

Department of Philosophy

Fall 2026 Undergraduate Course Descriptions

101 Logic, Reasoning, & Persuasion

Hutchens, section 01, 09

This course is a general introduction to the basic mechanics of critical thinking, understood to mean the systematic evaluation and formulation of beliefs by rational standards. We will learn about the important roles critical thinking plays in formulating viable study habits and in evaluating problems one encounters outside the classroom. We will master an understanding of deductions, in respect of their soundness and validity, as well as inductions, in terms of their cogency, strength and general role in empirical experience and scientific experimentation. Some time will be spent addressing the difference between formal and informal fallacies.

A great deal of the semester will be spent working with propositional logic (translation, truth tabling, and enthymemes) and categorical logic (translation, squares of opposition, Venn diagramming).

Derstine, section 02, 05

An argument is a series of statements, one set of which (the premises) is intended to provide either logically conclusive or strong support for another statement (the conclusion). In this course, we will study the logical structure of argumentation in ordinary language, with an emphasis on the relation of logic to practical (and controversial) affairs in politics, criminal justice, religion and ethics. We will also examine and learn to spot traditional informal fallacies— e.g., “begging the question”— which although formally valid, are still instances of bad reasoning. Discussions explore the nature of validity, truth, meaning, and evidence in relation to the evaluation of arguments.

Kang, section 03

Logic is the study of how to reason correctly. This course is designed to introduce a variety of logical concepts and tools of critical thinking. Based on the principles of reasoning from formal and informal logic, we will learn how to critically examine philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, knowledge, value and more. Learning objectives are as below:

1. Argument analysis: Acquiring skills of identifying parts of arguments (premises, conclusions, inferences); identifying mode (induction, deduction, analogy, etc.); reconstructing/diagramming arguments to reveal the logical structure

2. Argument evaluation: Becoming capable of a systematic evaluation of an argument; assessing the acceptability of premises/reasons; accurately evaluating the relevance of premises/reasons; making judgments about the sufficiency of grounds for a conclusion/contention/thesis.
3. Terminology/theory: Understanding and correctly using the definitions & conceptual foundations of logical analysis: validity, soundness, rhetoric, syllogisms, fallacies, other formal argument patterns.
4. Metacognition: Developing the skills of critical and logical thinkers such as ability to shift perspective, awareness of bias/cognitive limitations, commitment to understanding & transparency, and valuing logic over rhetoric.
5. Application: Acquiring substantial transference of technical ability to contexts outside the classroom.

Iwanicki, section 04

This course examines the fundamentals of deductive and inductive reasoning, common errors in reasoning, and techniques of effective persuasion. Additional topics will include cognitive biases and prejudices, the wisdom of crowds, fake news, and propaganda. The course will focus on skills essential for everyday life and scientific reasoning, using real-life case studies, logic games, and selected reasoning questions from graduate-level exams such as the LSAT.

Muse, section 06

This course aims to make you a more virtuous thinker. Toward this end, you shall learn the basics of formal logic and informal fallacies, how to identify and develop the intellectual virtues (open-mindedness, intellectual fairness, etc.), and finally, how to evaluate arguments encountered in academic philosophy and in everyday life. (Catalog description).

Sorensen, section 07 and 08

In this class, we will learn how to construct, criticize, and effectively deliver arguments. Unlike traditional critical thinking classes, which emphasize logical fallacies and methods in formal logic (e.g. truth tables), we will work on acquiring a critical mindset and incorporate methods from fields outside of philosophy such as cognitive science, social psychology, mathematics, and behavioral economics. Additionally, we will learn effective ways to gather and evaluate evidence and develop the ability to recognize trustworthy experts and reliable communities of knowledge. Towards the end of the course, we will critically evaluate recent issues in politics, ethics, and science by holding formal debates with group presentations. Topics include: Immigration, Drug Decriminalization, Carbon Taxes, Universal Healthcare, Transgender Athletes, and AI in warfare.

Skolits, section 90

This course aims to make you a more virtuous thinker. Toward this end, you shall learn the basics of formal logic and informal fallacies, how to identify and develop the intellectual virtues (open-mindedness, intellectual fairness, etc.), and finally, how to evaluate arguments encountered in academic philosophy and in everyday life. (Catalog description).

103 Introduction to Philosophy

Wolf, section 01

This course will introduce students to some central problems in the Western philosophical tradition and to tools for philosophical thinking.

Thus, the two main goals for the course are (i) to become familiar with these issues and (ii) to develop the ability to analyze rational argumentation. Topics include external world skepticism, material constitution, free will, and the nature of morality.

Baldino, section 02

Philosophy begins in a sense of wonder – a wonder about the very world itself and our own conspicuous existence in it. This class is an introduction to the field of inquiry that arises out of this sense of wonder, and it is an invitation to the student to convert that sense of wonder into specific questions and ways of addressing those questions.

The questions we will consider focus on the possibility of truth and value, the existence of God, ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, and theory of mind. Questions like: *How is knowledge possible and what justifies our beliefs? Is there a God? Do we have free will? What is the nature of the mind and how does it differ from matter? How should we treat one another, what is of value, and how should we live our lives?* The ways of addressing these questions will be through reading original works of philosophy, discussing openly and impartially these works with one another, critically examining the ideas presented, and (if all goes well) developing our own thoughts about the issues under discussion.

This introduction to philosophy will have been a success if, by the end of the course, you are able to think of yourself as a philosopher – as someone open to thinking philosophically and about philosophical questions, and connecting ideas from philosophy to the things you encounter, experience, think about, and hope for in your everyday life.

Quilty-Dunn, section 03

Philosophy is part of a rational attempt to understand the world. In this class, we'll be attacking some of the major questions throughout the past 2,500 years of Western philosophy in order to understand both the history of Western thought—important in its own right—as well as how to think honestly about things, how to be rational agents, and how to consider evidence and reject

bad arguments. Those fundamental questions are, "What do we know?", "What is reality like?", and "What makes our actions good or bad?"

Lin, section 04

Examination of fundamental philosophical issues such as the meaning and basis of moral judgments, free will and determinism, theism and atheism, knowledge and skepticism, and consciousness and the brain. Note: This course is a three-credit course certified to satisfy Core Curriculum goal AHO, but NOT certified for writing goals WCd and WCr. (Philosophy 104 is a four-credit writing intensive course certified for writing goals.)

Rotolo, section 90

This course introduces the major topics, problems, and methods of philosophy and surveys the writings of major historical figures in the field. Topics of discussion include the nature of philosophy; the nature and limits of human knowledge; the scope and limits of human freedom; the differences between right and wrong conduct; the nature of the good life; and the meaning and value of human existence.

104 Introduction to Philosophy

Bennett, section 01 - 10

A general introduction to some of the main topics of Western philosophy, as well as to philosophical writing and methodology. The course is organized thematically rather than historically, and readings will be drawn from both contemporary and historical sources. Topics include the existence of God, whether we have free will, the nature of morality, and death and the meaning of life. Readings will generally be short but difficult. There will be frequent writing assignments, both in-class and take-home.

105 Current Moral and Social Issues

Derstine, section 01

What makes an action morally right or wrong? When do persons deserve to be punished for wrongdoing? For example, what is the aim of imprisonment? Is this how we ought to punish non-violent offenders? What about institutional wrongdoing? Should we be concerned about the lead found in the water of Flint, MI, even if it doesn't affect *us*? What about natural gas pipelines and drilling, like DAPL? Is this fair to the First Nations? What about campus sexual assault? Is it reasonable to make sure the alleged perpetrator has due process in a fair system? In this course, we critically examine a host of hotbed issues in the US today: gun rights, sexual assault, free speech, voting rights, over-incarceration, through the lens of moral philosophy and normative ethical theories. We will investigate and discuss, among other topics, whether there are mitigating factors (e.g., economically disadvantaged citizens, childhood trauma, members of historically marginalized group) we ought to take into account when assessing the normative

claims we typically make about others. We will be taking on some very controversial topics this semester. Get ready!

Sartorio, section 02

This class covers classical problems in moral philosophy as well as moral and social issues that are of particular interest to today's college students. The main goal is to help you think more clearly and reflectively about these issues, and most of the readings are by contemporary philosophers. We will discuss a sample of topics in applied ethics such as our obligations to others, the ethics of abortion, environmental ethics, the ethics of new technologies, and well-being and the meaning of life.

McCrossin, section 03

According to the Course Catalog, we're to "[a]ppl[y] moral theory to selected contemporary issues[, ...] includ[ing] abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, punishment, equality, sexism, racism, affirmative action, privacy, obligations to the world's needy, treatment of animals, drug use, and the meaning of life." One strategic approach would be to develop or simply adopt this or that moral theory, or array of moral theories, and then apply it to the issues at hand. In an effort to resist losing the forest for the trees, however, one might instead focus more immediately on the issue at hand, with only the most basic commonsense "moral theory," as, for example, the variety of moral virtues we have at our disposal in managing our common challenge, which is to balance individual rights and the common good, not only lawfully, but with *morally-grounded* lawfulness? In this spirit, we will imagine ourselves as, "Current Social *as* Moral Issues."

We will want in the process to resist four additional pitfalls. It is not uncommon, on the one hand, to conflate the question of what is or isn't moral with the question of what is or isn't legal, hindering us in both arenas. Even once we distinguish them, on the other hand, we may still forget that we strive to resolve moral issues in order to resolve legal ones, in that order. In addition, even once we recognize this, we may still address moral issues in isolation, one by one, rather than as coalescing helpfully into overlapping arcs. Finally, even if we resist all of this, we may still neglect the richness of popular culture, as it addresses, deliberately or otherwise, with varying degrees of subtlety, a wide variety of moral issues.

This is the landscape we will explore, hope to clarify, in as cooperative, conversational a way as possible. In addition to anticipating being actively involved in a semester-long conversation, participants should anticipate periodic writing.

Iwanicki, section 04

This course explores the principles and philosophical arguments underlying contemporary social debates. We will examine topics such as theism and naturalism, existentialism and the absurd, the ideals of liberty, equality, and solidarity, the relationship between morality and criminal law, and

the metaphysical and moral status of AI. Throughout the course, we will read classic philosophical texts and watch films that engage with these topics.

107 Introduction to Ethics

Kaspar, section 01

Ethics is the study of human conduct. Its aim is not to study how humans actually conduct themselves. Instead it studies how humans *ought* to act. Modern ethics focuses on how we ought to morally act. In this course we'll study prominent modern moral theories, as well as contemporary moral issues such as abortion and poverty. Near the end of the semester we'll discuss how to bring whole-life issues into moral inquiry. Lastly, we'll examine a set of difficult contemporary moral cases and use all of our ethics tools to solve them.

Rotolo, section 02

Is it ok to date your friend's ex-partner? Are games a waste of time? Do we have an obligation to help others? Is there such a thing as an objectively wrong action? Is it moral to eat meat? Should you "fake it until you make it" or do you have an obligation to be "authentic" at all times? Are business people morally allowed to lie to sell more of their products? Do professionals in the medical field have an obligation to save someone's life at all costs?

These are some of the questions that we will try to answer during the semester. Through the study of several ethical theories we will try to uncover what it means to do the right thing, how we should make ethical decisions, and what it means to be a good person. At the same time, we will explore concepts like moral responsibility, moral worth, destiny, virtue, and many others.

Piven, section 03

Ethics is the attempt to understand moral concepts and justify moral principles. What should I do? How do I determine what's right and wrong? Is moral good in the intention or the consequence of my actions? Everyone disagrees on what people should do. Is it all personal opinion? Cultural values? Is it all relative? Should I question what I've been told? In this course we'll survey readings in ethics and moral philosophy to understand different perspectives on how moral decisions can be made. We'll investigate such topics as virtue ethics, deontology, constructivism, objectivism, relativism, consequentialism, free will, and determinism.

Sharpe, section 04

What does it mean to be a good person? What does it mean to live well, or act rightly? These are among the most basic philosophical questions, and the field of ethics is here to help us figure out how to answer them for ourselves. Ethics asks us to consider what we ought to do and how we know. In this course, we will focus primarily on systems of ethics that purport to tell us what's

right and wrong, good and bad, and why. We'll evaluate the reasons they give for their answers on their own merits and in dialogue with each other. We'll look at natural law and divine command views, hedonist views, consequentialist views (like Mozi's and Mill's), deontological or duty-based views (like those found in Stoicism and the *Bhagavad Gita*) and character-based views (like those found in Aristotle and among the Ojibway people). No antecedent familiarity with philosophy is required or expected.

Burgis, section 90

Exploration of basic issues in ethical theory and metaethics. Topics may include consequentialism, deontology, virtue theory, constructivism, value relativism, the objectivity of values, value skepticism, free will, and the nature of the values and practical reasons.

109 Introduction to Formal Reasoning and Decision

Bialek, section 01, 02

Resolving differences of opinion isn't always impossible. Figuring out what you should believe isn't just a matter of checking what's true. Deciding what you should do doesn't have to be left up to your whim. Formal tools have been (and continue to be) developed that enable us to talk very precisely about the strength of arguments and of evidence, the rationality of beliefs we have, and the value of choices we make. This course will introduce students to some of those formal tools—specifically: logic, probability, and decision theory—focusing on their application, but also looking at the limits to their application and their potential for expansion and sophistication. Assessment in the course will be based on a mixture of exams, reading/discussion assignments, and quizzes.

Comesaña, section 03

This course will introduce students to some of the formal tools used to model reasoning and decision making. We will cover the basics of propositional logic and probability, and apply them to reasoning and decision making under uncertainty. Emphasis will be placed on foundational and philosophical issues related to these topics.

Birolli Abrahao, section 04

This course introduces three formal theories—logic, probability, and decision theory—each offering a distinctive perspective on rationality. Besides being interesting in and of themselves, these theories are powerful tools for analyzing arguments, language, and how we think.

By the end of the semester, students will be able to work with the formal tools covered in the course and apply them to both practical and philosophical problems.

Caouette, section 90

Fundamentals of logical, probabilistic, and statistical thinking, as well as the basic principles of rational decision-making. Reasoning through data (and rhetoric) encountered on a daily basis using elementary principles of deductive logic and inference.

201 Introduction to Logic

Baldino, section 01

Logic is considered a branch of philosophy because it is part of the essence of philosophy that we try to ensure that the conclusions we draw follow from the premises we give. Logic functions in a similar way in mathematics, where the premises we state are mathematical assumptions and the conclusions we draw are theorems, and in computer science, where the premises are about states of computational systems and the conclusions are the consequences of such states. In fact, ensuring that conclusions follow from assumptions or premises is essential to all reasoning, whether in an academic setting or in everyday life.

In this introduction to logic, we will focus on describing a language for formally representing assumptions and conclusions and on determining whether the arguments constructed with these formally represented propositions are examples of acceptable reasoning. By doing so, we will be developing tools that will be of use in all our activities as rational agents.

Kalkus, section 02

This course is an introduction to symbolic logic. Logic is the study of correct reasoning and symbolic logic studies reasoning using formal languages. We will begin with propositional logic, which will enable us to represent various connective terms and allow us to evaluate inferences. We will focus on determining the validity of arguments and the processes involved in derivations using truth tables, semantic tableaux, and natural deduction proofs. Then, we will turn to predicate logic, which subsumes propositional logic, but affords us additional tools to both represent terms such as “something” and “everything”.

Kang, section 03

This course is an introduction to traditional categorical logic and modern symbolic logic. Logic is the study of correct reasoning and symbolic logic studies reasoning using formal languages. We will learn how to clarify the structure of an argument, translate the argument written in natural language (e.g. English) into symbols, and evaluate the symbolic arguments. Three deductive systems will be discussed: Categorical logic, Propositional logic, and Predicate logic. We will begin with categorical logic. The validity of a categorical argument depends on the relationships among classes, sets, or categories. We will practice how to analyze categorical claims with quantifiers (some, no, all).

Then, we will discuss propositional logic. Propositional logic offers analytic tools for logical operators such as “and,” “or,” and “not.” We will practice validity tests using truth tables and various types of proofs by applying inference rules.

Lastly, we will turn to predicate logic. Predicate logic subsumes propositional logic but affords us additional tools to represent the ideas of “some” and “all” and evaluate inferences.

Skiles, section 04

This course will introduce you to the basics of modern formal deductive logic and its applications to everyday reasoning, to philosophy, and to the numerous theoretical and practical disciplines that draw upon it (e.g. mathematics, computer science, and linguistics). Topics to be covered include: basic notions in formal logic such as validity, soundness, the logical modalities, ambiguity, and the use vs. mention distinction; truth-functional connectives; using a formal language to represent patterns of deductive reasoning in natural language; the syntax, semantics, and basic metatheory of truth-functional logic and first-order logic; constructing proofs in Fitch-style natural deduction systems; and rudimentary set theory.

Van Oeveren, section 06

Introduction to formal logic, covering truth, functional propositional logic, and quantification theory. Emphasis on developing symbolic techniques for representing and evaluating arguments.

Burgis, section 90

This course covers formal deductive logic. We cover logical concepts like validity, soundness, and logical equivalence on an informal intuitive level in the first part of the class, but most of the semester is spent on formal logic. Students learn to translate natural-language sentences and arguments into the language of propositional (and then predicate) logic, use truth tables to test argument forms for validity, and construct proofs.

215 Introduction to Metaphysics

Zimmerman, section 01

Examination of central issues in metaphysics, such as free will, personal identity, the nature of time, causality, necessity, and possibility.

218 Introduction to Philosophy of Mind

McLaughlin, section 01

The course will cover the various major approaches to the mind-body problem.

226 Introduction to the Philosophy of Physics

North, section 01

This course is an introduction to a variety of philosophical issues that arise in the context of classical (nonquantum) physics, including the nature of instantaneous velocity; the truth of the physical laws; the question of determinism; the existence of forces; the direction of time; the existence of space and time; the nature of spacetime; the flow of time; the possibility of time travel. Readings will be drawn from both physics and philosophy.

242 Ethics of AI

Perrine, section 01

It's no secret that AI has already worked itself deep into our society, assisting with mundane tasks like organizing cat photos on your phone to profound tasks like generating a missile strike package for a military. Anytime such technology starts changing our society, it raises new and important ethical questions. So in this course we will focus on new questions about the ethics of AI, focusing around three themes: creation, utilization, and integration. In the first unit, we'll focus on the creation of AI systems: can we create AIs in an ethical way, and can we create ethical AIs? In the second unit, we'll focus on the utilization of AI systems: what are ways that we can misuse AI systems and what safeguards should our societies set up to protect us? In the third unit, we'll look at how AI systems might integrate into our societies, in particular, must they remain mere tools for us to use or could they evolve to have some more robust ethical standing?

248 Foundations of Medical Ethics & Policy

Barchi, section 01

This course introduces students to the conceptual foundations of medical ethics, emphasizing how particular moral traditions and theories have influenced the development of policies and practices in health care and health research over time and in different settings around the world. The course combines lectures with small-group casework to encourage students to 'think-through' the moral and often practical challenges that arise in the practice of medicine and health policy. This course is one of two required courses in the undergraduate minor in Medical Ethics and Health Policy.

265 Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

Leftow, section 01

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam agree that there is a God, and in most matters, agree about what God is like. This course will seek to understand the picture of God they share- to say what this

God is like, if He exists- and to explain and evaluate the major arguments for and against the claim that He does exist.

268 Introduction to Existentialism

Piven, section 01

What is the purpose of our existence? Why are we here on earth? What is the meaning of life? How do we endure death? Existentialism is concerned with the human condition, the purpose of life, authenticity in one's purpose and being, the attempt to find meaning amidst the absurdity and finitude of existence. Philosophers have asked how life can be meaningful in the face of the grave, and whether life matters. This course explores some of the great works of existentialism, pondering the meaning (or meaninglessness) of existence, the death of God, moral responsibility, and our struggle against fate.

295 Arete- Part 1

McCrossin, section

The basic aim of Areté is to provide participants with an unusual writing-related experience. It takes the form of a one-credit course, bureaucratically, offered in both the fall and spring semesters, allowing participants, typically junior and senior philosophy majors, to carve out time in their schedules to devote to a yearlong project. The project, generally speaking, is to work together to develop collaborative skills as an editorial board, in weekly in-person meetings and in the interim. In particular, board members review submitted work, on the one hand, completed by current and former college students from around the country, sometimes internationally, during their college careers. On the other hand, they work with the authors of selected work to improve it, both internally and for the sake of the journal's intended general audience. Finally, they produce their annual issue in time for Philosophy's end-of-the-year commencement ceremony, which develops the additional skill of collaboratively meeting a shared deadline. All in all, it's not a small amount of work, but those who have participated over the years confirm consistently that it's nonetheless a rewarding form of academic public service.

301 Socrates and Plato

Kaspar, section 01

Socrates is considered a great philosopher, as well as a great historical figure. His best student Plato had such an impact on subsequent philosophical developments that it has been claimed that western philosophy "consists of a series of footnotes to Plato." In this course, we're going to study their philosophies. By examining Plato's early dialogues, we'll work to determine Socrates's approach to philosophy, his methods, his positions, and his worldview. Next, we'll study Plato's middle dialogues, which introduce Plato's distinctive philosophy.. For both of their philosophies, we'll strive to assess them on their own merits, as well as attempt to determine what philosophical value they might have for us today.

305 Philosophy in the High Middle Ages

Leftow, section 01

This course will examine major philosophical ideas and arguments by philosophers in the period (roughly) 1100-1300. It will probably cover Averroes, Abelard, Maimonides, Gersonides, and Aquinas. The emphasis will be on issues in metaphysics and the philosophy of religion.

307 Descartes, Locke and the 17th Century

Lin, section 01

Early development of modern views about the nature of the physical world; relation between the mental and the physical; the nature of one's self; skepticism and certainty. Readings from Descartes, Locke, and others, such as Spinoza, Leibniz, and Hobbes.

320 Speech Acts

Camp, section 01

In this class, we will investigate how speakers use language to communicate. What goals do people accomplish by speaking? What resources do languages offer for achieving those goals? How do speakers use those resources to achieve those goals on particular occasions?

Most philosophers and linguists have focused on assertion, which they understand as presenting a sentence as true in order to contribute information to a common body of knowledge. Do different goals besides sharing information, like making plans and building social identities, involve different kinds of speech acts? What difference does it make whether speakers communicate indirectly or nonliterally? How can hearers push back against malicious speakers?

The course will use an open-syllabus design where many readings will be selected collaboratively, in tandem with students' developing their final projects. Assessment will be based on active participation in class and online, two short papers and a larger project.

329 Minds, Machines, and Persons

Egan, section 01

What is a mind? What does it take to think, to understand, to be conscious? These are old philosophical questions, but recent advances in artificial intelligence have given them new urgency, and given us new cases to think about. This course investigates the central problems of philosophy of mind — the nature of mental states, the relationship between mind and body, the puzzle of consciousness — through the lens of a striking comparison: human minds and large language models do many of the same things, but their internal architecture is radically different. What should we make of that? We'll study the classic theories (behaviorism, functionalism, identity theory, dualism) and the major challenges to them (the Chinese Room, the hard problem of consciousness, the knowledge argument), engaging with both canonical texts (Turing, Dennett, Chalmers, Nagel, Searle, Block, Jackson) and current research on AI and cognition.

Students will also learn how LLMs actually work and engage with hands-on computational tools. No background in philosophy or computer science is required.

Huang, section 02

What does it mean to have a mind? Does having a mind mean different things for humans and machines? These philosophical questions are increasingly relevant with the emergence of highly capable AI systems. We begin by surveying early approaches to mind and cognition in various philosophical traditions. Then we turn to several capacities that have been proposed as marks of the distinction between persons and machines. These include biological constitution, memory, reasoning, consciousness, creativity, among others. For each topic, we'll examine philosophical arguments as well as current research in cognitive science and AI, with the hope to understand how they reveal about the nature of minds and the status of artificial systems today.

Skiles, section 03

This course focuses on four fundamental philosophical questions about minds, machines, persons and how they are related. First, is there a wholly physical explanation of how it is that we are able to mentally represent and reason about what's going on inside of ourselves and in the external world around us? Second, imagine that we had unlimited amounts of time, money, labor, and smarts. Could we build a machine that can think, understand, feel, and be conscious and self-aware in something like the way that we ordinary human beings are able to? Third, what is it for a person to have 'free will', and do we genuinely have it? Fourth, what does it take to remain one and the same person despite all the physical and psychological changes one undergoes in the course of a lifetime?

Rotolo, section 04

Throughout history, metaphors drawn from technology have been proposed to understand how the mind works. Locke likened the newborn's mind to a blank slate, Freud compared the mind to hydraulic and electro-magnetic systems; more recently, Turing proposed that the mind is a computer. Why is this idea attractive? Why do we keep on comparing technological artifacts to our minds? Is it at all plausible that the cells of your brain work like an inorganic machinic being? Could a machine ever really have a mind, beliefs, emotions and conscious experiences? And what are these mysterious things anyway? Could a machine ever count as a person and make choices based on its own free will? What does it even mean to be a person? These are the main themes that we will explore during the semester.

King, section 05

Philosophy 329 Minds, Machines and Persons

Some things have minds and some things don't. If you are reading this, you have a mind. My Lost surfboard doesn't. But what is it to have a mind? Surprisingly, there seems to be an easy

answer to this question. To have a mind is to be a thing that has *mental states* like believing that Paris is in France, perceiving a group of people, doing addition “in your head”, being in pain and so on. But of course this just raises another question: what is a mental state? In this course we will look at various answers to this question. Many people have wondered whether a machine could in principle have a mind. Given what has just been said, this amounts to wondering whether a machine could in principle have mental states. We will see that different answers to the question of what mental states are will yield different answers to the question of whether a machine could in principle have mental states.

Felder, section 90-2

We will explore the range of ideas implicit in the following questions: What are the characteristic features of the mental? What is the relationship between mental states and physical (“brain”) states? Between mind, behavioral, and more general causal patterns? Given the plausible nomic (causal) closure of physical conditions and processes, does the evident lack of causal autonomy in the realm of the mental imply the absolute causal inefficacy of the mental? What conditions need to be satisfied in order to justify the attribution of thought, belief, desire, consciousness, or personhood to something? What does it mean for something to instantiate a computational process, and is the classification of something as a machine or computational process consistent with its identification as a mind or person? Under what conditions, and to what extent, can the artificer, by constructive scheme or “programming”, determine the properties of her artifact? What characteristics constitute personal identity? In particular, what does it mean to be the same person over time? Is there a reasonable concept of free will that is compatible with a deterministic or indeterministic “mechanistic” account of the world, or with any comprehensive system of natural law?

Caouette, section 93

Comparison of the nature of the human mind and that of complex machines. Consequences for questions about the personhood of robots.

Burgis, section 94

Could we build a machine that truly had a mind? That’s a hotly debated topic in a world of increasingly advanced AI, but in order to rigorously think it through, we first have to know what it is for *anything* to “truly have a mind.” In this class we’ll examine some of the main classical theories of what minds are, such as dualism, mind-brain identity theory, and functionalism, as well as leading objections to each of these views, as well as thinking about more contemporary issues regarding the metaphysics and ethics of possible artificial minds.

330 Ethics of Harming and Helping

Otsuka, section 01

An investigation of our moral duties to come to the aid of, and refrain from harming, others. We will cover most if not all of the following topics in Fall 2026: Should you save the greater number from harm?; Should you give each an equal chance of being saved?; Effective altruism and the moral demands of affluence; Does it matter whether you know the identities of those you can save or harm?; The morality of imposing and allowing risks of harm (including the threat of an AI apocalypse); Does it matter whether or not you make a difference (e.g., in voting or participating in mass demonstrations)?; The trolley problem; The justification of deontological constraints against harming; Killing the innocent in war and self-defense; Abortion; Euthanasia and physician assisted suicide; Killing versus letting die; The non-identity problem.

342 Social and Political Philosophy Through History

McCrossin, section 01

According to the Course Catalog, ours is “[a]n ex[plora]tion of some of the most important social and political theories in the history of philosophy[, ...] includ[ing those of] Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Mill, and Marx[, for example, and of more] contemporary philosophers[, such as] Rawls and Nozick.” Such an exploration is naturally episodic, its episodes understood in terms of “big names”—the ones above, among others—or “big ideas”—democracy and authoritarianism, for example, and all that lies in between—or a sometimes messier combination of the two. For better or for worse, we’ll opt for messy.

There are various ways to organize the mess, the following four among them. There are, on the one hand, notable controversies that have arisen periodically, as between Plato and Aristotle, Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau and Voltaire, Dewey and Lippmann, Nozick and Rawls, among many others. There are notable tensions within bodies of work, on the other hand, as in Rousseau’s and Arendt’s, for example. There are, in addition, broad arcs with the development of broad political perspectives, as with the development of contractualism from Hobbes to Locke to Rousseau to Kant to Rawls, among others. Finally, all of this can’t help but be affected by social and political moments such as the Peloponnesian War, the Peace of Westphalia, the Great Rebellion and Exclusion Crisis, the American and French Revolutions, the European revolutions of 1848 and their effect on the American Civil War, the Bolshevik Revolution and World Wars, and of course the rise of authoritarianism in our day.

This is the landscape we will explore, hope to clarify, in as cooperative, conversational a way as possible, focusing in particular on portions of the landscape that may in retrospect represent “lost opportunities” worth revisiting. In addition to anticipating being actively involved in a semester-long conversation, participants should anticipate periodic writing.

344 Marx, Nietzsche, Freud

Rennie, section 01

Exploration of the work of three German writers who revolutionized modern philosophy, theology, psychology, aesthetics, social and political science, gender studies, historiography, literature and the arts. We will be reading and discussing a selection of key writings by Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud. Along with these we'll examine a sampling of texts that were important for their work, and writings that later both reflected their influence and drew their ideas in new directions.

- Students who have completed Introductory German 101 or the equivalent, or who have Prof. Rennie's permission, are encouraged to enroll in the 1-credit, optional companion module "The Language of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud" (01:991:121:E1, meeting times to be arranged with participating students in September), which will focus on the original German-language concepts and formulations in select passages relevant to the principal themes of the main course "Marx, Nietzsche, Freud."

Readings for "Marx, Nietzsche, Freud":

- Freud, Sigmund. *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud (Psychopathology of Everyday Life, the Interpretation of Dreams, and Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex)* [ISBN: 9780679601661]
- Marx, Karl, Friedrich Engels. *The Marx-Engels Reader* [ISBN: 9780393090406]
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Nietzsche Reader* [ISBN: 9780631226543]

360 Philosophical Aspects of Cognitive Science

Quilty-Dunn, section 01

Cognitive science is a mess, philosophically speaking. Topics like *perception*, *thought*, *memory*, *language*, and *representation* are foundational to cognitive science, but there is no consensus on what exactly these words refer to. We will investigate these topics and others from a scientifically informed philosophical perspective. Our readings will prominently feature work by Jerry Fodor, a longtime Rutgers faculty member and arguably the most important philosophical contributor to cognitive science. We will also investigate experimental techniques in cognitive science and try to figure out what (if anything!) they tell us about the structure of human and non-human minds.

362 Philosophy of Literature

McCrossin, section 01

According to the Course Catalog, the philosophy of literature "[c]onsider[s] such questions as the definition of literature, the ontology of literary works, the nature of fiction, the emotional reaction of the audience to fiction, the problem of interpretation, the problem of literary value, and [so on]."

Aesthetics is the business of exploring the practice, experience, and value of art generally, providing us with a variety of competing perspectives—representationalism, expressionism, formalism, and aestheticism, among others. Literary criticism or theory, on the other hand, is the business of exploring the practice, experience, and value of literature in particular, providing us with a different variety of competing literature-specific perspectives—new criticism, reader response, deconstruction, and new historicism, among others. Philosophy of literature, as a special case of aesthetics, may be understood as the business of refining, in the hope of reconciling both sets of perspectives. Taking a page from Monroe Beardsley, for example, we may think of it as developing “those principles that are required for clarifying and confirming critical statements [and so] may be thought of, then, as the philosophy of criticism, or *metacriticism*.” Peter Lamarque has recently asserted, by contrast, that “[w]hatever its initial appeal, [... t]he view of philosophy of literature as ‘metacriticism’ seems doomed to fail.” Instead, he continues, “the inquiry [should be] concerned [...] rather with what might be called the phenomenon of literature, the phenomenon, common to most if not all cultures, of elevating kinds of linguistics activities—notably story-telling or poetry-making or drama—to an art form issuing in products that are revered and of cultural significance.” The question persists, however, is such compartmentalization ultimately necessary? Worse, might it be counterproductive?

This is the landscape we will attempt to explore, hope to clarify, in as cooperative, conversational a way as possible. In addition to anticipating being actively involved in a semester-long conversation, participants should anticipate periodic writing.

363 Philosophy and Popular Culture: Severance and Taylor Swift

Jenkin, section 01

This course will examine how popular culture can help us understand and explore philosophical questions, with a focus on two recent pop culture phenomena: the TV show *Severance*, and the music and cultural impact of Taylor Swift. Roughly half the course will be devoted to each. In the *Severance* half of the course, we will cover topics such as the relationship between memory and the self, the rationality of choice, nature vs. nurture, and what constitutes well-being. In the Taylor Swift half of the course, we will cover topics such as the relationship between emotion and reason, the human pursuit of happiness, the promised salvation of romantic love, when forgiveness is apt, and the power of catharsis.

No prior knowledge or fandom of *Severance* or Taylor Swift is required. Students are just asked to come with an open mind toward exploring philosophical issues through these lenses.

371 Philosophy of Death and Dying

Piven, section 01

This course is a philosophical exploration of the ways human beings have faced mortality. Socrates reputedly said that philosophy was a preparation for death. Hobbes said that the dread of death inspired religion, while Schopenhauer spoke of the afterlife as a metaphysical consolation. Ancient cultures often saw the end of life as the continuance of the cyclical death and rebirth of nature. Others created elaborate rituals to preserve the existence of the soul into other incarnations. Some have devised means of refusing death, while others have perpetuated themselves symbolically, through identification with their offspring or nature. This course bridges philosophy, psychoanalysis, sociology, and anthropology to discover the ways human beings conceive, contemplate, and deny death.

403 Ancient Philosophy after Aristotle

Sharpe, section 01

Some of the most interesting and enduring ideas from the ancient world originated in or were developed during the Hellenistic period—which started roughly when Aristotle died—and during the Roman revivals and redevelopments of Greek thought. Figures like Epicurus, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, and Cicero flourished in this span, articulating Epicurean, Stoic, and Skeptical positions and arguments in deep dialogue with one another.

We'll use these three schools of thought as our lens for understanding the wider philosophical world of this period, surveying well known figures like those listed above. We'll also look at others like Seneca, Heirocles, Musonius Rufus, Pyrrho, and Sextus Empiricus, drawing both on original texts, where extant, and the works of ancient chroniclers and compilers like Diogenes Laertius and Stobaeus. Familiarity with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle would be helpful, but it is by no means required. However, as this is a senior-level class, familiarity with philosophical topics, methods, and how to write papers in philosophy is expected.

410 History of Analytic Philosophy

Loewer, section 01

At the beginning of the twentieth century philosophy took an “analytic turn” in Great Britain and the U.S. and parts of Germany. The analytic approach influences the way philosophy is practised in the U.S. (especially Rutgers) today. It emphasizes clarity, logic, paying attention to how language and mind represent the world, developments in the sciences, especially physics and mathematics. This course will focus on the history of analytic philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century. We will begin with Frege, then G.E. Moore, Bertrand Russell and early Wittgenstein (the *Tractatus*). After that we will discuss parts of later Wittgenstein (*The Philosophical Investigations*). We will then read some of the European positivist (positivists), Hans Reichenbach and Rudolph Carnap and Karl Popper. The course will end with reading parts

of Gilbert Ryles' *Concept of Mind*. Unfortunately, we will not have time to discuss the analytic tradition in ethics. That is another course.

Course work will be class participation, a short midterm paper and a final paper.

420 Philosophy of Language

Glanzberg, section 01

Language is a familiar part of our everyday lives, but it is also an important topic in philosophy. In this course, we will explore some of the fundamental philosophical issues that surround language. We will investigate what makes a language what it is, by investigating the nature of linguistic meaning, the range of special actions we can perform in virtue of having a language, and the ways language can frame thoughts about the world around us. We will also investigate what it is to know something so complicated as a human language, by investigating the nature of linguistic rules, and the kinds of cognitive states that comprise knowledge of language. As time permits, we will also examine some additional topics, such as how language can express vague or imprecise ideas.

424 Logic of Decision

Bialek, section 01

Formalizing the processes by which we make decisions can do a lot of good compared to, say, making all of our decisions arbitrarily or based merely on a whim. But there are fundamental issues with how such formalizations can be applied that prevent them from being a cure-all against less structured decision making processes. This course will examine formal theories relevant to decision making—such as those of preferences, utilities, games, social choice, voting, probability, and statistics—with a special focus on the circumstances under which they seem to fail. Assessment in the course will be based on a mixture of exams, quizzes, a presentation, and other in-class or at-home assignments.

429 Philosophy of Biology

Lange, section 01

This course will explore some issues concerning the conceptual foundations of contemporary biology. Topics will likely include (time-permitting):

- What makes something qualify as a living thing? Does the concept of “life” do any work in contemporary biology and, if so, what? Can a piece of computer software be (literally) alive?
- What does it take for something to qualify as an organism rather than as a collection of distinct organisms or as a piece of a larger organism? Examples to think about: lichens, ant colonies, siphonophores, a field of dandelions, you (and your internal gut microbiome).
- What is Darwinian “fitness”? Do fitness differences cause or explain frequencies of traits in populations? How does random genetic drift explain a trait frequency? Is Darwin’s theory of natural selection captured by some set of claims? How is that theory confirmed or disconfirmed?

· What does it mean to say that the function of the heart is to pump the blood (rather than, say, to make lub-dub sounds)? Are there no biological functions if there is no Designer? What is the relation between malfunctions and diseases? What makes something a disease rather than an injury, an anatomical variant, or an artificial category consisting of two diseases that have not yet been distinguished?

· What makes it the case that two organisms belong to the same biological species? Are biological species natural kinds, like the chemical elements, or more like the constellations in astronomy: convenient categories for us to use but lacking objective reality? No particular bit of background knowledge of philosophy or of biology will be presupposed (beyond a rough recollection of high-school level ideas about evolution by natural selection). But some prior experience in writing philosophy papers and thinking philosophically will definitely be helpful. Readings will be drawn from literature in philosophy and biology. There will be some short writing assignments (to be done in class in some cases and at home in others), a final exam, and some worksheets. I hope that this course will encourage you to look beyond various biological theories and ideas that may already be familiar to you from your science classes, leading you to examine their conceptual foundations more carefully and critically.

450 Topics in Moral Philosophy

Kamm, section 01

This class will focus on selected topics in normative ethical theory and practical ethics. Readings will be from modern and contemporary analytic philosophy. Some classes will have visiting philosophers who will discuss their recent work. Prerequisite: two prior philosophy classes.