

PHILOSOPHY

Overview & Learning Goals

Learning Goals

The Department of Philosophy seeks to promote the following among its students:

1. The ability to articulate arguments: to say what an argument's premises are, to justify those premises, and to explain why the conclusion follows from those premises. This requires both clear thinking and clear self-expression, particularly in writing.
2. The ability to analyze what arguments others are using to support their own conclusions.
3. The ability and willingness to engage in open-minded criticism of their own arguments and the arguments of others.
4. Familiarity with the central figures in the history of western philosophy, including their views, the arguments for their views, and notable objections to their views. Historical figures have provided a framework for philosophical discussion that is still used today, and engaging them not only teaches about the history of ideas but enhances our understanding of current philosophical debates.
5. Familiarity with contemporary philosophical debates.
6. The habits of intellectual discipline and creativity that allow independent research.
7. The habits of intellectual rigor and integrity needed for fruitful thought in all fields.

Options for Majoring or Minor in the Department

Students may elect to major in philosophy or to coordinate the major in philosophy with digital and computational studies, education, or environmental studies. Students pursuing a coordinate major may not normally elect a second major. Non-majors may elect to minor in philosophy.

Department Website (<https://www.bowdoin.edu/philosophy/>)

Faculty

Scott R. Sehon, *Department Chair*

Marybeth Bergquist, *Department Coordinator*

Professors: Scott R. Sehon, Matthew Stuart

Associate Professor: Kristi Olson†

Assistant Professor: Aliosha Barranco Lopez

Adjunct faculty: Dominik Berger

Faculty/Staff Website (<https://www.bowdoin.edu/philosophy/faculty-and-staff/>)

Requirements

Philosophy Major

The major consists of nine courses.

Code	Title	Credits
Required Courses		
PHIL 2111	Ancient Philosophy	1
PHIL 2112	Modern Philosophy	1
PHIL 2223	Logic	1

Select six additional elective courses in philosophy: 6

one course with a primary focus on epistemology and metaphysics (Philosophy 1040–1049, 1400–1499, 2400–2499, 3400–3499)

one course with a primary focus on value theory (Philosophy 1030–1039, 1300–1399, 2300–2399, 3300–3399)

at least two courses from the advanced level (3000–3999)

Among the six elective courses, students may count one appropriate course taught in another department, with consultation and approval of the Philosophy Department. Any such course may not count toward any of the requirements above.

Philosophy Minor

The minor consists of five courses.

Code	Title	Credits
Required Courses		
Select one of the following courses:		1
PHIL 2111	Ancient Philosophy	
PHIL 2112	Modern Philosophy	
PHIL 2223	Logic	
Select one philosophy course from the intermediate level (2000–2969) or from the advanced level (3000–3999).		1
Select one philosophy course from the advanced level (3000–3999).		1
Select two additional philosophy electives from any level.		2

Additional Information

Additional Information and Department Policies

- Unless an exception is made by the department, a course that counts toward the major or minor must be taken for a letter grade (not Credit/D/Fail), and the student must earn a grade of C- or better.
- Topics in first-year writing seminars change from time to time but are restricted in scope and make no pretense to being an introduction to the whole field of philosophy. They are topics in which contemporary debate is lively, and as yet unsettled, and to which contributions are often being made by more than one field of learning.
- First-year writing seminars count toward the major and minor.
- Introductory courses are open to all students regardless of year and count toward the major. They do not presuppose any background in philosophy and are good first courses.
- Two semesters of independent study or honors project may count toward the major with departmental approval and two semesters of work are required to earn honors in philosophy. One semester may count toward the minor with departmental approval.
- Although courses numbered in the 3000s are advanced seminars primarily intended for majors in philosophy, adequately prepared students from other fields are also welcome. Besides stated prerequisites, at least one 2000-level course in philosophy is a helpful preparation.
- Of the nine courses required of the major, at least five must be taken at Bowdoin; of the five required for a minor, at least three must be taken at Bowdoin. Students who wish to complete the major or minor are encouraged to take PHIL 2111 Ancient Philosophy, PHIL 2112 Modern Philosophy, and PHIL 2223 Logic at Bowdoin. In some circumstances, an appropriate non-Bowdoin course may meet one

of these requirements; this is determined by the department after review of the syllabus. No credit is given for either PHIL 2111 Ancient Philosophy or PHIL 2112 Modern Philosophy for a single-semester course that covers both ancient and modern philosophy; credit for PHIL 2223 Logic is typically not given for a course on critical thinking or informal logic.

- Courses cross-listed with philosophy may double-count to another department or program.

Information for Incoming Students (p. 2)

There is no single introductory course in philosophy. Students may start with a first-year writing seminar or a 1000-level course (see below), but many first-year students also choose to begin with 2000-level courses – there are no prerequisites, and no background in philosophy is assumed. The topics at the 2000-level are generally more focused and the material is more challenging. Students may choose their first course according to their interests. Those seeking a background in the history of philosophy are advised to take PHIL 2111 Ancient Philosophy: which is offered every fall, and which covers ancient Greek philosophy (pre-Socratics to Aristotle) and/or PHIL 2112 Modern Philosophy: offered every spring, which covers 17th and 18th century philosophy from Descartes to Kant.

PHIL 2223 Logic: This course differs from other philosophy courses in that it has problem sets and exams rather than papers. The course is a rigorous introduction to formal symbolic logic, and its aim is to help us in distinguishing valid from invalid arguments. The course does not presuppose any prior knowledge of logic, and is open to first-year students.

First-year writing seminars and 1000-level courses offered this fall: PHIL 1036 Personal Ethics, PHIL 1311 Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy, and PHIL 1350 Happiness.

Courses

PHIL 1026 (c) Utopias and Dystopias

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 16.

Looks at and evaluates different theories of political and social organization. We will read classics of philosophy, but we will also look at works of fiction. In science fiction authors explore ideas of government and social organization which are relevant to the philosophical theories, and present these with more attention to the details and possible ramifications of such theories than works of theory can easily do. We will, for example, read John Locke on our inherent right to private property, and then read Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Dispossessed*, which presents a society in which property has been abolished. We will consider whether and when government interference in family life is justified, examining fictional and philosophical portrayals of population control. One pervasive theme will be the value or lack of value of liberty in different areas of action, and we will end by giving special attention to considerations personal and political freedom.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2020.

PHIL 1031 (c) Ethics and the Embryo

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 16.

This course addresses moral questions about the human embryo. For example, when, if at all, is genetic enhancement morally permissible? Is it wrong to have children? Can we harm someone simply by bringing her into existence? If the embryo has the moral status of a person, does it follow that abortion is morally impermissible? We will analyze philosophers' answers to these and related questions. Readings include essays by contemporary philosophers, including Francis Beckwith, David Benatar, Elizabeth Harman, Jeff McMahan, Don Marquis, Derek Parfit, and Judith Jarvis Thomson.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2021.

PHIL 1036 (c) Personal Ethics

Matthew Stuart.

Non-Standard Rotation. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 16.

Examines some ethical problems and paradoxes that arise in ordinary life, some philosophical theories that bear upon them, and some strategies for making thoughtful decisions about them. Topics may include friendship, lying, love, family obligations, charity, the treatment of animals, abortion.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023.

PHIL 1037 (c) Race, Society, and Identity Politics

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 16.

Race is relevant for understanding many aspects of society, including political disagreement, identity, political affiliation, and social inequities. This course philosophically examines the sociopolitical role of race in society, focusing (though not exclusively) on two issues: (1) whether white people play "identity politics" or whether only people of color do and (2) whether the concept of racism is "inflated" (whether "racism" is overused). Answering these questions requires knowledge of the underlying concepts: What is identity politics? What is racism? The value and implications of philosophical analysis for understanding race as a sociopolitical phenomenon are also examined. Readings draw from several disciplines and methodologies, including philosophy, sociology, psychology, whiteness studies, decolonial studies, critical race theory, black male studies, and intersectionality. Examples of scholars we may read: Tommy Curry, Woody Doane, Ashley Jardina, Maria Lugones, and Charles Mills.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021.

PHIL 1040 (c) Personal Identity

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 16.

What is it that makes you a person, and what is it that makes you the same person as the little kid in your parents' photo album? Philosophers have defended a number of different answers to these questions. According to some, it is persistence of the same soul that makes for personal identity. Others argue that it is persistence of the same body that matters, or the continuity of certain biological processes. Still others contend that it is psychological relations that matter. Canvases all of these answers and considers thought experiments about soul swapping, brain transplants, and Star Trek transporters. Readings from both historical and contemporary sources.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022, Fall 2020.

PHIL 1046 (c) Philosophy and the Internet

Every Other Fall. Enrollment limit: 16.

Search engine results and social media are sources of knowledge, but also of fake news, conspiracy theories, epistemic bubbles, echo chambers, and polarization. This course introduces philosophical theories and tools to help students assess what counts as knowledge and identify reliable and unreliable sources online.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023.

PHIL 1252 (c) Death

Matthew Stuart.

Every Other Year. Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 50.

Considers distinctively philosophical questions about death. Do we have immortal souls? Is immortality even desirable? Is death a bad thing? Is suicide morally permissible? Does the inevitability of death rob life of its meaning? Readings from historical and contemporary sources.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

PHIL 1311 (c) Socialism, Capitalism, and Democracy

Scott Sehon.

Every Other Fall. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 50.

Explores and critically evaluates philosophical arguments for and against socialism. Questions include: What does the word "socialism" mean? Does socialism violate individual rights? What is the relationship between socialism and capitalism? Between socialism and democracy? Readings from mostly contemporary sources, including work by philosophers, economists, and politicians.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2021.

PHIL 1320 (c) Moral Problems

Every Year. Enrollment limit: 50.

Our society is riven by deep and troubling moral controversies. Examines some of these controversies in the context of current arguments and leading theoretical positions. Possible topics include abortion, physician-assisted suicide, capital punishment, sexuality, the justifiability of terrorism, and the justice of war.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023.

PHIL 1321 (c, DPI) Philosophical Issues of Gender and Race

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 50.

Explores contemporary issues of gender and race. Possible topics include the social construction of race and gender, implicit bias, racial profiling, pornography, the gender wage gap, affirmative action, race and incarceration, transgender issues, and reparations for past harms. Readings drawn from philosophy, legal studies, and the social sciences. (Same as: GSWS 1321)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024, Spring 2022.

PHIL 1322 (c) Philosophy and Tragedy

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 50.

Tragedy is arguably the most philosophical of art forms. Examines philosophical questions distinctly raised by tragedy – questions concerning the nature of the cosmos, the place of human within the cosmos, suffering, nihilism, moral responsibility, and the components of a flourishing life. Aims to engage with the works of the great Greek tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides in consultation with the philosophical theories of Aristotle, Hume, Nietzsche, Bernard Williams, Donald Davidson, and Martha Nussbaum, among others.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2020.

PHIL 1323 (c) The Souls of Animals

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 50.

Do animals have souls? Do they have thoughts and beliefs? Do they feel pain? Are animals deserving of the same moral consideration as human beings? Or do they have any moral status at all? Readings from historical and contemporary sources.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024.

PHIL 1325 (c) Philosophies to Live By

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 50.

This course is dedicated to the proposition that philosophy can make life better. It can provide wisdom to guide choices and clarify values. It can offer new perspectives and new worldviews. It can provide the insight necessary for self-knowledge and growth. And it can deepen the meaning we find in our everyday lives. In this course we will read works by philosophers both ancient and contemporary concerned with the question of how to live meaningful lives. The goal will be to find ways to apply those philosophies anew so that our own lives are enriched.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022.

PHIL 1336 (c) Ethics for a Digital World

Aliosha Barranco Lopez.

Non-Standard Rotation. Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 50.

Digital technologies make our lives easier in many ways—e.g., we can communicate with others around the world, we can order devices to play music, we can get instant directions to go basically anywhere! But is there any ethical cost to enjoying the benefits that come from these types of technologies? This course investigates a variety of ethical issues arising from and connected with digital technology. Topics covered might include privacy and big data, algorithmic bias, surveillance capitalism, social media and mental manipulation, fake news, internet shaming, and the moral status of superintelligence. (Same as: DCS 1650)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022.

PHIL 1350 (c) Happiness

Dominik Berger.

Non-Standard Rotation. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 50.

What is happiness? Should we strive to be happy? Does everyone strive to be happy? What is the relationship between a happy life and a meaningful life? Begins by focusing on these philosophical questions and considers discussions from Plato to the present. In addition, aims to connect philosophical discussions of happiness and well-being to recent empirical work. Particularly interested in questions about how we measure and evaluate the happiness and well-being of ourselves and others.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023, Spring 2022, Spring 2021.

PHIL 1352 (c) Latin American Philosophy

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 50.

Latin American philosophy is a philosophy born of struggle, a body of thought whose metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, and political identity is tied up with the problems of colonization, decolonization, and liberation in a Latin American context. This course will philosophically assess classical and contemporary thought in Latin American Philosophy, and will discuss issues such as immigration, xenophobia/racism, liberation, racial and ethnic identity, assimilation/acculturation, the black/white binary, Latinx feminisms, and the Spanish language. Our primary textbook will be Robert Eli Sanchez's edited anthology and topical introduction, *Latin American and Latinx Philosophy: A Collaborative Introduction* (2020). Though the course is arranged topically, we will begin by establishing the historical context of Latin American thought. We will read excerpts from Bartolome de las Casas and Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*. Classical philosophers we may read include Simon Bolivar, Leopoldo Zea, Jose Marti and Jose Vasconcelos. Contemporary scholars may include Enrique Dussel, Gloria Anzaldua, Jose Antonio-Orosco, Jorge J. E. Gracia, and Richard Delgado. (Same as: LACL 2320)

Previous terms offered: Fall 2020.

PHIL 1434 (c) Free Will and Moral Responsibility

Every Other Fall. Enrollment limit: 50.

We hold people responsible for their actions: we get credit and praise for nice things we do or good papers that we write; we are blamed if we break a promise or if we plagiarize a paper. In holding one another responsible in these ways, we seem to presuppose that people have free will, for it seems that we should not hold people responsible if they did not act freely. But what if all human behavior can be explained scientifically, as is suggested by current neuroscience research? What if determinism is true, and all our behaviors have been causally determined by events that took place before we were born? Readings from contemporary philosophers (Robert Kane, Alfred Mele, Manuel Vargas, and others) and psychologists (Benjamin Libet).

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024.

PHIL 1442 (c) Philosophy of Religion

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 50.

Does God exist? Can the existence of God be proven? Can it be disproven? Is it rational to believe in God? What does it mean to say that God exists (or does not exist)? What distinguishes religious beliefs from non-religious beliefs? What is the relation between religion and science? Approaches these and related questions through a variety of historical and contemporary sources, including philosophers, scientists, and theologians. (Same as: REL 1142)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022.

PHIL 2111 (c) Ancient Philosophy

Aliosha Barranco Lopez.

Every Fall. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

This course will involve careful study of the works of Plato and Aristotle—two major influences on Western thought. We will explore a wide range of philosophical problems, including the nature of the good life, the organization of the just city, and the nature of knowledge. At various junctures, we will compare the answers these ancient thinkers gave to the treatment these problems have received by later historical figures and contemporary philosophers.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023, Spring 2023, Fall 2021, Fall 2020.

PHIL 2112 (c) Modern Philosophy

Matthew Stuart.

Every Spring. Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 35.

A survey of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European philosophy, focusing on discussions of the ultimate nature of reality and our knowledge of it. Topics include the nature of the mind and its relation to the body, the existence of God, and the free will problem. Readings from Descartes, Hume, Locke, Kant, and others.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024, Spring 2023, Spring 2022, Spring 2021.

PHIL 2223 (a, MCSR) Logic

Scott Sehon.

Every Fall. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

The central problem of logic is to determine which arguments are good and which are bad. To this end, we introduce a symbolic language and rigorous, formal methods for seeing whether one statement logically implies another. We apply these tools to a variety of arguments, philosophical and otherwise, and demonstrate certain theorems about the formal system we construct.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023, Fall 2022, Fall 2021, Spring 2021.

PHIL 2233 (a, MCSR) Advanced Logic

Scott Sehon.

Every Other Spring. Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 35.

Investigates several philosophically important results of modern logic, including Gödel's incompleteness theorems, the Church-Turing Theorem (that there is no decision procedure for quantificational validity), and Tarski's theorem (the indefinability of truth for formal languages). Also includes an introduction to modal logic and the logic of necessity and possibility.

Prerequisites: PHIL 2223 or MATH 2020.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

PHIL 2320 (c) Bioethics

Every Other Spring. Enrollment limit: 35.

Examines issues central for physicians, biological researchers, and society: cloning, genetic engineering, biological patenting, corporate funding for medical research, use of experimental procedures, and others.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023, Spring 2021.

PHIL 2321 (c) Moral Theory

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

Is there a morally right way to live? If so, what is it? Should I do what is best for me? Should I respect individual rights – and if so, what rights do individuals have? Should I do whatever maximizes the welfare of society? Examines these fundamental ethical questions.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021.

PHIL 2322 (c) Political Philosophy

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

Examines some of the major issues and concepts in political philosophy, including freedom and coercion, justice, equality, and the nature of liberalism. Readings primarily from contemporary sources.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024, Fall 2020.

PHIL 2324 (c) How to Be a Stoic

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

In the popular imagination, to be a Stoic is to be sternly and dispassionately rational, as exemplified by the famous Vulcan, Spock, of the Star Trek universe. Yet it is perplexing how this familiar image of a Stoic could account for the immense popularity and persistence of the Stoic worldview. Since its beginning in the Hellenistic period, Stoicism has attracted a diverse range of followers: a slave-turned-philosopher, Epictetus; a Roman philosopher emperor, Marcus Aurelius; and a former POW, Admiral James Stockdale, among others. Our aim in this course will be to trace the development of Stoic theories, with special emphasis on Stoic ethics, philosophy of mind, and action, and examine whether these Stoic doctrines can offer credible solutions to present-day concerns. Readings will be drawn from Brad Inwood and Lloyd Gerson's *The Stoics Reader*, Epictetus's *The Handbook*, Seneca's *Letters from a Stoic*, Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, and Tad Brennan's *The Stoic Life*.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021.

PHIL 2325 (c) Aesthetics

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

Analyzes and evaluates the main approaches in the philosophy of art. Many modern and postmodern artworks challenge us to figure out why, on any theory, they would count as art at all. Our aim is to highlight the rich diversity of art in order to convey the difficulty of coming up with suitable theories, especially in light of the expanding mediascape of digital culture.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2021.

PHIL 2327 (c) Ethics and Public Policy

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 16.

This course examines questions at the intersection of ethics, economics, and public policy. For example, should you be permitted to sell your soul on eBay? What about your kidney or your first child? How should we measure individual well-being? Should we try to measure each individual's happiness, or should we measure her preference satisfaction? If the latter, which preferences should we include? What are the ethical assumptions behind cost-benefit analysis? May we permissibly discount the harms of climate change to future generations? What role, if any, should normative concepts—such as freedom, justice, and equality—play in economic and policy analysis? Readings will be drawn primarily from the contemporary philosophical literature. This course emphasizes research-based writing. (IRBW)

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022, Spring 2021.

PHIL 2341 (c) Philosophy of Law

Scott Sehon.

Non-Standard Rotation. Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 35.

In *Roe v. Wade* the Supreme Court held that there is a constitutional right to abortion, but in *Dobbs v. Jackson*, the Court now holds that the *Roe* opinion was “egregiously wrong.” By virtue of what is a proposition of law right or wrong? How should we determine whether the Constitution guarantees a certain right or not? What is the law? What is the relationship of law to morality? Should our moral beliefs affect our interpretation of what the law is? Investigates these general questions in the context of particular legal issues, including the nature and status of privacy rights, the legitimacy of restrictions on speech and expression, the nature of equality rights, and the right to liberty. Writings from legal theorists as well as judicial opinions.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

PHIL 2350 (c) What is Equality?

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

What do we really want when we advocate for greater equality? Should we equalize income or something else? If everybody had enough, would we still have a reason to pursue equality? What should we do in those cases in which individuals are responsible, through their choices, for having less? Seeks to answer these and other questions by examining theories of equality in contemporary political philosophy.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024, Fall 2020.

PHIL 2359 (c) The Ethics of Climate Change

Britta Clark.

Non-Standard Rotation. Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 35.

Examines moral questions raised by climate change including: What would constitute a just allocation of burdens? What do we collectively owe to future generations? If collective action fails, what are our obligations as individuals? When, if at all, is civil disobedience justified? Readings drawn primarily from contemporary philosophy. (Same as: ENVS 2459)

PHIL 2361 (c) Nietzsche's Philosophy of Music

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

The nineteenth-century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche is renowned for challenging traditional religion, morality, etc., but his real passion was music. He wrote more about music than any previous philosopher, devoting three of his thirteen books to it. Nietzsche believed that music revealed a lot about the culture that produced it; even more, he believed that an individual's taste in music revealed a great deal about that individual's inner psychology. In this course, we will learn what Nietzsche's predecessors, especially Schopenhauer, said about music, and familiarize ourselves with the music of Nietzsche's time and about which he writes. Then we will explore Nietzsche's philosophy of music, both for what it says about Nietzsche's philosophy and for what it says about the nature of music itself. We will close with some speculation about what Nietzsche would think of later music and of our own particular tastes.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.

PHIL 2410 (c) Philosophy of Mind

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 35.

We see ourselves as rational agents: we have beliefs, desires, intentions, wishes, hopes, etc. We also have the ability to perform actions, seemingly in light of these beliefs, desires, and intentions. Is our conception of ourselves as rational agents consistent with our scientific conception of human beings as biological organisms? Can there be a science of the mind and, if so, what is its status relative to other sciences? What is the relationship between mind and body? How do our mental states come to be about things in the world? How do we know our own minds, or whether other people even have minds? Readings primarily from contemporary sources.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024, Spring 2022.

PHIL 2425 (c) Philosophy of Science

Every Other Spring. Enrollment limit: 35.

Science is often thought of as the paradigm of rational inquiry, as a method that gives us an unparalleled ability to understand the nature of the world. Others have doubted this rosy picture, and have emphasized historical and sociological aspects of the practice of science. Investigates the nature of science and scientific thought by looking at a variety of topics, including the demarcation of science and non-science, relativism and objectivity, logical empiricism, scientific revolutions, and scientific realism.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022.

PHIL 2427 (c) Metaphysics

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

Metaphysics is the study of very abstract questions about reality. What does reality include? What is the relation between things and their properties? What is time? Do objects and persons have temporal parts as well as spatial parts? What accounts for the identity of persons over time? What is action, and do we ever act freely?

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023.

PHIL 2430 (c) Epistemology

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 35.

What is knowledge, and how do we get it? What justifies us in believing certain claims to be true? Does knowing something ever involve a piece of luck? Is it possible that we lack knowledge of the external world altogether? An introduction to the theory of knowledge, focusing on contemporary issues. Considers various conceptions of what it takes to have knowledge against the background of the skeptical challenge, as well as topics such as self-knowledge and the problem of induction.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2020.

PHIL 2435 (c) Responsibility and Rational Belief

Aliosha Barranco Lopez.

Non-Standard Rotation. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 35.

Explores philosophical questions about (ir)rational beliefs and examines what responsibilities humans have as epistemic agents in our society. Philosophical theories and tools are introduced to carry on a deep analysis of topics like deference to experts, biased reasoning and irrationality, epistemic injustice, and political disagreement.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022.

PHIL 3325 (c) Utilitarianism and Its Critics

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 15.

How should we decide what to do? Utilitarianism is the view that the right act is the act that produces the greatest happiness of the greatest number—an appealing view in many respects, since we do want to be happy. However, it doesn't give much respect to the value of the individual or the value of liberty. Utilitarians argue that happiness is so desirable that it is worth sacrificing these other things. Examines the arguments in the debate between those who value only the maximization of happiness and those who think happiness must sometimes take second place to other things, one of the most important issues in ethics.

Prerequisites: PHIL 1050 - 2969 or PHIL 3000 or higher.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2020.

PHIL 3349 (c) Analyzing Abortion Arguments

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 16.

This advanced seminar examines arguments for and against the moral and legal permissibility of abortion. Readings will be drawn from the contemporary philosophical literature. Possible authors include Anita Allen, David Boonin, Christopher Kaczor, Don Marquis, Gina Schouten, and Judith Jarvis Thomson.

Prerequisites: PHIL 1000 - 2969 or PHIL 3000 or higher.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023.

PHIL 3352 (c) Theories of Economic Fairness

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 16.

How should income be distributed in a fair society? This class will examine issues of economic justice, including the right to a basic income, justifications for inequality, the no-envy test for fairness, and the moral permissibility of redistributive taxation. Readings will be drawn from the works of contemporary philosophers, including G. A. Cohen, Ronald Dworkin, Robert Nozick, John Rawls, Debra Satz, and Philippe Van Parijs.

Prerequisites: PHIL 1000 - 2969 or PHIL 3000 or higher.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2022.

PHIL 3375 (c) The Self

Matthew Stuart.

Non-Standard Rotation. Fall 2024. Enrollment limit: 16.

Explores philosophical questions about the self. Are selves real or fictions generated by our neural hardware? Do selves persist over time? What are their persistence conditions? What is our relation to past and future selves? Can we have adequate grounds for making choices on behalf of future selves? Is it irrational to care less about the distant future? Do we have moral obligations to ourselves?

Prerequisites: PHIL 1000 - 2969 or PHIL 3000 or higher.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2022.

PHIL 3417 (c) Polarization, Disagreement, and Intellectual Humility

Every Other Spring. Enrollment limit: 16.

In today's world, polarization in both political and moral contexts is a common phenomenon that often makes our environment divisive and makes us see some of our fellow citizens as untrustworthy. This course offers a philosophical perspective on polarization. Topics might include: the nature of epistemic disagreement, the concept of epistemic egocentrism, the importance of intellectual humility, the challenges of dogmatism and "bullshit", the impact of echo chambers, the dynamics of individual and group arrogance, and the role of empathy in bridging divides. Our readings will primarily consist of philosophical texts, supplemented occasionally by insights from the social sciences.

Prerequisites: PHIL 1000 - 2969 or PHIL 3000 or higher.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024.

PHIL 3420 (c) AI and the Future of Humanity

Every Other Year. Enrollment limit: 16.

This course investigates philosophical issues arising from advanced forms of technology—in particular artificial intelligence and biological enhancement. We will discuss topics like the ethical implementation of AI, machine consciousness, moral obligations toward advanced machines, the nature of reality in virtual environments, living with entities that have super-human abilities, and the moral significance of the possibility of human extinction. We will read both theoretical papers in ethics, philosophy of mind, and metaphysics and papers that specifically discuss these issues in relation to the topics above. (Same as: DCS 3720)

Prerequisites: PHIL 1000 - 2969 or PHIL 3000 or higher.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2024.

PHIL 3422 (c) Nihilism and Magic

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 15.

Various areas of metaphysics (e.g., philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, metaethics, philosophy of religion) raise questions about the nature and existence of phenomena that seem central to being a person: mind, meaning, and value. Some skeptical philosophers argue that belief in such things would commit us to a kind of unscientific magic. However, if we deny the existence of mind, meaning, and value, it can seem that we collapse into a nihilistic abyss in which nothing makes sense, even the scientific worldview that brought us these problems. Philosophers attempt to find a comfortable middle ground between the extremes, but the question is whether any such position is stable.

Prerequisites: PHIL 1000 or higher.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2023.

PHIL 3432 (c) The Story of Analytic Philosophy

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 16.

Analytic philosophy is commonly regarded as the dominant school in contemporary philosophy. However, there is no set of doctrines common to all analytic philosophers, nor is there any one thing that could properly be termed the method of analytic philosophy. The term "analytic philosophy," if useful at all, indicates a shared set of concerns, a shared predilection for clarity of argument, and a shared history of the most eminent figures in the tradition. This course examines that story from 1879 through the late twentieth century, including works by Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Rudolf Carnap, W. V. Quine, Donald Davidson, and Saul Kripke. Topics include objectivity and truth; the foundations of mathematics; and the nature of language, theories, evidence, and meaning.

Prerequisites: Two of: either PHIL 1000 - 2969 or PHIL 3000 or higher and either PHIL 1000 - 2969 or PHIL 3000 or higher.

Previous terms offered: Fall 2021.

PHIL 3451 (c) Reasons and Persons

Non-Standard Rotation. Enrollment limit: 16.

Derek Parfit's "Reasons and Persons" (1984) is one of the most important and influential philosophy books of the late twentieth century. It is a work of general philosophy, of ethics, and of metaphysics. Parfit explores the nature of rationality, theories about the foundations of ethics, questions about personal identity, and our obligations to future generations. Parfit's book is read and discussed, and some of the vast literature it has spawned is considered.

Prerequisites: PHIL 1000 - 2969 or PHIL 3000 or higher and PHIL 1000 - 2969 or PHIL 3000 or higher.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2021.

PHIL 3456 (c) Current topics in Epistemology: Pragmatic and Moral Encroachment

Aliosha Barranco Lopez.

Every Other Fall. Spring 2025. Enrollment limit: 16.

For our beliefs to be rational we need to have evidence for them. But there is a lot of debate in contemporary epistemology about how much evidence we need, and whether the amount of evidence required changes with what is at stake in a particular situation. Consider, for example, my belief that there is milk in the fridge and my belief that my friend lied to me — do I need to have more evidence in the latter case than in the former to have a rational belief? In this course we will examine questions like the one above. In particular, we will talk about whether pragmatic and moral factors about one's situation influence what it's rational to believe. This class will introduce students to a vibrant contemporary debate in modern epistemology and most of our readings will be drawn from the last couple of years.

Prerequisites: PHIL 1000 - 2969 or PHIL 3000 or higher.

Previous terms offered: Spring 2023.