

**DEPARTMENT
OF
PHILOSOPHY**

**COURSE BROCHURE
SPRING 2016**

PHIL 102-51 - History of Western Philosophy: Modern
1 unit(s)

Mr. Lam
TR 12:00PM-1:15PM

We will study the epistemology and metaphysics of the 17th and 18th century from Descartes through Kant. Advancements in sciences during this period made many philosophers question existing preconceptions of how knowledge ought to be acquired and how the material world was intelligible to humans. The advancements also revealed deep insecurities about the role of God in the world. We will look at how some central philosophers of the period responded to these controversies, including Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant.

PHIL 102-52 - History of Western Philosophy: Modern
1 unit(s)

Mr. Seidman
TR 10:30AM-11:45AM

Descartes inaugurated modern philosophy by turning philosophical attention away from questions about what the world is like and directing it onto the question: how is it possible for us to know what the world is like? He made this question urgent by offering arguments that suggest that we cannot know what the world is like – arguments suggesting that there is an unbridgeable gap between the mind and the material world. We will carefully examine the ways in which Descartes himself, Hume, and, finally, Kant, seek to answer these arguments and bridge the gap that Descartes' arguments open up. We will see how their various approaches to this task shape and are shaped by their conceptions of the human mind, the material world, the relation of the mind to the human body, and the nature of the 'self.' No pre-requisites.

PHIL 105-51 - Philosophical Questions
1 unit(s)

Mr. Holloway
MW 10:30AM-11:45AM

Democracies. The word "democracy" is invoked widely today to refer to vastly differently forms of politics. From local, participatory movements to global banking institutions, from the invasion of Iraq to the revolts of the Arab Spring, democracy is more widespread and perhaps more ambiguous than ever today, which makes an investigation of it all the more pressing. This course will explore several of the philosophical questions that underlie these inherently different democracies, including participation, representation, law, human rights, forms of equality, globalization, securitization, and militarization.

PHIL 106-51 - Philosophy and Contemporary Issues
1 unit(s)

Mr. Kelly
MW 10:30AM-11:45AM

This course introduces students to the philosophical study of moral issues, focusing upon topics such as war, terrorism, our food choices, abortion, and euthanasia. Emphasis throughout will be placed upon argumentative rigor, clarity, and precision.

PHIL 106-52 - Philosophy and Contemporary Issues
1 unit(s)

Mr. Kelly
MW 1:30PM-2:45PM

This course introduces students to the philosophical study of moral issues, focusing upon topics such as war, terrorism, our food choices, abortion, and euthanasia. Emphasis throughout will be placed upon argumentative rigor, clarity, and precision.

PHIL 210-51 - Neo-Confucianism and Chinese Buddhism
1 unit(s)

Mr. Van Norden
TR 10:30AM-11:45AM

Introduction to Neo-Confucianism, one of the most influential intellectual movements in China and all of East Asia. Neo-Confucianism combines a profound metaphysics with a subtle theory of ethical cultivation. There will also be some discussion of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism whose views of the self and ethics are the primary targets of the Neo-Confucian critique. No familiarity with Chinese culture is assumed, but a previous 100-level course in philosophy is a prerequisite because this course assumes students have the ability to tackle subtle issues in metaphysics, personal identity, and ethics.

Prerequisite: one 100-level course in Philosophy, Chinese-Japanese, or Religious Studies, or permission of the instructor.

PHIL 222-51 - Philosophy of Language
1 unit(s)

Mr. Lam
TR 3:10PM-4:25PM

Topic for 2015/16b: Language is our primary means of expressing our thoughts. Language is also one of our primary means of representing the world. As a result, philosophers in the analytic tradition have attempted to gain a better understanding of standard philosophical issues through the study of how we understand and use language to express our thoughts, communicate, and represent the world. We will look at the philosophical study of meaning and truth as well as the philosophical problems that such studies purport to illuminate, solve, or dissolve. We will discuss theories of meaning that seek to identify meanings as items in the world, as abstract concepts, as psychological ideas, as social rules of interaction, and we will link these theories to metaphysical and epistemological questions.

Prerequisite: one 100-level course in Philosophy.

PHIL 226-51 - Philosophy of Science
1 unit(s)

Mr. Winblad
TR 12:00PM-1:15PM

(Same as [STS 226](#)) This course explores general questions about the nature of scientific inquiry, such as whether science is fully rational, and whether even our best scientific theories really provide us with accurate depictions of the natural order. The course also treats philosophical issues that arise in relation to specific scientific theories. These include whether life originated in a series of unlikely accidents, whether human cognition may be understood in purely computational terms, and whether we should embrace the existence of multiple universes and abandon the requirement that scientific theories be testable.

Prerequisite: one 100-level course in Philosophy.

PHIL 230-51 - Symbolic Logic
1 unit(s)

Mr. Winblad
MW 12:00PM-1:15PM

One of the traditional branches of philosophy, logic is concerned with understanding valid inference. It rests on the idea that what makes premises imply conclusions can be clarified by abstracting to some extent from their content, concentrating instead on their formal features. This course examines the modern approach to making these features more transparent, focusing on the construction and application of formal languages, interpretations, and inferential rules. Employing a metalogical perspective, it also addresses the adequacy of these methods.

PHIL 235-51 - Stephen Darwall's *The Second-Person Standpoint*
0.5 unit(s)

Mr. Seidman
MW 10:30AM-11:45AM

Stephen Darwall's *The Second-Person Standpoint* is a landmark contribution to contemporary moral philosophy. Darwall's book aims to explain how moral obligation is possible, by grounding it in the relations between individuals. Darwall argues that fundamental ethical concepts, including the concept of a person itself, along with the concepts of human rights and human dignity, presuppose that we have the authority to make claims on those toward whom we stand in a second-person relation. We engage in a careful reading of this important book, as well as some philosophical responses to it.

Prerequisite: one 100-level course in Philosophy.

Second six-week course.

Ungraded (SU grade type)

**PHIL 280-51 - Spaces of Exception: Migration,
Asylum-Seeking, and Statelessness Today**

1 unit(s)

**Ms. Borradori
Mr. Opondo
TR 12:00PM-1:15PM**

(Same as [AFRS 280](#), [INTL 280](#), and [POLI 280](#)) The totalitarian disregard for human life and the treatment of human beings as superfluous entities began, for Hannah Arendt, in imperial projects and was extended to spaces where entire populations were rendered stateless and denied the right to have rights. In this course, we are going to start from Arendt's seminal analysis of statelessness and her concept of the right to have rights to study aspects of today's "migratory condition." This is a peculiar condition by which inclusion in the political community is possible only by mechanisms of exclusion or intensified precarity. Mapping these mechanisms of identification through exclusion, abandonment, and dispossession will reveal that, like the stateless person, the contemporary migrant is increasingly being included in the political community only under the banner of illegality and/or criminality, unreturnability, suspension, detention, and externalization. This fact pushes millions of people to exist in "islands of exception," camps and camp-cities on the shores of Malta, Cyprus, or Lampedusa in the Mediterranean, Manus/ Nauru in the Pacific, and Guantanamo in the Americas. Through a critical engagement with the migrant condition, this course examines a range of biopolitical practices, extra-territorial formations, and technologies of encampment (externalization, dispersion, biometric virtualization). The engagement with the physical and metaphysical conditions of these 'spaces of exception' where migrants land, are detained, measured, and sometimes drown, calls attention to lives at the outskirts of political legibility while interrogating the regimes of legibility through which migrant lives are apprehended. Besides Arendt, we will discuss novels and texts by Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler, Zadie Smith, Eyal Weizman, Emmanuel Levinas, Achille Mbembe, Michel Foucault, Suvendrini Perera, V.Y. Mudimbe, Jacques Derrida, and Julia Kristeva.

Prerequisite: by permission of the instructors.

PHIL 282-51 - Taoism

0.5 unit(s)

**Mr. Van Norden
TR 1:30PM-2:45PM**

This first-six-week course is an introduction to the two seminal texts of ancient Taoism. We shall examine the historical context of these works, their critiques of conventional ethics, and their distinctive mystical visions. Requirements include faithful attendance and weekly reaction essays.

First six-week course.

Ungraded (SU grade type)

PHIL 283-51 - French Philosophy in the 1960s

1 unit(s)

Mr. Holloway
MW 1:30PM-2:45PM

Many of the foundations for contemporary European philosophy can be traced to a rare confluence of original thinkers who were active in France at the same time. The philosophical methods of post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, and philosophical archeology were developed in Paris throughout the 1960s, and seminal philosophical works were written by Emmanuel Levinas, Roland Barthes, Frantz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Jean-Pierre Vernant, and Julia Kristeva, among others. Forming an unlikely canon of mostly immigrants, homosexuals, women, Jewish thinkers, and thinkers from colonized nations, these French and French-speaking philosophers introduced new ways of thinking about the unconscious, history, language, politics, and excluded or marginalized “others.” After Foucault, who encouraged us to think about philosophy in terms of brief, historical, intellectual periods, this course will consider French thought in the 1960s.

PHIL 310-51 - Seminar in Analytic Philosophy:

Advanced Philosophy of Language: Vagueness, Context-Sensitivity, Genericity

1 unit(s)

Mr. Lam

M 3:10PM-6:10PM

In this course, we will study very specific kinds of constructions of natural language that pose difficult questions for theories of meaning, mind, and metaphysics. These constructions include vague words, or words that make it difficult for us to draw a line between items to which the word does or does not apply, like “bald,” “tall,” or “old.” We will also look at context-sensitive words that appear to apply to different things depending on the context, like “yesterday,” and “every bottle of beer.” Finally, we will look at generic constructions like “Ducks lay eggs”, “Vassar students like art” and “The tiger migrated from Africa to India a long time ago.” These constructions appear to make general claims that can be true or false, but it is unclear how many of a population must have the property to make the claim true or false. The seminar will be primarily geared toward students who have focused interest on the complex workings of linguistic meaning.

Prerequisites: Philosophy 222 or 230, or permission of the instructor.

PHIL 330-51 – Seminar in Ethics & Theory of Value:

Free Will and Moral Responsibility

1 unit(s)

Mr. Seidman

M 3:10PM-6:10PM

If the world is causally determined, does it make sense to think of human beings as *free* to do as we choose? Does it make sense to hold us morally *responsible* for our actions? What would the world have to be like, for human freedom or responsibility to make sense?

Readings by: Nomy Arpaly, R. Jay Wallace, T.M. Scanlon, Helen Steward, and others.

Prerequisites: two, 200-level courses in Philosophy.

PHIL 340-51 - Seminar in Continental Philosophy:
Frames of the Invisible. Politics of Photography
1 unit(s)

Ms. Borradori

M 4:00PM-6:00PM

The transformation of textual into visual culture and the retooling of the cellular phone as a camera have given photography a new political role. From the self-immolation of a street vendor in Tunisia that unleashed the Arab Spring to the images of police brutality in the United States, photographs have mobilized grass root movements of political resistance against atrocity and oppression. The thesis of this seminar is that our visual culture is governed by a “regime of visibility” that regulates the background of what is represented. The snapshots and the photographs taken by ordinary people possess the unique power of eluding this “staging apparatus.” We shall discuss these images as performative statements of moral outrage and appreciate how they expose both patterns of dispossession and the uneven distribution of human suffering across world populations. This will enable us to question whether the ethics of photography, and especially of photographs of human rights abuses, should not be directed at what is shown within the photographic frame but rather at the active and unmarked delimitation that lies beyond it, which limits what we see and what we are able, and unable, to recognize.

Texts by Walter Benjamin, Merleau-Ponty, Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, Vilem Flusser, Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, Edward Said, and Jacques Derrida, and images by Sebastiao Salgado, Gilles Peres, and Sophie Ristelhueber.

PHIL 350-51 – Seminar in Comparative Methodology:
Modernism, Post Modernism, and Hermeneutics
1 unit(s)

Mr. Van Norden

R 3:10PM-6:10PM

The Modernism/Postmodernism/Hermeneutic divide stretches across many different disciplines, including philosophy, literary theory, history, religious studies, political science, anthropology and others. Roughly, these approaches argue over whether rationality, truth, and ethics are culturally and historically universal (Modernism), incommensurable (postmodernism) or dialogical (Hermeneutics). This course explores these approaches with an emphasis on how they apply in the context of one culture trying to understand another. Requirements include regular class participation that shows familiarity with the readings and many brief essays.

Prerequisite: courses in Philosophy at the 200-level.