Philosophy Department
Undergraduate Courses Fall 2011

Introductory Courses

PHIL-UA 15
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 Watson a thinker? Could any non-biological computer be a thinker? Could any computer be conscious? Searle's "Chinese Room" argument against Strong Artificial Intelligence, the Turing Test, the Blockhead, functionalist views of intelligence and consciousness, the inverted spectrum hypothesis, mental imagery as a problem for computationalist views. **Registration in this course is by permission of the instructor. Philosophy majors will be given priority.**

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

Grace Helton: Wednesday 12:30-1:45; 2-3:15

PHIL-UA 17
Life and Death
T/TH 9:30-10:45
David Velleman

We will study metaphysical and ethical questions about the limits and value of human life. When does a person begin to exist (e.g., at conception, or at birth)? When does a person cease to exist (e.g., in dementia, or at brain-death)? Is a person harmed by ceasing to exist (i.e., by dying)? Is a person benefitted by being brought into existence (i.e., by being born)? Do we have special obligations toward people whom we ourselves bring into existence (our children) or toward those who brought us into existence (our parents)? Do we have any obligations to future generations? Answering these questions will require us to explore topics such as personal identity, the nature of well-being, and the grounds of moral obligation. Readings will be drawn from contemporary philosophers, including: Thomas Nagel, Bernard Williams, and Derek Parfit. Students will be required to write four short papers and a final exam.

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

Max Barkhausen: Thursdays 3:30-4:45; 4:55-6:10
Olla Solomyak: Fridays 11-12:15; 2-3:15

Group I: History of Philosophy

PHIL-UA 20
History of Ancient Philosophy
MW 12:30-1:45
James Stazicker

Prerequisite: one Introductory course

This course will focus on Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. Their methods and ideas set the agenda for subsequent Western philosophy. We will aim to understand and critically evaluate some of their central arguments about knowledge, reality and human action. We will ask what their views were, why they held them, and whether we should accept them even today.

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

Martin Glazier: Thursdays 2-3:15; 4:55-6:10
Nick Riggle: Fridays 12:30-1:45; 2-3:15

PHIL-UA 30
Kant
T/TH 11-12:15
Rolf-Peter Horstmann

Prerequisite: one Introductory course

Kant's philosophy has been one of the most influential positions in the history of western thought. Traces of its influence can be discovered in almost all areas and disciplines of contemporary philosophy, especially in metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. The best known (and most important) documents of Kant's philosophical views are his three Critiques, i.e. the Critique of Pure Reason (1781/87) dealing with topics in epistemology and metaphysics, the Critique of Practical Reason (1788) focusing on topics in ethics and morality, and the Critique of Judgment (1790) treating questions concerning aesthetics and biology. The course will concentrate on the Critique of Pure Reason and discuss in detail Kant's conception of knowledge and experience, his criticism of traditional metaphysics and the resulting project of a system of transcendental philosophy.

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

Chris Prodoehl: Thursday 12:30-1:45; Friday 12:30-1:45

Group II: Ethics, Value, and Society

PHIL-UA 45
Political Philosophy
MW 11-12:15
Samuel Scheffler

Prerequisite: one Introductory course

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.

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

Philippe Lusson: Friday 11-12:15; 12:30-1:45
Mark Vandevelde: Thursday 9:30-10:45; 11-12:15

PHIL-UA 53
Ethics and the Environment
T/TH 2-3:15
Benjamin Sachs

When human activity leads to global warming and depletion of natural resources, who, if anyone, is obligated to fix the problem? We will systematically search for an answer to that question. We will investigate whether there are any national, individual, or corporate obligations with respect to the environment. Along the way we will try to figure out who these obligations would be owed to and what their content would be--that is, just how healthy of an environment are we obligated to strive for?

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

Emilio Mora: Friday 11-12:15; 12:30-1:45

Group III: Metaphysics, Epistemology, Mind, Language, and Logic

PHIL-UA 70-001
Logic
MW 4:55-6:10
Michael Schweiger

PHIL-UA 70-002
Logic
T/TH 4:55-6:10
Melis Erdur

This course introduces the techniques, results, and philosophical import of 20th century formal logic. Principal concepts include those of sentence, set, interpretation, validity, consistency, consequence, tautology, derivation, and completeness. This course satisfies the logic requirement for NYU Philosophy majors.

PHIL-UA 76
Epistemology
T/TH 9:30-10:45
TBA

Prerequisite: one Introductory course

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? What is knowledge, and how does it differ from belief?

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

Erica Shumener: Fridays 12:30-1:45; 2-3:15

PHIL-UA 78
Metaphysics
T/TH 4:55-6:10
Peter Unger

Prerequisite: one Introductory course

What is the ultimate nature of the universe, the nature of all concrete reality? Is it physical, or mental, or both, or neither? And, what is our nature: are we physical, or mental, or both, or neither? We'll be concerned to use our inquiry into these questions to help us with traditionally central philosophical problems, including the problem of free will, the problem of personal identity, and the mind-body problem. While much of the course will treat these topics, some will treat some other topics.

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

Yu Guo: Friday 11-12:15; 2-3:15

PHIL-UA 91
Philosophy of Biology
T/TH 12:30-1:45
Laura Franklin-Hall

Prerequisite: one Introductory course

We'll consider a variety of topics at the intersection of biology and philosophy. Questions include: (1) How are living things different from non-living things? (What makes you a whole organism rather than simply a collection of cells? Is the entire planet a living thing? Could a computer program be alive?) (2) How is biology separate from, but connected to, other sciences? (Are there autonomous biological laws? Are there emergent biological properties? Can biology be "reduced to" chemistry or physics?) (3) How contingent is biological evolution? (Is evolution

"progressive"? Should we count our lucky stars, or were humans pretty much inevitable?) (4) Can biological evolution explain human behavior? (Are we "programmed" by evolution to do certain things? How important is culture in explaining behavior, and can it too evolve?)

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

Zach Perry: Friday 11:00-12:15; Monday 11:00-12:15

PHIL-UA 93
Philosophical Appliations of Cogntive Science
MW 9:30-10:45
Michael Strevens

Prerequisite: one Introductory course

We will discuss the relevance of recent discoveries about the mind to philosophical questions about metaphysics, logic, and ethics. Most of the class concerns metaphysics. The questions include: What is causation? Is there a right way to "carve up" the world into categories? Why do we see the world as consisting of objects in places? Are the rules of logic objective or just the way we happen to think? Is there such a thing as objective right and wrong?

PHIL-UA 101
Topics in History of Philosophy
MW 2-3:15
Ralf Bader

Prerequisite: PHIL-UA 20 or PHIL-UA 21

This course is a comprehensive examination of Rudolf Carnap's masterpiece 'The Logical Structure of the World' (Der logische Aufbau der Welt, 1928). This book is often hailed as the pinnacle of the logical empiricism propounded by the Vienna Circle and as one of the key founding documents of analytic philosophy. Carnap's project in this book consists in providing a rational reconstruction of all of human knowledge, tracing all concepts back to a small number of basic elements, thereby vindicating the unity of science. We will be focusing on Carnap's appeal to a structuralist understanding of science in explaining how objective knowledge is possible in spite of the fact that all knowledge has its origin in subjective experiences, as well as on his attempt to use the tools of modern logic to provide a synthesis of traditional empiricism and rationalism, leading to a wide-reaching critique of metaphysics. Apart from being intrinsically rewarding, engaging with this important text provides a helpful vantage point from which to understand the origin and subsequent development of analytic philosophy, whilst also being of direct contemporary relevance in light of a number of recent attempts to resurrect Aufbau-style projects in contemporary philosophy.

PHIL-UA 103
Topics in Metaphysics and Epistemology
MW 3:30-4:45
Katrina Elliott

Prerequisite: PHIL-UA 76 or PHIL-UA 78 or PHIL-UA 90

Description Forthcoming

PHIL-UA 201
Honors Seminar
Tuesday 4-6
Laura Franklin-Hall

Permission of the department required to enroll.