COURSE DESCRIPTIONS
FALL 2019

Phil 0002:
Introduction to Philosophy

The major types of philosophical thought and the central problems of philosophy are presented through study of some classic texts of the great philosophers. Offered each term. (May be used to satisfy the second half of the college writing requirement by students with credit for ENG 1.)

Phil 0003:
Language & Mind
Brian Epstein

Are we the only species with minds? Do animals — dolphins, chimpanzees, birds, spiders — have minds, or do they just have brains? We are the only species with language. Some animals have what might be called proto-languages, much simpler signaling systems, but these do not seem to give those species the spectacular boost in intelligence that language gives us. It is generally agreed that language makes our minds very different from animal minds, but how, and why? Are we the only conscious species? Are we the only self-conscious species? What is it like to be a bat? Is it like anything to be a spider?

In the first half of the course we will explore fundamental questions about the nature of minds. What does it take for something to have a mind? We will discuss the empirical research that has recently shed new light on the questions about animal minds, while sharpening philosophical questions about the nature of minds in general.

In the second half of the course, we will look at human language, its structure and evolution, and the effects it has on our minds. We will also explore "linguistic relativity": do people in other cultures think differently than we do? Is there a relation between the language we speak and how we think?

The course has no prerequisites, and it is particularly appropriate for students who are not likely to major in philosophy but want to get a substantial introduction to the specific philosophical issues surrounding the mind-body problem and its relation to language. Readings will include classic philosophical essays by Turing, Nagel, Putnam, Jackendoff, Dennett, and others.

Phil 0024-01:
Introduction to Ethics
David Denby

At this moment, like every other, you're faced with a question: What should I do?

People often say that, in general, what you should do is help others. But then they would, wouldn't they? Perhaps what you really should do is always act in your own self-interest. Perhaps that is what everyone else is already doing anyway (despite what they say).

Some people say that you should promote the values of your community or society. But some societies have vile values. Indeed, don't the values of our society need at least a little adjustment? Anyway, why should the fact that a society is yours mean that you should promote its values, especially if doing so is contrary to your self-interest?

Some people say that you should act according to God's will. But what does God will, exactly? And surely we should obey Him only if He is good and commands us to do what is right. Yet that seems to mean that morality is independent of Him.
Some philosophers have argued that whether you should do an action depends entirely on its consequences (compared to those of its alternatives). But should you really ignore the past? Doesn't just punishment, for instance, depend on whether the person is actually guilty -- a fact about the past?

Other philosophers have focused instead on the motives behind an action, in particular on whether you're acting out of respect for others (and yourself). Still others have argued that whether you should do an action depends on a combination of these and perhaps other factors. But each of these suggestions faces problems: What on earth is "respecting others"? What is it to "combine" the various factors? Self-interest then? Maybe, but even self-interest is a tricky notion. Something is not in your self-interest simply because you want it, as every smoker knows. And maybe our interests, or at least the best means for achieving them, are mutually interdependent: perhaps the best way for you to get what you want depends on what I do and vice versa.

We will discuss all this in this course. After a brief introductory discussion of logic and the nature of ethical theory we will spend most of the semester critically evaluating a number of normative ethical theories. These will include various forms of Relativism, religiously-based theories, Utilitarianism, Kantianism, Egoism and Social Contract theories. We will also discuss self-interest, values, and other matters. Finally, we will discuss how to apply what we've learned to an issue of contemporary moral concern – probably abortion.

**Phil 0024-02:**
**Introduction to Ethics**
*Monica Wong Link*

What kind of standards can we use for determining whether an action is right or wrong? Is morality just a matter of popular opinion? What responsibilities, if any, do we have to people other than ourselves and those most close to us, and how should we balance competing interests?

These are the some of the questions that will be addressed as we study the fundamentals of various ethical theories including relativism, consequentialism, duty-based ethics, virtue ethics and social contract theory. With this background, we will also devote some class time to discussing how these ethical theories can help us analyze real-world dilemmas. We will consider topics pertinent to choices that an individual might face (e.g., abortion, raising children), as well as to decisions that affect larger communities (e.g., alleviating poverty and preserving the environment.)

Prior experience in philosophy is not necessary; this course is intended for students interested in acquiring and sharpening their oral and written skills in order to construct, analyze, object to, and revise arguments.

**Phil 0033:**
**Logic**
*Susan Russinoff*

How can one tell whether a deductive argument succeeds in establishing its conclusion? What distinguishes good deductive arguments from bad ones? Questions such as these will be addressed in this course. We will discuss what a formal language is, how arguments in English are to be expressed in various formal languages, and what is gained from so expressing them. We will cover sentential logic, first-order predicate logic, identity theory, definite descriptions, and metatheory. Satisfies MATH requirement.

**Phil 038:**
**Rational Choice**
*Patrick Forber*

Decision making and strategic interaction are activities we engage in every day. But do we make the right decisions? Do we adopt the most advantageous strategies? This course will approach these questions by using a set of formal methods for analyzing decisions and strategies: decision theory and game theory. We will cover the basic formal frameworks of probability and game theory and their application to problems in decision making and strategic thinking, tackling a number of troublesome paradoxes that emerge. We will also look at promising applications of
The course focuses on forms of philosophical skepticism—claims to the effect that we can never know, or can never really know, something that we tend to think we do know, or at least may know. We will examine three forms of skepticism and the relations among them: skepticism about the external world, skepticism about other minds, and skepticism about God. Our primary concern, in each case, will be to ask not so much whether what the skeptic says is true, but rather whether it is clear what exactly the skeptic is seeking to assert, or deny, and hence whether the skeptic's "discovery" and its significance are what he takes them to be. The skeptic typically presents himself as interested in knowledge; but a consideration of the various skeptical arguments gives us an opportunity to think deeply and systematically not merely about what we can and cannot know, but equally about issues such as the following: What does 'world' mean? What is our relation to the world and, in particular, can we truly conceive of ourselves apart from that relation? What is our relation to our body and, in particular, can we make sense of the idea that we might not have a body, or have a different body? What is our relation to other people and to their 'inner lives'? In particular, can we conceive of ourselves apart from a relation to others? In what sense might feelings, thoughts, experiences, etc, be said to be 'inner' or 'private'? What does it mean to believe, or not to believe, in God? Thus, throughout our discussion, questions that originally present themselves as epistemological questions (questions about knowledge) will turn out to be just as much metaphysical questions (questions about being). And all of those questions will involve us in reflections on language.

The primary texts in this course will be Descartes' Meditations on First Philosophy, Shakespeare's Othello, and Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. In addition to the primary texts we will also use texts by Hilary Putnam, Barry Stroud, Max Scheler, Stanley Cavell, Franz Rosenzweig, and Kierkegaard.

According to Hamlet, there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in philosophy. Maybe he was right. What Hamlet couldn't know, however, was that today the dreams of philosophy may be made real by movies. Take some recent movies such as Inception, Ex Machina or Memento. Or less recent ones, such as The Matrix, Blade Runner, 2001, or Clockwork Orange. They are all philosophical movies, that is, movies that bring out, and help us in understanding, some of the deepest problems that philosophers have been tackling: how can we be free if we are subject to the laws of nature? How can we be sure that the world we perceive as real is real? Is there such a thing as the right answer to ethical dilemmas? And, finally, what is that makes cinema an art – and perhaps the most relevant art nowadays?

Was Socrates guilty of treason and impiety? Did he corrupt the young of Athens? In “Socrates and his Critics,” we will read Plato's early ethical dialogues, encountering Socrates as a model teacher, someone who fearlessly inquired into the civic values of his time, who formed our conceptions of what it is to think clearly and critically, who understood that thinking is a communal cooperative practice, who showed us how to remain steadfast in the face of ambiguity and uncertainty... and who was condemned to death by the Athenians for treason, corrupting the young and dishonoring the Gods of the city.
Working together, we will attempt to follow Socrates' model, to engage in collaborative discussion of the topics of Plato's early dialogues: friendship, sex, piety, justice, art and unconscious knowledge. Along with those dialogues, we will read modern authors who wrote on (what purports to be) the same subject (Kant on friendship, Durkheim and Kierkegaard on faith and religion, Nagel on sex, Oscar Wilde on art, Freud on unconscious knowledge) and enact a Socratic discussion with each of them. We’ll look at some artworks and attempt to see a painting through Socrates’ critical gaze, contrasting it with Wilde’s aesthetic stance. Finally, we shall read the Apology and the Crito, and end with the class dramatically recreating the trial of Socrates on the charges of treason, impiety and corrupting the youth, limiting ourselves to the evidence presented by the early dialogues.

The course has six aims:

1) to acquaint the class with Plato's "early Socratic" ethical dialogues,

2) to compare Socratic views with a range of later philosophic approaches, methods and positions on ethical topics, noting the relation between a work’s genre (dialogue, essay, treatise, aphorisms) and its aims and audience,

3) to engage in “debates” with some modern critics of Socratic views and methods,

4) to attempt to see a work of art through Socratic eyes, contrasting it with Wilde’s aesthetic stance,

5) to reflect on the conception of philosophy --and its role in moral education-- that each philosopher advocates,

6) to form a collegial intellectual community among the participants, one which we hope will extend beyond the seminar.

**Phil 0092-02: Philosophy for Children**  
Susan Russinoff

From a young age, children ask questions about everything around them and many of their questions are philosophical! Kids have strong intuitions about what is beautiful, fair, right, and wrong. They enjoy playing with language and are intrigued by logical puzzles.

There are many benefits to facilitating philosophical dialog with children in the classroom. It hones analytical reasoning, reading comprehension, emotional growth, and independent thinking. Philosophical inquiry is collaborative and emerges in classrooms in which questioning, discussion, and search for unexamined assumptions are encouraged.

In this course, we will think about the value of philosophy for children, develop activities and curricula for teaching children, and work with kindergartners, first, and second graders at the Eliot-Pearson School on the Tufts campus. Classroom visits to Eliot-Pearson School TBD  
Prerequisite: at least one philosophy course (preferably more than one.)

**Phil 0092-03: Climate Change Ethics**  
George Smith

In addition to enormous improvements in quality of life, the Industrial Revolution has from the outset introduced risks of occasional harms to individuals who had little or no say in living under these risks and little means for obviating them. Society has devised various means at least to compensate those suffering such inadvertent harm – for example, Workmen's Compensation and, on Oliver Wendell Holmes's view, some aspects of modern tort law. In the case of nuclear power the scale of the risks have become large enough to spark controversy over whether the risks are even morally permissible. Granting fully the uncertainties about the harms that human emissions of greenhouse gases may produce, those emissions are without question creating risks of harm to people in the future
who have no say whatever about whether the risks are worth the potential gains. What is so unusual about climate change as a challenge in risk management is the worldwide scale of the potential harms and the 50 or more years of lag time before the full extent of the harms will emerge if they occur at all. This course will review the growing literature on climate change ethics, focusing on two questions: (1) Who ought to bear the responsibility for any harms that do occur in the future?; and (2) What obligations do we presently have either to obviate those risks or to provide means for compensating those who, beyond their capacity to prevent it, suffer harm? Not too far in the background throughout the course will be the more sweeping question whether it is morally permissible at all to impose a risk on others of such a scale.

**Phil 0092-04:**  
**Philosophy and Artificial Intelligence**  
**Mario DeCaro**

HAL 9000, Terminator, Blade Runner’s replicants, Eva from Ex Machina: films are replete with very intelligent machines, which in most cases hate humans and want to destroy us. Until recently these characters were considered pure fantasies, but nowadays the situation is different. More and more, machines organize and control our lives, solve problems, and do things that would be impossible for us, while some of them look almost exactly like humans (think of Sophia, the robot that in 2017 was given citizenship by Saudi Arabia). A.I. seems close to succeeding.

In this lunch seminar, we will explore some of the deepest and most fascinating philosophical and ethical questions that the rise of A.I. has generated. Is it possible to build machines that feel sentiments, have minds, and act freely? (These questions of course require that we become clearer on what would count for us as feeling sentiments, having a mind, or acting feely.) Will some of them ever gain the status of moral entities? If they do, which duties and rights should we attribute to them? And (of course) how could we assess the notorious issue whether I.A. can revolt against humans?

In discussing these questions, we will use readings by philosophers, scientists, and science-fiction writers, watch clips from movies, and host guest speakers.

**Phil 092-05:**  
**Ethics Bowl**  
**Susan Russinoff**

The Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl is a debate-style competition in which teams of undergraduates argue against each other to resolve cases of actual ethical dilemmas. The Ethics Bowl gives students a chance to enter an academic competition that combines excitement and fun with an educationally valuable experience in the areas of practical and professional ethics. Participating students can earn 1/2 credit (pass/fail) and will attend coaching sessions on Mondays and Wednesdays during the noon free blocks during the weeks leading up to the Tufts competition. These sessions will help students think through ethical questions and issues and prepare them to construct arguments to support their positions on the cases written for the Ethics Bowl.

**Phil 092-06:**  
**Paradoxes & Dilemmas**  
**Riccardo Strobino**

Paradoxes and dilemmas are problematic cases, conundrums or puzzles that force us to accept counterintuitive conclusions from apparently acceptable premises or to choose among equally undesirable outcomes without an apparent justification. They are often associated with moments of crisis and revolutionary developments in the history of philosophy and beyond.

The course will introduce students to an array of famous cases in the history of Western thought from Antiquity to the present. Themes under discussion will include - but not be limited to - Zeno's paradoxes (the infinite), the liar paradox (truth), the heap (vagueness), the ship of Theseus (identity), Russell's paradox (sets), the Gettier problem (knowledge), moral luck, nuclear deterrence, the lottery paradox, the voting paradox and the prisoner's dilemma.
The course indirectly provides an introduction to various fundamental themes in metaphysics, logic, epistemology and moral philosophy and offers analytical tools that can be useful for students in any area of the humanities, social sciences and international relations.

**Phil 103: Logic**  
**George Smith**

How can one tell whether a deductive argument succeeds in establishing its conclusion? What distinguishes good deductive arguments from bad ones? Questions like these will be addressed in this course. The principal text will be Richard Jeffrey's *Formal Logic*, though it will be supplemented by other texts and by notes from the instructor. The accent will be as much on coming to understand what the word 'formal' means in the title of Jeffrey's book as on what 'logic' means. We will discuss what a formal language is, how arguments in English are to be expressed in various formal languages, and what is gained from so expressing them. In the jargon of the field, we will cover sentential logic, first order predicate logic, identity theory, and definite descriptions. We will also look briefly at the history of logic. The course requires no specific background and no special ability in mathematics. Understanding why formal methods work will be as important as manipulating them. The course will require six written homework assignments and an open-book final exam. The homework assignments, which students are expected to work on in groups, form the core of the course. Students should anticipate spending an average of eight hours per week outside of class in this course.

**Phil 0111: Semantics**  
**Dilip Ninan**

Anyone who knows a natural language (like English or Hindi or ASL) possesses a remarkable ability: he or she is in a position to understand an unlimited number of novel sentences, i.e. sentences that he or she has not previously encountered. Semantics, the study of linguistic meaning, aims to explain our ability to do this. Contemporary “formal semantics” is based on Richard Montague’s idea that this explanatory goal is best achieved by using the tools and techniques of modern logic. This course will serve as an introduction to this influential approach to the study of linguistic meaning. Students will be introduced to the foundational ideas undergirding this framework, the relationship between semantics and pragmatics, and to the mathematical tools used in formal semantics. We will use these formal and conceptual tools to analyze a number of natural language expressions, including quantifiers and modals. A background in logic and/or syntax is useful, though not essential.

**Phil 0123: Philosophy of Law**  
**Erin Kelly**

This course involves philosophical examination of some legal principles operating in several domains of law: criminal law, tort law, and constitutional law. We will read some influential legal cases and consider the principles used by American courts to settle those cases. We will scrutinize the legal principles from an ethical point of view in order to shed light on the relationship, or lack thereof, between law and justice. Finally, we will take up questions about the conditions of law’s legitimacy and the moral obligations, if any, we have to obey the law. This will take us into a discussion of the relationship between law and democratic citizenship. Finally, we will consider civil disobedience and some other forms of resistance to unjust law.

**Phil 0129: Meta-ethics**  
**Sigrún Svavarsdóttir**

This is an advanced course in metaethics, open to both undergraduate and graduate students. In metaethics, we address questions such as: What are we doing when engaging in moral thinking or in moral discussion? What is the nature of moral and other value judgments? Are there moral facts? If so, what is the nature of these facts? Are there
objective values? What would it be for values to be objective? We will undertake a rigorous study of the most influential 20th century analytic literature on these issues, starting with the work of G. E. Moore. The rest of the course is organized as a study of the main responses that have been given to Moore’s open question argument. The students will be exposed to the main theoretical developments within 20th century metaethics: non-cognitivism/expressivism, error theory, naturalized realism, and informative dispositional analysis. The course aims to give the students a solid grounding in metaethics. Prerequisites: Two philosophy courses.

**Phil 0130: Moral Psychology**
Patrick Forber

From an evolutionary perspective human have a fascinating and distinctive combination of cognitive complexity and sociality. Indeed, the combination is so distinctive that many conjectures that our cognition co-evolved with our sociality: complex cognition makes possible a psychology capable of following moral norms, and the need to track whether social behavior conforms to moral norms creates an environment that drives the evolution of even more sophisticated cognition. In this course we will investigate contemporary proposals about the evolution of human cognition and moral psychology with the aim of evaluating the proposals and their potential consequences for ethical theorizing. The course will survey both scientific approaches and philosophical arguments based on evolutionary science, especially the so-called “debunking” arguments. Previous coursework on evolution is recommended but not required.

**Phil 131: Epistemology**
Jody Azzouni

Sometimes we know something, and sometimes we have just made a good guess. Can we tell the difference? Is there a method for recognizing that we know something? We usually can supply evidence for what we know. Must we always be able to do so for us to rightly claim that we know something? Evidence for a belief is usually something we know. Do we need evidence for our evidence? If so, how do we ever manage to know anything? Some philosophers, called skeptics, don't think we do know anything. In this course, we'll try to answer these questions, or at least explore them further. Readings will be from articles, both contemporary and classic.

**Phil 151: Ancient Philosophy**
Riccardo Strobino

**Phil 0186: Phenomenology and Existentialism**
Stephen White


**Phil 191-01: Seminars: TA Training Workshop**
David Denby

TAs are expected to do many things—grade papers and tests, hold office hours, lead discussions, and work with struggling students. In this workshop, we’ll discuss how best to do these things. The aim is to prepare students to take on TA-ships and ultimately to become better teachers. We will adopt the perspective of TAs in philosophy.
courses, but most of what we discuss will be relevant to TA-ing classes in other departments too. I also hope that the course will help the TAs themselves improve their own writing and presentation skills.

The class will meet once a week and will be conducted as a workshop. Often, I will give a short presentation and sometimes we’ll do some short in-class exercises. But we will spend most of our time in discussion. The topics will include how to deal with arguments and theories, the basics of writing papers, designing paper assignments and tests, leading recitation sections, grading, office hours and dealing with students face-to-face, the first day, dealing with “difficult” students, giving presentations, etiquette, rules and regulations, designing courses and syllabi. Other matters will arise along the way.

The course will be worth ½ credit. There will be no grades.

**Phil 191-02:**
**Seminars: Non-human Cognition** *(Course will count toward Part IID of the CBS major)*
Brian Epstein

Non-human cognition

Facebook recently sent out a survey asking: “Please agree or disagree with the following statement: Facebook cares about me.” The available responses ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Notably, they didn’t include an option for the user to say, “Facebook cannot have feelings, because it is a corporation.” Can a corporation have feelings? Can it think? Can it have beliefs, form intentions, take actions?

Various philosophical literatures examine the nature of cognition among different types of non-humans. There are literatures on group cognition, on corporate agency, on animal cognition, on artificial intelligence, on systems of computational agents, on robot thinking, and more. The aim of this seminar is to cut across these literatures and explore the question of non-human cognition in general. When we speak of cognition and agency by groups, corporations, animals, machines, etc., do we mean it literally or metaphorically? Do we use human cognition as the prototype, and then extend human-like cognition to other entities? Or rather is human cognition just one species of a more general category? How should we approach the question of non-human minds and thinkers?

Readings will include selections from the literatures on group cognition, animal cognition, artificial intelligence, and philosophy of mind, as well as work on social construction and the nature of category construction.

**Phil 0191-03:**
**Seminar: Race and Black Progress**
Lionel McPherson

In the words of Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, “The best way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.” How, then, is progress toward correcting racial injustice and inequality supposed to be possible? This research seminar will focus on major themes addressed in the book manuscript-in-progress The Afterlife of Race. Specific themes under consideration include: the idea of race and recognition of mixed race; the legitimacy and nature of color-conscious political solidarity; the value of integration and forgiveness in response to historical injustice; and practical prospects for Black American socioeconomic progress when law and public policy have an increasingly “post-racial” orientation. In addition to draft chapters of the manuscript, readings will include Alexander, Appiah, Haslanger, Mills, Shelby, Taylor, and West.

**Phil 195-01:**
**Moral Responsibility and Personal Identity**
Lionel McPherson

The idea of moral responsibility is often connected with judgments of moral desert. How could a person deserve blame or punishment, praise or reward? What excusing, mitigating, or disqualifying conditions could there be?
Perhaps most fundamentally, what in or about “the person” could be properly subject to assessments of moral responsibility in the first place? Moral responsibility is also connected with personal identity. We ordinarily take personal identity for granted: it would seem obvious, say, that “The person having this thought is and has always been ‘me.’” Yet philosophers from Locke to Parfit have recognized that determining what personal identity consists in is hard. Is “the person” essentially a body, a mind/brain, or some immaterial essence? Consider the following questions:

Will “I” continue to exist after my body has died? If yes, why should I be especially worried about my physical death? If no, does this imply that “I” am nothing over and above my body? If “I” were to undergo a psychological transformation, could I literally become a different person? If yes, and “I” had committed a serious crime, would it be legitimate to punish that different person who now inhabits the same body?

In short, the philosophical problem of personal identity can pose philosophical and practical problems regarding moral responsibility.


**Phil 195-02:**

**Chomsky**

**Jody Azzouni and Jeff McConnell**

Noam Chomsky is recognized to have revolutionized linguistics. Not as well-known is his deep engagement with philosophy—especially as it bears on linguistics. He has written knowledgeably and controversially not just on questions about the methodology of linguistics, and its relationship to other sciences, but on typical philosophical topics in metaphysics such as the mind/body problem and free will.

In this course, we will look how Chomsky's transformation of linguistics—as a science—directly leads him to philosophical positions that put him in opposition to the major philosophers of his day (and ours): W.V. O. Quine, Donald Davidson, Michael Dummett, Hilary Putnam, Jerrold J. Katz, and others. We will look at both his writings and the writings of some of his many opponents and critics. Among the topics we'll consider are innate ideas and analyticity, the empirical status of linguistics, its methodology, its relationship to other sciences, the status of semantics as a science reductionism, and the mind/body problem.

The course will be self-contained: in particular, we will not presuppose any previous knowledge of linguistics.

Requirements for the course: two previous philosophy courses or consent.

**Phil 0297:**

**Graduate Writing Seminar**

**Dilip Ninan & Sigrun Svavarsdottir**

A writing workshop open to all philosophy master's degree candidates who have completed at least one semester in the program. Graded SAT/UNSAT. Recommendations: Master's degree candidacy in Philosophy or permission of department chair; submission in advance of an acceptable paper draft or detailed paper outline to be polished during the course.