

Philosophy Department
Fall 2013 Course Descriptions

Phil 3105 Landmarks in Philosophy

TR2 *Tues, Thurs* 2:15pm – 3:30pm

Instructor: Robert Sinclair

Email: rsinclair@brooklyn.cuny.edu

This course will cover central 'landmark' philosophical texts from the history of Western philosophy. We will engage in a close reading and detailed discussion of key selections from texts that every student of philosophy should be familiar with.

Students will develop important skills in reading and analyzing philosophical texts and learn how to reconstruct and compare philosophical arguments.

An effort will also be made to situate these texts historically and to further demonstrate the ongoing relevance of these discussions for contemporary philosophical issues. Our principal authors will include Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hume, Mill, and Dewey.

PHIL 3111 Ancient Philosophy

MY2 *Mon, Wed* 2:15pm – 3:55pm

Instructor: Angelica Nuzzo

Email: anuzzo@brooklyn.cuny.edu

The course is a survey of some of the crucial texts and moments of ancient Greek philosophy.

We will investigate the “beginnings” of *philosophia* as “love of wisdom,” address the historical question of the distinction between “wisdom” and “love of wisdom,” look at the beginning of what has been since then called “metaphysics.” We will address problems of metaphysics, logic, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics by looking at texts of the Presocratics, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, and Epicurus.

The format of the course includes lecture, class discussion, and student presentation. Particular emphasis will be placed on the careful reading, interpretation, and discussion of texts. Objectives of the course are learning how to read, analyze, and interpret philosophical texts as well as assessing the historical transformation of philosophical ideas.

PHIL 3121 Modern Philosophy

TQ6 Tues 6:05pm – 9:25pm

Instructor: Justin Steinberg

Email: jsteinberg@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Modern philosophy arose out of conflict and concluded in “Enlightenment,” but the path was by no means direct, and the development was not unequivocally progressive. In this course, we will trace some of the twists and turns of seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophy by way of close readings of some of the most important texts of this period.

We will focus on the works of seven philosophers: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant.

Some of the main questions that we will ask in this course are:

What are the sources and limits of human knowledge? How are our beliefs justified? Are there good reasons for believing in God? What is the relationship between our minds and our bodies? What is the basis of moral agency and personal identity? Is freedom compatible with determinism?

PHIL 3130 American Philosophy

MW9 Mon, Wed 9:30am – 10:45am

Instructor: Daniel Campos

Email: dcampos@brooklyn.cuny.edu

“American philosophy” refers to the various philosophical traditions that have emerged in the United States as a result of distinctively American history, culture, and experiences.

Classical American philosophers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, Josiah Royce, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead, and subsequent generations of their followers and critics, have engaged the major historical issues of philosophy from distinctive vantage points, and have developed original views such as transcendentalism, pragmatism, and naturalism.

In this course, we will study the historical development of American philosophy, centering our attention in the aforementioned figures and traditions. We will pay special attention to the ways in which American philosophers have responded to problems that emerged in Modern European philosophy regarding the dualisms or oppositions reason/will, intellect/sense, mind/matter, reality/appearance, transcendence/immanence, theory/practice, belief/action, fact/value, and individual/community. We will see how they have developed philosophical concepts, and in one notorious case, a philosophical system, to completely reconfigure our understanding of philosophy, its tasks and problems.

By the end of the semester, the student should understand American philosophy as a distinctive response to Modernity that is not, however, riding the “postmodern” bandwagon.

PHIL 3142 Existentialism and Phenomenology

MW12 Mon, Wed 12:50pm – 2:05pm

Instructor: Angelica Nuzzo

Email: anuzzo@brooklyn.cuny.edu

The course offers an overview of the main topics and issues that characterize the philosophical movement known in the 19th and 20th century as “existentialism”.

Our principal objective throughout the course will be to follow the different ways in which philosophers have been addressing issues concerning the meaning of life and death, the significance of human individuality against the power of universal reason, the relationship between reason and faith, the place of the human subject in the world of nature and history, and the meaning of historical and individual contingency.

We will read, among others, selections of work by the following authors: Hegel (Phenomenology of Spirit, master-slave dialectic), Kierkegaard (Fear and Trembling), Nietzsche, Heidegger, Dostoevsky (Notes from Underground), Sartre, and Buber (I and Thou).

Objectives of the course are learning to read, analyze, and critically interpret philosophical texts, as well as assessing historical transformations of philosophical ideas.

PHIL 3203 Introduction to Formal Logic

MW3 Mon, Wed 3:40 – 4:55pm

Instructor: Matthew Moore

Email: matthewm@brooklyn.cuny.edu

We are often presented with arguments designed to convince us to believe certain things, or to act in certain ways. Most of the time we do pretty well at sorting out the bad arguments from the good ones, but we may not have a very clear idea of what this involves. One requirement is surely that an argument should be valid, that its conclusion should follow from its premises, or to put it another way, that the premises should *entail* the conclusion. But just what is it for an assertion to follow from (be entailed by) others? In this course we will develop a formal framework within which entailment, along with other central concepts of deductive logic, can be rigorously defined and studied.

PHIL 3210 Reasoning

MW12 Mon, Wed 12:50pm – 2:05pm

Instructor: Dena Shottenkirk

Email: dshottenkirk@brooklyn.cuny.edu

This course focuses on the examination and development of reasoning skills. Informal logic will also be discussed. Topics such as meaning, definition, the analysis of arguments, and fallacies will be looked at. We will discuss various examples in reasoning and see how the principles we learn can be applied to them. Legal reasoning, support claims about public policy, and scientific and philosophical arguments will also be examined.

PHIL 3210 Reasoning

TR3 Tues, Thurs 3:40pm – 4:55pm
EM6 Mon 6:30pm – 9:00pm

Instructor: Fletcher Maumus

Email: mfm233@nyu.edu

This course focuses on the examination and development of reasoning skills. Informal logic will also be discussed. Topics such as meaning, definition, the analysis of arguments, and fallacies will be looked at. We will discuss various examples in reasoning and see how the principles we learn can be applied to them. Legal reasoning, support claims about public policy, and scientific and philosophical arguments will also be examined.

PHIL 3305 Ethics and Personal Relations

TR9 Tues, Thurs 9:30am – 10:45am

Instructor: Penny Repetti

Email: prepetti@brooklyn.cuny.edu

This is a philosophy course that focuses on the study and application of ethics in relationships.

The course will begin by exploring students' personal ethical principles, in regard to their own existing relationships. We will examine both the positive and negative qualities/characteristics that

are present in these relationships and what makes these relationships successful or not. We will then evaluate moral obligations to oneself, family, friends, etc.

Some topics that will be discussed are: friendship, marriage, divorce, love and sex, parent-child relationships, lying, cheating, etc.

PHIL 3306 Ethics and Society

MW11 Mon, Wed 11:00am – 12:15pm

Instructor: Len Mitchell

Email: lmitchell@brooklyn.cuny.edu

In this course, we focus on the study of ethical theories and the application of theory to social issues. In this process we develop the analytical skills needed for philosophical thought about important social issues.

We begin with a discussion of several challenges to morality including cultural relativism, egoism and moral skepticism. Next we discuss the moral theories of Kant, Mill, Aristotle and others. Finally, we apply the principles we have learned from these moral theories to various social issues including abortion, euthanasia, world hunger, terrorism, pornography, affirmative action, animal rights, death and the meaning of life.

PHIL 3306 Ethics and Society

R12 Thurs 1:00pm – 3:30pm

Instructor: Penny Repetti

Email: prepetti@brooklyn.cuny.edu

This is a philosophy course that focuses on the study and application of ethics.

We will first discuss students' personal ethical principles. After this, students will be exposed to various ethical theories that may be utilized in the assessment of ethical issues that arise in the world. Some topics that we will be examining are: abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, etc.

Though we will begin in this fashion, proceeding from theory to practice, we will also do the opposite -- we will look at ethical issues that arise in the world and then will assess the plausibility of various ethical theories by determining how well they stand up in such concrete contexts.

PHIL 3308 Race, Justice, and Equality

ER6 Thurs 6:30pm – 9:00pm

Instructor: Anatoly Nichvoloda

Email: nichvoloda@yahoo.com

What is race? Is race a legitimate biological category? Is it a valid census category? What is the relationship between the category of race and racism? What is the relationship between race and personal identity? How do multiracial identities raise questions about the meaning of race and its relationship to identity?

This course will address these and other related questions from political, socioeconomic and historical perspectives. But above all, we will aim to reflect philosophically upon the notion of race and its relationship to the formation of a more pluralistic and democratic society.

In this course we will engage in a philosophical examination of race and racism centered around the moral values of justice and equality. Topics addressed include race as a social category, racial identity, the nature of racism, race neutrality and race consciousness, multiculturalism, and the relationships among values such as fairness, equality, and well-being.

We will examine and discuss contrasting points of view on measures designed to counter racism, including civil disobedience, affirmative action, racial reparations, and race-based restrictions on speech.

PHIL 3309 Environmental Ethics

MW3 Mon, Wed 3:40pm – 4:55pm

Instructor: Michael Menser

Email: mmenser@brooklyn.cuny.edu

The 21st century has brought with it a range of environmental problems that humanity (and the rest of the earth) have never encountered. Global warming gets much of the press but mass extinction, soil degradation, water scarcity, and atmospheric and oceanic pollution pose problems potentially as catastrophic. Relatedly, a global economy heavily reliant upon oil, coal and gas threaten to further destabilize the global ecology as do further processes of economic development, urbanization, and population growth.

So what should be done and who should do it? This is a central question in applied ethics.

An array of ethical problems arise: 1) is there a right to a clean and health environment? If so, who defines “clean”? Many talk about “sustainability” but what would an economy that did not destroy the environment look like? Is capitalism inherent ecologically destructive? Is another economy possible? If so, how do we get there? 2) If the world recognizes that certain wild parts of the globe should be preserved (e.g. the Amazon rainforest), who should pay to preserve it? 3) Do nonhumans have rights in these kinds of debates or do only humans possess them? Ecuador and Bolivia now recognize the rights of “mother nature” in their constitutions, should the US adopt such a amendment? 4) As a consumer YOU make choices that directly impact on the environment every day. What sorts of moral guidelines should we follow as consumers? We shall examine a range of ethical perspectives to deal with these issues, but virtue ethics, democratic and rights perspectives will be of special focus.

Furthermore, we shall be especially focused on the issue of “sustainability” and sustainable development and related issues of agriculture, food, and democracy as they apply to both rural and urban areas. Brooklyn and Brooklyn College itself will be of particular focus as we look at activities and proposals to make the campus and the borough more “sustainable” and fights over just what that means. Also, students will be required to morally evaluate some of their own consumption practices.

PHIL 3315 / COMM 3200 Communication Ethics

MW9 Mon, Wed 9:30 – 10:45am

Instructor: Dena Shottenkirk

Email: dshottenkirk@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Explore issues concerning journalistic integrity, the ethical dilemmas in advertising, internet issues including privacy and governance, and the complex issues of censorship. This course addresses the concerns inherent in our written, visual, and verbal communications with one another. Pertinent philosophical texts include, among others, Kant, Rawls, Mill, and Aristotle. Learn to identify issues within the media and articulate arguments regarding them in the applied ethics course.

PHIL 3320 Foundations of Ethics

TY3 Tues, Thurs 3:40pm – 5:20pm

Instructor: Christine Vitrano

Email: cvitrano@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Theories in normative ethics attempt to explain and systematize our moral judgments. They also provide an account of our moral obligations and duties, suggesting a standard to regulate right and wrong conduct.

In this course, we examine some of the most influential historical ethical theories, beginning with the ancient Greek moralists such as Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus and the Stoics, and then moving on to consider the views of Hobbes, Hume, Kant, Bentham, Mill and Sartre.

PHIL 3331 Happiness and the Meaning of Life

TR11 Tues, Thurs 11:00am – 12:15pm

Instructor: Christine Vitrano

Email: cvitrano@brooklyn.cuny.edu

This course will center on two of the oldest philosophical topics, happiness and the meaning of life.

The first half of the course will focus on the concept of happiness, where we will examine its nature and value. We begin with a review of the role played by happiness in the history of ethics, and then explore how it continues to play a role in contemporary moral debates.

The second half of the course will examine the question of what makes life meaningful or worthwhile. We shall consider a theistic approach, non-theistic alternatives, and an approach that questions the meaningfulness of the question.

PHIL 3401 Metaphysics

TY9 Tues, Thurs 9:05am – 10:45am

Instructor: Saam Trivedi

Email: trivedi@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Metaphysics, broadly understood as the study of reality, is often described as being at the abstract heart of Philosophy, with important connections to other branches of Philosophy.

In this class, we will discuss some central issues in contemporary analytic metaphysics such as: existence; realism and anti-realism; universals and particulars; identity; things and their persistence; and emergence, reduction, and supervenience.

Both classic and contemporary readings will be used.

PHIL 3410 Epistemology: Theory of Knowledge

MY11 Mon, Wed 11:00am – 12:40pm

Instructor: Robert Lurz

Email: rlurz@brooklyn.cuny.edu

What are the limits to human knowledge and understanding? Can we know and understand anything? Can we distinguish appearance from reality? Are there things that we cannot (or should not) know or understand? What are they and why?

This course is intended to introduce students to a number of important philosophical issues and theories on the nature of knowledge and rational belief. Issues such as – skepticism, foundationalism, coherentism, and kinds of knowledge – are examined and discussed from classical and contemporary philosophical perspectives. This is an excellent course for students who are interested in philosophy, philosophy of mind, philosophy of psychology, and philosophy of science.

PHIL 3410 Epistemology: Theory of Knowledge

WQ6 Wed 06:05pm – 9:25pm

Instructor: Dena Shottenkirk

Email: dshottenkirk@brooklyn.cuny.edu

Classical and contemporary theories of the nature of knowledge and belief. Discussion of skepticism, rationalism, empiricism, coherentism, and foundationalism. Analysis of such concepts as probability, certainty, perception, evidence, and truth.

PHIL 3420 Philosophy of Mind

MY9 Mon, Wed 9:30am – 10:45am

Instructor: Robert Lurz

Email: rlurz@brooklyn.cuny.edu

What is the true nature of the self, consciousness, and thought? How are they related to each other, to what goes on in our brains and bodies, and to the world in which we live? Can science or philosophy answer such questions?

This course is intended to introduce students to a number of important issues in the philosophy of mind. Issues such as the mind-body problem, the problem of other minds, and the possibility of thought and consciousness in computers and animals are discussed and examined. This is an excellent course for students who are interested in philosophy, philosophy of psychology, and cognitive science.

PHIL 3423 Philosophy of Artificial Intelligence

TR11 Tues, Thurs 11:00am – 12:15pm

Instructor: Anatoly Nichvoloda

Email: nichvoloda@yahoo.com

Can a machine be conscious or possess genuine intelligence? What is intelligence? Can there be a behavioral criterion for intelligence? Is there a unique capacity human minds have that cannot be replicated by technological means? Are neural processes in some fundamental way different from processes in a digital computer? What's the relationship between computational processes and physical processes? Can a software event cause a physical event? Can computational processes support semantics? What does it mean to say that a machine understands something?

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a research area that combines computer science, philosophy and biology. This course will introduce students to philosophical thinking about AI from historical and technological perspectives and progress through a number of core topics in classical AI. We will discuss landmark essays that form the foundation of AI and engage in a philosophical examination centered around concepts such as intelligence, perception, learning, memory, understanding, language, etc. The overall goal is to enable students to appreciate the philosophical importance and successfully navigate the conceptual complexity of the topics of machine intelligence and human-computer interaction.

PHIL 3501 Philosophy of Art

TR11 Tues, Thurs 11:00am – 12:15pm

Instructor: Saam Trivedi

Email: trivedi@brooklyn.cuny.edu

About a hundred years back, the Dadaist artist Marcel Duchamp took a urinal, installed it in an art exhibit, and called it “Fountain”. But is that ART?

More generally, what is art? Can we define art, and if so, how? Do artistic intentions matter to interpreting artworks? What is the relation between beauty in art and beauty in nature? How can we care for fictional characters given that we know they are not real? What role does music play in a culture? Why do many people seek out and enjoy horror films even though they arouse fear? Can there be pornographic art?

Using both classic and contemporary readings, this course will discuss philosophical issues such as the above that pertain to art.

PHIL 3620 Philosophy of Nature

MW12 Mon, Wed 12:50 – 2:05pm

Instructor: Michael Menser

Email: mmenser@brooklyn.cuny.edu

What is nature? Of what is it composed: a single substance or an infinite number of indivisible atoms? How is it ordered? Is it a random moving self-transforming chaos or a well-ordered machine? An incomprehensible and endless flux or a cyclical harmonious multilayered system? Is God in and separate from nature? And humanity?

Key issues and debates concerning the idea that every being has a purpose (teleology) or is simply a randomly assembled machine (mechanism), that animals and non-living beings are “animated” and/or possess spirits or souls (animism).

We will also explore more recent understandings of nature such as Darwinian evolution, Gaia, ecological systems theory and phenomenology. Throughout we shall address how conceptions of nature relate to culture and understandings of human nature, politics, war, sex, gender, and economics and sustainability.

Roughly speaking, half of the class focuses on classical views such as Parmenides, Heraclitus, Aristotle, Lucretius, and Native American views, and half focuses on more contemporary figures and issues traversing philosophy, ecology, economics, and social theory.

Requirements: 4 page paper, quiz, midterm, 5 page paper, final exam

PHIL 3703 Political Philosophy

TY2	<i>Tues</i>	<i>2:15pm – 3:30pm</i>
	<i>Thurs</i>	<i>1:25pm – 3:30pm</i>

Instructor: Justin Steinberg

Email: jsteinberg@brooklyn.cuny.edu

In this course we will investigate many of the central questions in political philosophy: What is the source of political legitimacy? What justifies civil disobedience? What ought to be the place of religion in civic life? What does political liberty mean? Is private property a right?

For roughly the last half of the course we will consider such questions as: What, if anything, makes democracy from a market? What duties do we incur as citizens in a democracy? Should cultural differences be promoted, ignored, or limited by the state? And, what, if anything, grounds a group’s or an individual’s claim to special treatment by the state.

PHIL 3704 Social Philosophy

MQ6 Mon 6:05pm – 9:25pm

Instructor: Michael Menser

Email: mmenser@brooklyn.cuny.edu

This course has two goals:

- 1) to understand differing conceptions of the institutions of social life particularly with respect to the following topics: human nature, capitalism and commodity consumption; community, rights, sex/gender, race, ecological and social “sustainability,” labor, and globalization
- 2) to address the ethical and political dimensions of social life with a strong international approach to the question of democracy and the state

In particular we shall focus on:

- 1) the concept of the social and its relationship to the concept of nature with respect to environmental issues such as sustainability and place
- 2) to explore the impact of capitalism and consumerism on social structures, individual freedom and the workplace
- 3) to look at movements for democracy that offer differing views on the role of the state
- 4) to analyze the social possibilities and limitations in urban areas from divergent perspectives (postmodern, cosmopolitan, ecological, feminist, capitalist/anti-capitalist)
- 5) to look at case studies inside and outside the US that articulate the themes in the first four (Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Brazil and others)

Readings will include writings by Thomas Hobbes, Charles Mills, Thomas Friedman, Martha Nussbaum, Carole Pateman, Iris Young and others.

REQUIREMENTS: 4 short exercises (quiz, reports etc.), midterm, 6-8 page paper, final exam

PHIL 3730 Philosophy of Religion

MW11 Mon, Wed 11:00am – 12:15pm

Instructor: Andrew Arlig

Email: aarlig@brooklyn.cuny.edu

This course will consider both traditional and contemporary notions of divinity and revealed religion. We will primarily focus on these notions as they are conceived in the Abrahamic traditions (i.e. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam); however, non-Abrahamic conceptions of divine beings may also be considered and many of the issues explored easily will translate into non-Abrahamic contexts.

Readings will be drawn from medieval, Enlightenment and contemporary sources.

Questions to be explored will include the following:

Can God's existence be proved? Can God's essence and nature be grasped by the unaided human intellect? Do mystics have special access to the divine nature? Is God's essence fundamentally unknowable or ineffable? What is God's relation to time and space? Is the existence of evil compatible with the existence of an all-powerful and all-good divinity? Are the claims about the natural world that we find in revealed texts supposed to be taken literally? If a passage from the Bible or Qur'an seems to conflict with our best current science, what should we do?

Be prepared to explore these questions with equanimity and magnanimity. No specific ideological perspective will be privileged. We will be engaging in careful conceptual analysis as well as using the tools of deductive and inductive logic to tackle these and other related questions. No previous acquaintance with philosophy or religion will be assumed.

PHIL 3731 Philosophy of Sport

TR9 Tues, Thurs 9:30am – 10:45am

Instructor: Robert Sinclair

Email: rsinclair@brooklyn.cuny.edu

In this course we will engage in a philosophical examination of sport where it is viewed as an integral part of human life. We will begin with some foundational questions concerning the definition of sport in relation to games, play, exercise, and physical movement. Other issues that may be discussed include: the ethics of sport, the aesthetic appreciation of sport and the question of the social value of sporting activities. A possible further theme considers the role of knowledge within sport, or what conceptions of knowledge may best describe the practice of sport.

PHIL 3740 Philosophy of Law

MW2 Mon, Wed 2:15pm – 3:30pm

Instructor: Len Mitchell

Email: lmitchell@brooklyn.cuny.edu

In this course we will examine basic legal concepts and philosophical problems relating to law.

Topics to be studied include:

- general legal theory (legal positivism, legal realism, natural law theory)
- legal and moral obligation
- human and legal rights
- legal responsibility
- judicial reasoning
- possibly other related topics

PHIL 3920 Internship in Philosophy 1

V1 TBA 00:00am – 00:00am

Instructor: Dena Shottenkirk

Email: dshottenkirk@brooklyn.cuny.edu

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS:

1. ECPAT (anti-human trafficking org)
2. HOPE (job training organization)
3. Habitat for Humanity
4. NYC Fellowship for Affordable Housing (secures housing for HIV patients)
5. US Participatory Budgeting Project (direct democracy funding project)
6. Room to Grow (support for disadvantaged mothers/children)

LEGAL:

Various lawyers' offices

BUSINESS AND PHILOSOPHY:

Students can be placed in a particular business, and study in depth how business intersects with ethics.

ART AND PHILOSOPHY:

Students interested in art can intern in a gallery or museum while studying issues in contemporary aesthetic theory.

PHIL 3921 Internship in Philosophy 2

V1 TBA 0:00am – 0:00am

Instructor: Dena Shottenkirk

Email: dshottenkirk@brooklyn.cuny.edu

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS:

1. ECPAT (anti-human trafficking org)
2. HOPE (job training organization)
3. Habitat for Humanity
4. NYC Fellowship for Affordable Housing (secures housing for HIV patients)
5. US Participatory Budgeting Project (direct democracy funding project)
6. Room to Grow (support for disadvantaged mothers/children)

LEGAL:

Various lawyers' offices

BUSINESS AND PHILOSOPHY:

Students can be placed in a particular business, and study in depth how business intersects with ethics.

ART AND PHILOSOPHY:

Students interested in art can intern in a gallery or museum while studying issues in contemporary aesthetic theory.