

PHILOSOPHY

FALL QUARTER COURSES

PHIL 110 Introduction to Philosophy (Goldberg)

MW 9:30-10:50am

In this course we will be exploring several traditional topics within philosophy, including free will, the nature of morality and justice, and existential issues pertaining to the meaning of life and the significance of death. Students will be expected (i) to comprehend the various philosophers' arguments on these topics, (ii) to develop their own views on the topics, and (iii) to present their own views, as well as the views of the philosophers we read, in clear, succinct, and forcefully argued thesis papers. Special attention will be paid to questions concerning disagreements over values.

PHIL 210-1 History of Philosophy - Ancient (Yau)

MW 3:30-4:50pm

How can we make our lives and our communities better? Why should we act justly, when being unjust can be profitable? What makes someone a true friend, how many kinds of friendships are there, and how many friends should we aim to have? These kinds of questions preoccupied ancient Greek philosophers, and their contributions to these topics continue to influence contemporary thought. We will investigate different proposed answers to these and other questions with a view to better understanding ancient Greek ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology. This course strongly emphasizes the development of close reading and writing skills. No prior exposure to ancient philosophy is required.

PHIL 150 Elementary Logic (Ebels Duggan)

TTH 2:00-3:20pm

This course acquaints students with both the power and limitations of formal deductive logic. We want true premises to lead to true conclusions---that is, we want the truth of the conclusions to follow from the truth of the premises. When this happens, we say that the premises entail the conclusions. Logic examines this "follows from", or entailment, relation, and how to represent sentences in an idealized way that captures (at least some) of that relationship. Logic makes subtle mistakes easier to spot---and this is useful in philosophy where arguments can be quite intricate! The first step is learning how to represent sentences in natural language in a symbolic language, which allows for step-by-step reconstruction of natural language arguments. The second step is determining whether the argument, so represented, has features that mark it as an entailment. When it does, conclusions follow from premises! When it doesn't---either the conclusions don't follow, or we need to refine our formal representation of the argument. The course begins by examining truth-functional logic: a system for treating arguments involving "and", "or", "not", and "if...then" constructions. We'll then show how this logic is inadequate, but how its main shortcomings are met by first-order logic, which also accommodates arguments involving quantifier words like "all", "none", and "some".

PHIL 221 Gender, Politics, & Philosophy

MW 3:30-4:50pm

This course is an introduction to philosophical problems concerning gender and politics. What is gender and what is its relation to sex and sexuality? What is gender injustice and why is it wrong? What are the causes of gender injustice and how could we overcome it? And what is the relation of feminist theory to lived experience and to political action? We will read and critically discuss both historical and contemporary texts addressing these questions.

PHIL 222 Introduction to Africana Philosophy (Barnes)

MW 9:30-10:50am

Philosopher Lucious Outlaw understands Africana philosophy as a “gathering notion used to cover collectively particular articulations, and traditions of particular articulations, of persons African and African-descended that are to be regarded as instances of philosophizing.” Broadly, Africana philosophy considers work from diverse areas in Africa, the Caribbean, and North America. Central questions discussed herein include very common philosophical questions such as: “What does it mean to be a human being?”; “how do we account for the past (or time, more generally)?”; and “how is knowledge about ourselves—as thinking subjects—possible?” However, what makes these questions unique to Africana philosophy is their being asked in light of Western modernity, colonialism, and slavery by or about African-descended people. This is so since, as Louis Gordon tells us, “there was no reason for the people of the African continent to have considered themselves as Africans until that identity was imposed upon them through conquest and colonization.” So the question: “What does it mean to be a human being?” is raised in light of the humanity of African descended peoples that was called into question beginning with Western modernity, colonialism, and slavery. This course introduces students to philosophical work done by African and African descended people on a plethora of issues, many of which are intersecting. In so doing, it highlights the impact of racialized and racist conditions, historical and present social and political structures, and linguistic and cultural formations of African-descended groups throughout the world.

PHIL 253 Introduction to the Philosophy of Language (Hyska)

TTh 9:30-10:50am

This is an introduction to the philosophy of language taught through academic texts from philosophy and the cognitive sciences as well as selections of short fiction. Some questions we will ask include: What is meaning? Can we ever really communicate with one another and, if so, how? How do we acquire a language? How do the languages that we learn shape our minds and the ways that we live? Do non-human animals use language? And how does figurative language work?

PHIL 225 Minds and Machines (Hyska)

TTH 12:30-1:50pm

This course will take up a number of philosophical questions about generative artificial intelligence. Are generative AI models agents? Do they pose unique existential risks to humans? What does the surge in AI-generated content mean for art, social media, and politics? We will explore these questions through readings from philosophers, computer scientists, and others in the cognitive and social sciences.

PHIL 259 Introduction to Metaphysics (Thompson)

TTH 9:30-10:50am

Metaphysics concerns the structure of reality. It asks questions like: Do entities like electrons and minds exist in the same way as a tree or a water bottle? What distinguishes kinds like H₂O and lions from kinds like ‘animals at the Lincoln Park Zoo’? Are race and gender real and in what way? Are groups like the Supreme Court more than a collection of their members? How should we understand claims about possibilities, such as ‘If kangaroos did not have tails, they would fall over’? And how do social structures (that is, social practices, social roles, institutions) cause social outcomes? In this course, we will cover philosophical views on ontology (what exists), fundamental levels of reality, the composition of social groups, natural and social kinds, the nature of race and gender, possibility and necessity, and social structural causation. There will be particular emphasis on social aspects of reality.

PHIL 262 Ethical Problems and Public Issues

TTH 2:00-3:20pm

This course is a study of ethical problems arising in public policy, as well as philosophical approaches to addressing these problems. In this course we will think within, and critically examine, contemporary philosophical theories of morality such as utilitarianism, contractualism, virtue ethics, and care ethics. We will examine these moral theories through the lens of disputed moral issues such as punishment, immigration, racial integration, climate change, and freedom of speech, paying special attention to these issues as they figure in the contemporary social and political landscape of the United States. We will explore historical and contemporary structures of inequality in the US, particularly related to race, gender, and class, and we will critically reflect on our own positions within these structures.

PHIL 314 Studies in German Philosophy: Marx (Brixel)

TTH 2:00-3:20pm

This course is a reading-intensive seminar on the social and philosophical thought of Karl Marx. We will study Marx's earlier and later writings, as well as relevant background material from Marx's Hegelian predecessors (including Hegel himself) and the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century political economists.

PHIL 312 Studies in Modern Philosophy: Belief and Doubt (Reed)

TTH 11:00am-12:20pm

This course will consider the ways in which philosophers have understood the life of the mind to unfold, from belief and doubt an individual may experience to disagreement and the need for toleration in a community.

PHIL 315 Studies in French Philosophy (Deutscher)

TTH 6:00-7:20pm

The course begins with a foundational competency in main concepts from the French philosopher Michel Foucault, including discipline and biopower, the productivity and plurality of power; normalization and its dependence on "abnormality;" the conditions under which freedom is also a form of subjection; disciplinary and punitive societies, the historical a priori. We review many of the aspects of Foucault's work that have strongly impacted inquiry in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Turning, in the course's second section, to the work of French Martinian philosopher and decolonial theorist Frantz Fanon, we will critically compare Foucault's and Fanon's approaches to power, psychiatric medicine, families, biopolitics, self-surveillance, knowledge, selfhood, alterity, and colonization. Challenging both thinkers we will ask how these approaches both reinforce each other and, at times, call each other into question. Students will have the opportunity to write on each of the two French philosophers jointly or separately.

PHIL 327 Philosophy of Psychology MW 9:30-10:50am

What is the nature of short-term memory or implicit bias? Are our moral judgments impacted by emotional states? How do we know that tests like the n-back task, implicit association test, or fMRI studies produce evidence about memory, implicit attitudes, or emotional states? Psychologists appeal to tools of scientific reasoning, such as validation, construct development, and operational definitions, to evaluate when methods provide evidence about the objects of inquiry. We will analyze these tools as well as typical methods employed in psychology and cognitive neuroscience. These methods include: introspection, comparative animal research, controlled lab experiments, and functional neuroimaging. Using this analysis as background, we will evaluate particular cases of scientific reasoning about animal cognition, implicit bias, short-term and spatial memory, and moral judgment. At the end of this course, we will evaluate the role of replication and integration of results in producing knowledge about the mind/brain.

PHIL 390 Topics in Feminist Philosophy (Southgate)

TTH 12:30-1:50pm

Very broadly, feminism is both a political movement and a theoretical commitment to ending gender-based oppression. Feminists have contributed important work to every area of philosophy, posing distinctive questions and developing distinctive critiques, views, and concepts. In this course we will learn about feminist contributions to various “core” areas of philosophy such as metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and social philosophy. Issues we may consider include: ‘what is gender?’ (metaphysics), ‘how does gender impact our standing as knowers’ (epistemology), ‘how do and how should gender norms operate in our moral theories?’ (ethics), ‘what are sexism and misogyny, and how can we counteract them?’ (social philosophy). We’ll also think about the commitments, assumptions, and aims shared by feminists across philosophy and what it is that connects this work across philosophy.

PHIL 361 The Philosophy of Punishment and Incarceration (Reed)

M 10:30am-1:15pm

The United States is currently home to 5% of the world's population but 25% of its incarcerated population. With close to 2 million people under the control of the American criminal legal system, the United States has more total people who are incarcerated than any other country in the world. Moreover, the United States has one of the most punitive approaches to criminal justice, imposing lengthy prison sentences, forcing people who are incarcerated to spend years—sometimes even decades—in solitary confinement, and providing very few educational, vocational, and recreational programs in prisons.

Punishment and incarceration also disproportionately impact people of color. Black Americans are incarcerated at more than 5 times the rate of whites. While Black Americans and Hispanics make up about 32% of the US population, they constitute 56% of the incarcerated population.

This course will use a philosophical lens to examine the causes and consequences of this crisis of mass incarceration in the United States, along with possible solutions to it, with a particular emphasis on the theories of punishment grounding our criminal legal system and, thus, our prisons. The course will include students from the Evanston campus and incarcerated students in the Northwestern Prison Education Program.