PHILOSOPHY (PHIL)

* PHIL 022a, Philosophy of Masculinities  Robin Dembroff
What is masculinity? What relationships does it bear to femininity, misogyny, and homophobia? To race? To biological sex? This course examines these and other questions related to masculinity from a philosophical perspective. The course develops students’ understanding of masculinity as a cultural product that changes across context and time. It pays particular attention to the ways that masculinity is socially policed and reinforced, rather than a “natural” expression of male sex. Through combinations of academic and popular texts, students critically examine language surrounding masculinity (e.g., “real man,” “bromance”), interlocking relationships between masculinity and other social features, such as race/ethnicity and class, social mechanisms that reproduce masculine norms (e.g., misogyny), and forces that challenge these norms (e.g., trans and queer identifications). From this groundwork, students consider the influence of masculinity on main fields of philosophy, such as epistemology, philosophy of science, ethics, and metaphysics, as well as the prospects for non-hierarchical, non-“toxic” forms of masculinity. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.  

HU

PHIL 115b, First-Order Logic  Kenneth Winkler
An introduction to formal logic. Study of the formal deductive systems and semantics for both propositional and predicate logic. Some discussion of metatheory.  

QR

PHIL 125a / CLCV 125a, Introduction to Ancient Philosophy  Brad Inwood
An introduction to ancient philosophy, beginning with the earliest pre-Socratics, concentrating on Plato and Aristotle, and including a brief foray into Hellenistic philosophy. Intended to be taken in conjunction with PHIL 116.  

WR, HU

PHIL 126b, Introduction to Modern Philosophy from Descartes to Kant  Keith DeRose
An introduction to major figures in the history of modern philosophy, with critical reading of works by Descartes, Malabranche, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. Intended to be taken in conjunction with PHIL 125, although PHIL 125 is not a prerequisite.  

HU

PHIL 128b, Philosophy, Gender, and Patriarchy  Robin Dembroff
This course provides an introductory survey of issues that arise in philosophy of gender and sexuality. We discuss topics concerning the metaphysics of gender and sexual orientation (such as biological essentialism vs. social constructivism); the nature of patriarchy and masculinity; bias and epistemic injustice; sexual harassment and violence; intersectionality; and feminism.  

HU

PHIL 130b / EDST 135b, Philosophy of Education  Jason Stanley
An introduction to the philosophy of education. In this course, we read classical texts about the nature and purpose of education, focusing ultimately on the question of the normative shape and form of education in liberal democracy. What is the difference between education and indoctrination? What is the proper relation, in a liberal democracy, between civic education and vocational education? What shape or form should education take, if it is to achieve its goals? How, for example, is the liberal ideal of equality best realized in the form and structure of an educational system? Authors include Plato, Rousseau, Du Bois, Washington, Stanton, Dewey, Cooper, Woodson, and Freire.  

HU

PHIL 175b, Introduction to Ethics  Shelly Kagan
What makes one act right and another wrong? What am I morally required to do for others? What is the basis of morality? These are some of the questions raised in moral philosophy. Examination of two of the most important answers, the theories of Mill and Kant, with brief consideration of the views of Hume and Hobbes. Discussion of the question: Why be moral?  

HU

PHIL 178b, Introduction to Political Philosophy  Thomas Pogge
A survey of social and political theory, beginning with Plato and continuing through modern philosophers such as Rawls, Nozick, and Cohen. Emphasis on tracing the development of political ideas; challenges to political theories.  

HU

PHIL 179a, Life  Shelly Kagan
Examination of elements that may contribute to a good life, including the question of which truly have value and why. Factors to consider in choosing a career; the significance of the decision whether to have children; the value of education; the importance of love and accomplishment.  

HU

* PHIL 202a / RLST 277a, Existentialism  Norreen Khawaja
Introduction to key problems in European existentialism. Existentialism considered not as a unified movement, but as a tradition of interlocking ideas about human freedom woven through the philosophy, religious thought, art, and political theory of late modern Europe. Readings from Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heti, Lukács, Gide, Heidegger, Fanon, Sartre, de Beauvoir, Cesaire.  

HU

PHIL 203b / EALL 212b, Ancient Chinese Thought  Mick Hunter
An introduction to the foundational works of ancient Chinese thought from the ruling ideologies of the earliest historical dynasties, through the Warring States masters, to the Qin and Han empires. Topics include Confucianism and Daoism, the role of the intellectual in ancient Chinese society, and the nature and performance of wisdom.  

HU
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
What makes someone the same person over time? Philosophers and psychologists have long been fascinated by identity and the nature

PHIL 214b, The Philosophies of Hegel and Schelling  Paul Franks
The competing versions of absolute idealism developed by Hegel and Schelling in the early 1800s. The relationships between
philosophy and a history that culminates in modernity, and between philosophy and religion; the possibility of absolute knowledge and
systematicity; the role of kabbalah in philosophy.  HU

PHIL 223b / RLST 133b / SAST 258b, Indian Philosophy: Beginnings and Foundations  Aleksandar Uskokov
In this course, we introduce prominent themes that preoccupied the doctrinal communities of Ancient India—Brahmanism, Buddhism,
and Jainism. These include first principles (or their absence), notions of personhood and soul (or their absence), the human good, and
the means by which this human good is known. The primary objective is to survey in some depth philosophical ideas in Ancient India as
they were advanced not by systematic philosophers but rather in foundational texts such as the Upaniṣads, the epics, and the Buddhist
sutras. We occasionally read modern writings that attempt to engage the sources in their wider philosophical significance while keeping in
mind their historical context. Knowledge of Indian languages is not required.  HU

* PHIL 227b / ENGL 268b / HUMS 254b / LITR 463b, Literature and Philosophy, Revolution to Romanticism  Jonathan Kramnick
This is a course on the interrelations between philosophical and literary writing beginning with the English Revolution and ending with the
beginnings of Romanticism. We read major works in empiricism, political philosophy, and ethics alongside poetry and fiction in
several genres. Topics include the mind/body problem, political ideology, subjectivity and gender, and aesthetic experience as they take
philosophical and literary form during a long moment of historical change.  WR, HU

PHIL 263a, Skepticism, Faith, Evidence, and Rationality  Keith DeRose
A study of the rationality of everyday, scientific, philosophical, and religious beliefs, through critical readings of the works of some
major early modern philosophers, Descartes, Berkeley, Hume, and Reid, together with writings of recent decades in both religious
estimatology and general epistemology. Evidentialist and conservative approaches to the roles of faith and evidence in our governing of
our fundamental beliefs are investigated and compared.  HU

PHIL 267a, Mathematical Logic  Sun-Joo Shin
An introduction to the metatheory of first-order logic, up to and including the completeness theorem for the first-order calculus.
Introduction to the basic concepts of set theory. Prerequisite: PHIL 115 or permission of instructor.  QR

PHIL 271a / LING 271a, Philosophy of Language  Zoltan Szabo
An introduction to contemporary philosophy of language, organized around four broad topics: meaning, reference, context, and
communication. Introduction to the use of logical notation.  HU

* PHIL 274a / GMAN 254a / JDST 335a / RLST 249a, Jewish Philosophy  Paul Franks
Introduction to Jewish philosophy, including classical rationalism of Maimonides, classical kabbalah, and Franz Rosenzweig’s inheritance
of both traditions. Critical examination of concepts arising in and from Jewish life and experience, in a way that illuminates universal
problems of leading a meaningful human life in a multicultural and increasingly globalized world. No previous knowledge of Judaism is
required.  WR, HU

PHIL 281a, Infinity  Mark Maxwell
The idea of infinity. Traditional and contemporary versions of the paradoxes of space, time, and motion, as well as the paradoxes of
classes, chances, and truth. Some elementary arithmetic, geometry, probability theory, and set theory.  QB, HU

* PHIL 304b / ECON 302b, Homo Economicus and Human Irrationality  Daniel Greco and Larry Samuelson
The aim of the course is to build up a sufficiently strong foundation in the philosophy of science to allow students to critically assess
the challenge posed to the rational choice framework in social science by evidence of human irrationality. Readings are drawn from
philosophy, economics (including behavioral economics), and psychology. Prerequisite: ECON 121 or two prior courses in philosophy.
HU, SO

PHIL 311a / RLST 303a, The End of Metaphysics  Nancy Levene
Exploration of metaphysics in light of the supposition that it is at an end. Readings from classics and critics in philosophy, religion, and
literature.  WR, HU

PHIL 326b / RLST 402b, The Philosophy of Religion  John Pittard
The relation between religion and ethics, traditional arguments for the existence of God, religious experience, the problem of evil,
miracles, immortality, science and religion, and faith and reason.  HU

* PHIL 359a / CGSC 395a, Junior Colloquium in Cognitive Science  Joshua Knobe
Survey of contemporary issues and current research in cognitive science. By the end of the term, students select a research topic for the
senior essay. Enrollment limited to Cognitive Science majors. ½ Course cr

* PHIL 410b / PSYC 410b, 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 instructor is required.

* PHIL 411b, Early Modern Philosophy of Language  
Zoltan Szabo and Kenneth Winkler

Early modern contributions to the philosophy of language. Topics include the nature of signs, ideas as sources of meaning, the formation of propositions, truth, necessary truth, inference, and logical form. Readings from works by Arnauld and Nicole, Locke, Leibniz, and Berkeley; contemporary philosophical reception in the writings of Chomsky, Davidson, and their critics. HU

* PHIL 416a, The Philosophy of Spinoza  
Michael Della Rocca

An in-depth study of Spinoza’s philosophy. Readings from his Ethics, political writings, Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect, letters, and other works. Spinoza’s metaphysics and his views on philosophy of mind, teleology, action, and emotion. Some attention to methods for interpreting works in the history of philosophy. HU

* PHIL 418a / GMAN 377a / HUMS 451a / LITR 306a, Karl Marx’s Capital  
Paul North

A careful reading of Karl Marx’s classic, Capital volume 1, a work of philosophy, economy, and critical social theory that has had a significant global readership for over 150 years. During our work with the book, we also make reference to Capital volume 2, as well as interpretations by influential readers. This is a Franke Seminar in the Humanities at the Whitney Humanities Center. Students who enroll in the seminar will also attend special weekly colloquia with visiting scholars. HU

* PHIL 421a, John Rawls  
Thomas Pogge

This seminar offers a close study of Rawls’s principal writings. It explores how his thinking evolved in communication with contemporary debates in philosophy, political science, law, and economics. And it probes the suitability of his mature conception of justice in regard to the role Rawls intended this conception to play in the 21st century United States. Featuring ample feedback on written and oral work, this seminar is meant to prepare students for future graduate work at a top institution. Prerequisites: Two courses with substantial normative content. HU

* PHIL 425a, Topics in Epistemology  
Keith DeRose

Survey of recent work in epistemology, with an emphasis on connections between formal approaches to epistemology and traditional epistemological questions. Bayesian approaches and their limitations; the relationship of credence to belief and knowledge; higher-order knowledge and probability. Prerequisite: a course in epistemology, or with permission of instructor. HU

* PHIL 427b, Computability and Logic  
Sun-Joo Shin

A technical exposition of Gödel’s first and second incompleteness theorems and of some of their consequences in proof theory and model theory, such as Löb’s theorem, Tarski’s undefinability of truth, provability logic, and nonstandard models of arithmetic. Prerequisite: PHIL 267 or permission of instructor. QR, HU

* PHIL 434a, Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence  
John Pittard

Investigation of the epistemic significance of disagreement. Whether one can reasonably maintain confident belief in the face of disagreement with apparently qualified thinkers; recent responses to that question from conciliationists and anticonciliationists. Related issues in the theory of rationality. HU

* PHIL 437a, Philosophy of Mathematics  
Sun-Joo Shin

We take up a time-honored debate between Platonism and anti-Platonism, along with different views of mathematical truth, that is, logicism, formalism, and intuitionism. Students read classical papers on the subject. Why do we need the philosophy of mathematics? This question could be answered toward the end of the semester, hopefully.

none HU

* PHIL 439b, 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 non-standard logical assumptions. Prerequisite: basic knowledge of deductive systems. HU
* PHIL 442b, Language and Power  Jason Stanley
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. Prerequisite: one philosophy course; a basic course in logic would be helpful.  HU

* PHIL 443a, Subjectivity, Objectivity, Inter-Subjectivity  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, Davidson, Kuhn, Stroud, Evans, McDowell and Brandom. Prerequisite: Some prior study of Kant, e.g., in DS, PHIL 126, or PHIL 204. WR, HU

* PHIL 444a / WGSS 432a, 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. Prerequisites: at least one, but preferably two philosophy courses.  HU

* PHIL 445b / LING 376b, Implicature and Pragmatic Theory  Laurence Horn
This seminar explores theoretical and experimental approaches to conversational and conventional implicature. We examine the role that pragmatic inference plays in the determination of what is said and of truth-conditional content in neo-Greek pragmatics and relevance theory as well as considering arguments for and against the grammatical view of scalar implicature. Our investigations draw on evidence from linguistic diagnostics, corpora, and a range of experimental studies on the acquisition, processing, and patterning of scalar implicature, negative strengthening, and exhaustivity in focus constructions. Finally, we review current work on the effects of discourse context, politeness considerations, and lexical semantics in constraining when and how pragmatic inferences are drawn. Prerequisite: At least one course in semantics, pragmatics, or philosophy of language; or permission of instructor.  SO, RP

* PHIL 447b / GMAN 321b, Aesthetics of Existence, Life as a Work of Art  Staff
A research seminar exploring issues at the intersection of ethics and aesthetics. We discuss the modern idea that in order to attain their highest vocational human beings need to form and transform their nature like a work of art. On this picture, we have to turn our sensible nature into a “second nature” that is expressive of supersensible ideas. After a brief look at the affinity of the virtuous and the beautiful in ancient thought, we discuss the emergence and articulation of the modern idea in Kant, Schiller, Goethe, Schelling, Hegel, and Nietzsche, before exploring how this thought has informed 20th century thought (Adorno, Foucault, Rancière, Agamben). In the last section of the seminar, we highlight the critical notion that the most recent phase of capitalism has exploited the idealist, romantic, and critical ideas of artistic creation and self-creation and turned them into a new disciplinary mechanism (Boltanski/Chiapello). Participants should be familiar with issues in modern aesthetics and ethics. Priority is given to juniors and seniors, who are asked to write a brief e-mail to the instructor, detailing their interest in the course and their familiarity with its topics.  HU

* PHIL 455a / EP&E 334a, 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 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). Prerequisite: a course in moral philosophy.  HU

* PHIL 457a / EP&E 235a / PLSC 283a, Recent Work on Justice  Thomas Pogge
In-depth study of one contemporary book, author, or debate in political philosophy, political theory, or normative economics. Focus varies from year to year based on student interest and may include a ground-breaking new book, the life’s work of a prominent author, or an important theme in contemporary political thought.  HU

* PHIL 460a, Hylomorphism: A Critical Assessment of Aristotle’s and Neo-Aristotelian Theories  David Charles
What is hylomorphism? It is, in broad outline, the idea that substances and artefacts 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. The specific questions to be investigated include: (a) What is a form? Is it best understood in terms of structure, capacity, activity….?; (b) What is the relation between form and matter in a substance and artefact?; (c) What are the causal roles of matter and form in a substance or artefact? Our general goal is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the hylomorphic account of substances and artefacts. Priority given to seniors and juniors in philosophy or classics.  HU

* PHIL 462a / EP&E 362a, The Morality of Reparations  Stephen Darwall
The history of chattel slavery and its long legacy, even to the current moment, is a history of almost unimaginable injustice. What is the appropriate moral response to this history? This turns out to be a complex and difficult question, or set of questions, which we explore
in this course. Some of these are issues of philosophical theory, however, of “nonideal theory,” where the questions concern not what is ideally just, but what responses are called for by historical injustice. But there are also important empirical historical issues concerning the precise character of the injustices and who, and what institutions, were complicit in them. We examine, as best we can, the history of chattel slavery and its long legacy: the white reaction to what Du Bois called “black reconstruction,” racist violence and terror, and decades of white supremacy, including segregation in all its forms and, most recently, mass incarceration. Ultimately, however, our questions are philosophical. What response does justice require to this history and of whom is it required?

* PHIL 464b / PLSC 291b, Justice, Taxes, and Global Financial Integrity  Thomas Pogge
Study of the formulation, interpretation, and enforcement of national and international tax rules from the perspective of national and global economic justice. Previous courses in one or two of the following: law, economics, political science, or political philosophy.  HU

* PHIL 472b / GMAN 314b / PLSC 309b, Contemporary Critical Theory  Seyla Benhabib
Frankfurt School and Critical Theory focuses on a number of unresolved questions such as pragmatic Kantianism; modernity and post-colonial theory; the idea of progress; critiques of surveillance capitalism and neo-liberalism. Readings from Habermas, Honneth, Fraser, A. Allen, Jaeggi and others. Prerequisite: Directed Studies or two or more advanced courses in modern political philosophy.  SO

* PHIL 475b, 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.  HU

* PHIL 480a or b, Tutorial  Daniel Greco
A reading course supervised by a member of the department and satisfying the following conditions: (1) the work of the course must not be possible in an already existing course; (2) the course must involve a substantial amount of writing, i.e., a term essay or a series of short essays; (3) the student must meet with the instructor regularly, normally for at least an hour a week; (4) the proposed course of study must be approved by both the director of undergraduate studies and the instructor.

* PHIL 490a or b and PHIL 491b, The Senior Essay  Daniel Greco
The essay, written under the supervision of a member of the department, should be a substantial paper; a suggested length is between 8,000 and 12,000 words for one-term projects, and between 12,500 and 15,000 words for two-term projects. Students completing a one-term project should enroll in either 490 in the fall or 491 in the spring. Students completing a two-term project should enroll in both 490 and 491. The deadline for senior essays completed in the fall is December 5; the deadline for both one- and two-term senior essays completed in the spring is April 21.

* PHIL 499b / CLCV 320, Before Socrates  Brad Inwood
The origins of Greek philosophy lie in the period before Socrates and Plato. The so-called Presocratics set up many of the questions developed by Plato: the nature of being, the structure of matter, human knowledge and its limitations, causation, etc. Three of the most important early Greek thinkers are studied in this course: Heraclitus, Parmenides, and Empedocles. Knowledge of ancient Greek is not required. Prerequisites: PHIL 125, CLCV 125 or the fall semester of Directed Studies Philosophy.  WR, HU