PHILOSOPHY

Connecticut Hall, 203.432.1665
http://philosophy.yale.edu
M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.

Chair
Verity Harte

Director of Graduate Studies
Zoltán Szabó (C301, 203.432.1669, zoltan.szabo@yale.edu)


Associate Professor John Pittard

Assistant Professors Robin Dembroff, Daniel Greco

FIELDS OF STUDY

The department offers a wide range of courses in various traditions of philosophy, with strengths and a well-established reputation in the history of philosophy, ethics, philosophy of law, epistemology, philosophy of language, and philosophy of religion as well as other central topics.

SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PH.D. DEGREE

1. In the first two years all students must complete a total of twelve term courses. Graduate courses are grouped: (1) metaphysics, theory of knowledge, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, philosophy of science; (2) ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, political philosophy, philosophy of law, and theory of value; (3) history of philosophy. No more than six of the twelve and no fewer than two courses may be taken in each group. At least one of the twelve courses taken must be logic (unless the logic requirement is satisfied in some other way), and this course does not count toward the required minimum of two within any of the three categories.

2. Two qualifying papers must be submitted, one in the history of philosophy, the other in another distribution area. These papers must be more substantial and professional than an ordinary term paper.

3. Approval of the dissertation prospectus is expected before the end of the sixth term. Upon completion of all predissertation requirements, including the prospectus, students are admitted to candidacy for the Ph.D. Admission to candidacy must take place by the end of the third year of study.

4. Students in Philosophy typically teach in the third, fourth, and sixth years.

5. In addition to the twelve required philosophy courses, before the dissertation defense students must take at least one class that is not listed in philosophy on a subject that is relevant to their research.

6. The dissertation is expected to be submitted in the end of the fifth to sixth year.

CLASSICS AND PHILOSOPHY COMBINED PH.D. PROGRAM

The Classics and Philosophy Program is a combined program, offered by the Departments of Classics and Philosophy at Yale, for students wishing to pursue graduate study in ancient philosophy. Suitably qualified students may apply for entry to the program either through the Classics department for the Classics track or through the Philosophy department for the Philosophy track.

Applicants for the Classics track of the combined program must satisfy the general requirements for admission to the Classics graduate program, in addition to the requirements of the Classics track of the combined program. Details of the Classics track of the program are available online at https://classics.yale.edu/research/ancient-philosophy/classics-and-philosophy-joint-program.

Applicants for the Philosophy track of the combined program must satisfy the general requirements for admission to the Philosophy graduate program, in addition to the requirements of the Philosophy track of the combined program. Details of the Philosophy track of the program are available online at http://philosophy.yale.edu/graduate-program/classics-and-philosophy-program.

The combined program is overseen by an interdepartmental committee currently consisting of Verity Harte, David Charles, and Brad Inwood together with the director of graduate studies (DGS) for Classics and the DGS for Philosophy.

PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOLOGY COMBINED PH.D. PROGRAM

The Philosophy and Psychology Program is a combined program, offered by the Departments of Philosophy and Psychology at Yale. Students enrolled in the program complete a series of courses in each discipline as well as an interdisciplinary dissertation that falls at the intersection of the two. On completing these requirements, students are awarded a Ph.D. either in Philosophy and Psychology, or in Psychology and Philosophy.
Students can be admitted into the combined program either through the Psychology department or through the Philosophy department. Students must be accepted into one of these departments (the “home department”) through the standard admissions process, and both departments must then agree to accept the student into the combined program.

Students can be accepted into the combined program either (a) at the time they initially apply for admission to their home department, or (b) after having already competed some course work within the home department. In either case, students must be accepted into the combined program by each department.

Students in the combined program complete two-thirds of the course requirements of each of the two disciplines, then write a qualifying paper and a dissertation that are fully interdisciplinary. For more details about the program requirements, see http://philosophy.yale.edu/graduate-program/philosophy-and-psychology-combined-phd-program.

MASTER’S DEGREES

M.Phil. See Degree Requirements under Policies and Regulations.

M.A. (en route to the Ph.D.) An M.A. degree is awarded to students after completion of seven term courses with an average grade of High Pass.

Please see the Philosophy website for information on the program: http://philosophy.yale.edu.

COURSES

PHIL 567a, Mathematical Logic I  Sun-Joo Shin
An introduction to the metatheory of first-order logic, up to and including the completeness theorem for the first-order calculus. An introduction to the basic concepts of set theory is included.

PHIL 610b / PSYC 610b, The Self Over Time: Psychological and Philosophical Approaches  Paul Bloom and Laurie Paul
What makes someone the same person over time? Philosophers and psychologists have long been fascinated by identity and the nature of the self. Philosophers ask: Are there really such things as individuals who endure over time, from cradle to grave? Or is this an illusion – is a single life nothing but a string of related individuals? If so, is it rational to value who you are now over who you might become in the distant future? In any case, how can someone undergo profound change yet remain the same person? Psychologists explore beliefs and inclinations. What is our natural understanding of personal identity and the self, and how does this change through development? How does this understanding connect to how we think about moral responsibility, love, gratitude, and guilt? What can neuroscience and cognitive science tell us about the nature of a persisting self? In this course, we explore the nature of personal identity and see what happens when philosophy meets psychology. While the course begins with introductory material, we quickly get to contemporary debates of real interest. Prerequisite: some background in psychology, philosophy, or related disciplines. Permission of the instructor required.

PHIL 611b, Early Modern Philosophy of Language  Zoltan Szabo and Kenneth Winkler
Study and discussion of early modern contributions to the philosophy of language. Reading in the Port-Royal Logic, Locke’s Essay, and other works. Topics include the nature of signs; ideas as sources of meaning; the formation of propositions; truth; necessary truth; inference and logical form.

PHIL 616a, Philosophy of Spinoza  Michael Della Rocca
An in-depth study of Spinoza’s philosophy with attention to his major work, the Ethics, as well as his political writings, the Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect, the letters, and other writings. Focus not only on Spinoza’s metaphysics, but also on his views on philosophy of mind, teleology, action, and emotion. Some attention also to competing methods for interpreting works in the history of philosophy.

PHIL 625a, Topics in Epistemology  Keith DeRose
A survey of some recent work in epistemology, with an emphasis on connections between formal approaches to epistemology and traditional epistemological questions. We explore the power and limitations of Bayesian approaches to epistemology; the relationship between credence on the one hand, and belief and knowledge on the other; higher-order knowledge and probability; and other topics.

PHIL 626b, Cognitive Science of Morality  Joshua Knobe
Introduction to the emerging field of moral cognition. Focus on questions about the philosophical significance of psychological findings. Topics include the role of emotion in moral judgment; the significance of character traits in virtue ethics and personality psychology; the reliability of intuitions and the psychological processes that underlie them.

PHIL 627b, Computability and Logic  Sun-Joo Shin
A technical exposition of Gödel’s first and second incompleteness theorems and of some of their main consequences in proof theory and model theory, such as Löb’s theorem, Tarski’s undefinability of truth, provability logic, and nonstandard models of arithmetic.

PHIL 634a, Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence  John Pittard
An investigation of the epistemic significance of disagreement, focusing on recent work on this question and on several related issues in the theory of rationality.

PHIL 637a, Philosophy of Mathematics  Sun-Joo Shin
Metaphysical and epistemological issues raised by mathematics. Questions concerning the notion of a set; whether one can quantify over absolutely everything; whether there are really infinite sets of different sizes; the significance of Gödel’s incompleteness theorems; arguments designed to show that certain mathematical terms are referentially indeterminate.
PHIL 639b, Modal Logic  Sun-Joo Shin
Basic philosophical concepts and logical tools underlying different modal systems, mainly focusing on necessity and possibility. Topics include propositional logic and its natural deductive system; modal operators and development of the simplest natural deductive system; extensions of the basic propositional modal system; intensional semantics; a diagrammatic method to check validity or invalidity; and quantified modal logic (QML). These topics lead to interesting philosophical issues and several nonstandard logical assumptions.

PHIL 642b, Language and Power  Jason Stanley
An investigation into the way language shapes our social world, drawing on readings from feminist theory, critical race theory, formal semantics and pragmatics, political psychology, and European history.

PHIL 643a, Subjectivity, Objectivity, and Intersubjectivity  Paul Franks
How is thinking possible? It can seem impossible to simultaneously meet three necessary conditions for the very possibility of thinking. First, thinking is not thinking unless it is performed by subjects with their own viewpoints and interests. Second, thinking is not thinking unless it has at least the form of objectivity, the possibility of truth or falsehood. Third, thinking is not thinking unless it is accessible and communicable to more than one subject. How can thinking be by a subject, yet transcend that subject's viewpoint and interests in order to be communicable to another whose viewpoint and interests differ, let alone in order to focus on the way the world is independently of viewpoint? Emphasis on subjectivity seems to make both intersubjectivity and objectivity impossible, while emphasis on objectivity seems to leave no room for subjectivity and therefore intersubjectivity. We investigate this question by means of transcendental methods pioneered by Kant and further developed by analytic philosophers. Authors include Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Carnap, Reichenbach, Strawson, Sellars, Quine, Kuhn, Stroud, Evans, and Davidson.

PHIL 644a / WGSS 644a, Social Ontology  Robin Dembroff
Study of conceptual and methodological foundations of social ontology, as well as particular topics within social ontology, such as the nature of gender and race.

PHIL 655a, Normative Ethics  Shelly Kagan
A systematic examination of normative ethics, the part of moral philosophy that attempts to articulate and defend the basic principles of morality. The bulk of the course surveys and explores some of the main normative factors relevant in determining the moral status of a given act or policy (features that help make a given act right or wrong). Brief consideration of some of the main views about the foundations of normative ethics (the ultimate basis or ground for the various moral principles).

PHIL 660a, Hylomorphism: A Critical Assessment of Aristotle's and Neo-Aristotelian Theories  David Charles
Hylomorphism is, in broad outline, the idea that substances and artifacts are made up of matter and form (or structure). A statue is, on this account, made up of its matter (for example, clay) and its shape (for example, that of Athena), if the clay statue is a statue of Athena. You and I are not simply quantities of physical materials; we are physical materials with a certain form or organization. This idea has been employed by Aristotle and by several recent writers, such as David Wiggins, Kit Fine, and Kathrin Koslicki, to answer questions about identity over time, change, and generation. It has also been used to address mind-body problems, taking the body as matter and the mind as form. Specific questions to be investigated include: (1) What is a form? Is it best understood in terms of structure, capacity, activity? (2) What is the relation between form and matter in a substance and artifact? (3) What are the causal roles of matter and form in a substance or artifact? But our general goal is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the hylomorphic account of substances and artifacts. Priority for enrollment is given to graduates and advanced undergraduates (seniors and juniors) in philosophy or classics. Auditors are allowed subject to enrollment and with the permission of the instructor; they are expected to attend all classes, complete all reading assignments, and participate in class discussion, but not to complete writing assignments.

PHIL 664b, Justice, Taxes, and Global Financial Integrity  Thomas Pogge
This seminar studies the formulation, interpretation, and enforcement of national and international tax rules from the perspective of national and global economic justice.

PHIL 671a, Moral Emotions  Stephen Darwall
A close study of the role of emotions and attitudes in the moral life and in moral philosophy. The course investigates the nature of emotions such as shame, guilt, gratitude, love, and respect, as well as related phenomena as empathy and sympathy. It considers their relation to fundamental moral concepts, as well as their epistemological role and capacity to ground moral judgments and facts.

PHIL 675b, Ethics and the Future  Shelly Kagan
Decisions we make now may affect whether human life will continue on Earth or not, or what the quality of that life will be like. This means that the existence and nature of hundreds of trillions of lives (a conservative estimate) may hang in the balance. Arguably, then, our highest moral priority should be to ensure that human life continues, and at an acceptable level of well-being. The view that this should be our overriding moral concern has been dubbed “long-termism.” The seminar is devoted to examining this position and exploring the moral assumptions that lie behind it. Prerequisite: a previous course in moral philosophy.

PHIL 677b / WGSS 677b, Feminist Philosophy: Theories of Sex, Gender, and Sexual Orientation  Robin Dembroff
This course surveys several feminist frameworks for thinking about sex, gender, and sexual orientation. We consider questions such as: Is there a tenable distinction between sex and gender? Between gender and sexual orientation? What does it mean to say that gender is a social construction, or that sexual orientation is innate? What is the place of politics in gender and sexual identities? How do these identities—and especially resistant or transgressive identities—impact the creation and revision of social categories?
PHIL 690b / LING 776b, Implicature and Pragmatic Theory  Laurence Horn
Theoretical and experimental approaches to conversational and conventional implicature. Pragmatic intrusion into what is said; constraints on truth-conditional content in neo-Greican pragmatics and relevance theory. Arguments for and against the grammatical view of scalar implicature. Evidence from studies on the acquisition and processing of implicature and presupposition. Prerequisite: one course in semantics or pragmatics, or permission of the instructor.

PHIL 705a, First-Year Seminar  Michael Della Rocca and Laurie Paul
Required of and limited to first-year students in the Philosophy Ph.D. program. Topic varies from year to year. Preparation for graduate work. Reading, writing, and presentation skills.

PHIL 706b, Work in Progress I  Laurie Paul
In consultation with the instructor, each student presents a significant work in progress, e.g., a revised version of an advanced seminar paper or a dissertation chapter. Upon completion of the writing, the student presents the work in a mock colloquium format, including a formal question-and-answer period.

PHIL 719a, Faith and the Will  John Pittard
An investigation of questions concerning the nature of religious faith, the relationship of faith to the will and to desire, and the merits of various prudential, moral, and existential arguments for and against religious faith. Questions to be treated include: Is faith in some sense “meritorious” (to use Aquinas’s language)? Do the commitments of faith essentially involve believing propositions? Can belief be voluntary? Can trust or hope be voluntary? Should we hold religious beliefs to the same epistemic standards that apply to more mundane beliefs? Or should we persist in faith even if these beliefs do not meet conventional rational standards? We explore these questions through writings by Aquinas, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, James, Freud, Wittgenstein, and various contemporary philosophers.

PHIL 729a / LATN 732a, Seneca: Letters on Ethics  Brad Inwood
Lucius Annaeus Seneca was one of the most distinguished writers of Latin prose and also an important Stoic philosopher. This course focuses on readings in his most important and best known works, the Epistularum Morales. Most of the letters we read deal with themes of broad general interest, but some include the more challenging philosophical topics in Stoic ethics that form the culmination of the work. We aim to read the letters included in Seneca: Selected Letters, ed. Catharine Edwards (2019), which has an excellent literary and philological commentary; a few additional letters are read with the more philosophical commentary found in the instructor’s Seneca: Selected Philosophical Letters (2007).

PHIL 750a or b, Tutorial  Zoltan Szabo
By arrangement with faculty.

PHIL 752a, Metaphysics  Laurie Paul
This course is an advanced-level exploration of the metaphysical structure of the world, focusing on the metaphysics of categories. Readings are drawn from a range of contemporary sources.

PHIL 754b, Recent Work in Analytic Philosophy of Religion  Keith DeRose and John Pittard
An advanced seminar engaging state-of-the-art work in analytic philosophy of religion, with attention given to both traditional questions and areas of emerging interest. Possible topics include theodicy, alternatives to traditional theism and naturalism, fine-tuning arguments, creation ethics, skeptical worries facing various religious and nonreligious outlooks, and norms pertaining to religious hope and commitment.

PHIL 756b / CLSS 802b, Plato’s Protagoras  Verity Harte and Brad Inwood
The class reads and discusses the Greek text of Plato’s Protagoras, a central work of Plato’s ethics and moral psychology and of his engagement with the fifth-century intellectual Protagoras. Over the course of the term, we read the entire dialogue, with detailed in-class discussion each week of focused passages chosen from larger sections of the work. This core course for the combined Ph.D. program in Classics and Philosophy is open to all graduate students in Philosophy or Classics who have suitable preparation in Attic Greek (L5 equivalent) and some prior knowledge of ancient philosophy. Others interested in taking or attending the class must have prior permission of the instructors. Undergraduates are not normally admitted.

PHIL 762b, Idealization and Model-Building in Science and Philosophy  Daniel Greco and Timothy Williamson
Much recent philosophy of science studies the practice of model-building, especially where it involves idealizing assumptions, such as the frictionless planes and point particles of physics, the infinitely large populations of evolutionary biology, and the logically omniscient expected utility maximizers of economics. It is increasingly common to think that philosophers also build models, and that model-building in philosophy can be fruitfully compared to model-building in science. In this class we explore a wide range of philosophical questions about the practice of building idealized models. What relations must such models bear to the real-world systems they model in order for them to give us knowledge? Is model-building always justified by concerns of tractability, or are there other reasons to build idealized models? Is idealization always eliminable in principle? What is the relationship between model-building on the one hand, and the search for laws of nature on the other?