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

Andrew Lee: Fridays 9:30-10:45; 11-12:15

Prerequisite: one Introductory course

PHIL-UA 90; Philosophy of Science; M/W 9:30-10:45; Michael Strevens

What is science? How does it work? When it works, what kind of knowledge does it provide? Is there a scientific method? How do experiments provide evidence for theories? Does science help us to understand why things happen, or does it merely describe what happens? How does the social organization of science contribute, if at all, to its success?

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

Kyle Blumberg: Mondays 12:30-1:45; 2-3:15

Prerequisite: one introductory course

PHIL-UA 96; Philosophy of Religion; T/R 9:30-10:45; Ang Tong

Description forthcoming.

PHIL-UA 98; Philosophy of Math; M/W 12:30-1:45; Gabriel Rabin

Description forthcoming.

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

This course will be organized around two main issues, though we will discuss some other matters as well.

One main issue will concern the value for us of living a long life, the longer the better, providing that the quality of our lives is usually quite high, and we are usually quite happy people. With this issue, we will discuss the question of the quite certain cessation of our lives, during the next century or so, and what is an appropriate attitude for us to take toward our termination.

The other main issue will concern what one must do, morally speaking, toward saving the lives of others, both when such saving will come at relatively little cost to one and also, as will happen only rarely, when it will cost one the loss a limb or, even, the loss of one's life.

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; T/R 2-3:15; Laura Franklin-Hall

"Exploring the 'Human Element' of Scientific Explanation, Classification, and Theory"

This course will explore, from a philosophical point of view, three of the primary fruits of the scientific project: 1) explanations--i.e., the paleontologist's explanations of the extinction of the dinosaurs by appeal to the Chicxulub impact, 2) classifications--i.e., the chemist's partition of atoms into gold, hydrogen, and others, 3) scientific theories--i.e., the biologist's theory of natural selection.

First, we will aim to understand what rules--if any--govern the scientist's construction of explanations, classifications and theories. For instance, we will ask whether correct explanations, in some disciplines or all, must cite the causes of the events explained, or whether they might also explain by simply unifying each event with others like it. With respect to classification, we will consider whether genuine classifications must cite the essential properties of the entities classified. With respect to theories, we will consider how scientists decide when to use probabilistic or deterministic theories of the domains they investigate.

The second facet of our inquiry concerns what we might call the 'human element' of each of these scientific practices. For instance, we will explore the *Verstehen* tradition in scientific explanation, broadly the question of whether explanations in the human sciences--in particular, in anthropology and sociology--require the scientist to develop a first-person grasp of life in the societies that are under investigation. With respect to classification, we will explore Ian Hacking's theory of 'looping kinds,' categories whose members are responsive to the way that we categorize them. And with respect to scientific theories, we will ask this difficult (but I think quite interesting) question: were we to find an alien culture who took as its object of investigation our planet, its terrestrial life, and the societies that inhabit it, would they (and should they) construct the same kinds of theories that we have constructed (or that we will construct when our science is more mature)?

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

PHIL-UA 104; Topics in Language & Mind; M/W 11-12:15; Crispin Wright

This course will concentrate on a small number of central questions in recent philosophy of language and some connected issues in philosophy of mind. Topics to be covered include skepticism about meaning, with special reference to writings of Quine and Kripke; what it is to understand a language, with special reference to the work of Davidson, Dummett and Wittgenstein; the paradoxes of vagueness; the competing paradigms of singular thought deriving from Frege and from Kripke; and Kripke's famous argument against physicalism about the mental. Assessments will include a mid-term paper, and a take-home final exam. Depending on the numbers enrolling, the class may be run in seminar style.

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 1-3; Cian Dorr

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

Cross-listed Courses:

PHIL-UA 122; The Greek Thinkers; T/R 11-12:15; Marko Malink

PHIL-UA 123; Readings in Chinese Philosophy; T/R 3:30-4:45; Robert Moss