

## **PHILOSOPHY**

Studying philosophy improves our critical and creative thinking. It helps us understand our society, and our system of beliefs and values. In addition, philosophy provides excellent training for a variety of professions. Most philosophy courses are organized as lectures or seminars and typically include tutorials. All courses, except PHIL1068, are assessed by 100% coursework.

### **Major in Philosophy (72 credits)**

Students wishing to major in Philosophy must complete 72 credits of courses, including:

- Either PHIL1012 or PHIL1034 (6 credits);
- 12 credits of introductory courses taken from any Arts programme(s), which may include additional credits in 1000-level Philosophy courses;
- 54 credits of Philosophy courses from among those at the 2000-, 3000-, and 4000-levels, including PHIL3920 or PHIL4810 or PHIL4920 (capstone experience).

### **Minor in Philosophy (36 credits)**

Students wishing to minor in Philosophy must complete 36 credits of courses, including:

- Either PHIL1012 or PHIL1034 (6 credits);
- 30 credits of Philosophy courses from among those at the 2000- and 3000-levels.

### **Recommendations about Course Selection**

- The Department welcomes students who want to study philosophy but have no intention to major or minor in Philosophy. We do recommend that they complete PHIL1012 or PHIL1034 before enrolling in courses at the 2000- level or above.
- PHIL1012 or PHIL1034 is usually taken in the first year of study, but students may also take them in other years.
- Courses at the 2000- level are divided into four groups according to their subject matter:
  - Knowledge and reality
  - Mind and language
  - Moral and political philosophy
  - History of philosophy

We strongly recommend major students to select courses from all four groups to ensure a broader training in philosophy.

### **1000-LEVEL COURSES**

All 1000-level courses are introductory courses with no prerequisites. They are open to students in all years of study.

#### **PHIL1012. Mind and knowledge: an introduction to philosophy (6 credits)**

This course is an introduction to philosophical issues about mind and knowledge. These include metaphysical questions about what minds are, such as whether the mind is something non-physical or whether it is some kind of computer, and questions about what knowledge is and how we can obtain it. We also address epistemological questions about the limitations of human knowledge, such as whether we can really know what other people's experiences are like or whether God exists. Assessment: 100% coursework.

**PHIL1034. Ethics and politics, East and West: an introduction to philosophy (6 credits)**

This survey course is a comparative introduction to philosophy focusing primarily on topics in ethics and politics. Lectures and readings will draw equally on the Chinese and Western philosophical traditions and indicate various respects in which the two can be put into dialogue. Readings include Confucius, Mòzǐ, Mencius, *Dàodéjīng*, Xúnzǐ, Zhuāngzǐ, and Hán Fēi, on the Chinese side, along with Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Bentham, Mill, Marx, Nietzsche, Bakunin, Russell, Berlin, Hart, Wolff, Rawls, Nozick, Taylor, and Scanlon, on the Western side. Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL1068. Elementary logic (6 credits)**

This is a web-based self-study course on elementary formal logic. Formal logic uses special symbolic notations to study reasoning and arguments systematically. In this course we shall look at some basic concepts in logic, and learn how to use special logical symbols to construct and evaluate arguments. There are no lectures in this course, and all teaching material is available online for self-study. There are, however, optional tutorials for students to ask questions. Registered students should visit the philosophy department web site at the beginning of the semester to find out how they can obtain access to the learning material.

Assessment: 60% coursework, 40% examination.

Note: Students who have taken PHIL2510 may not take this course.

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**2000- LEVEL COURSES**

The following courses are normally open to students in the second, third, and fourth years of study. Please note that not all of them are offered every year. The Department will publish on its website the list of courses that will be offered in the coming academic year.

The courses are divided into four groups. Philosophy majors are recommended to select courses from different groups to ensure a broader exposure to different areas of philosophy.

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***Group I: Knowledge and Reality*****PHIL2000. Tools for Philosophers (6 credits)**

This course is an introduction to some of the basic logical and formal techniques and concepts in contemporary analytic philosophy. Very often they are taken for granted in specialist philosophical writing. The aim of the course is to explain the meaning and application of these ideas clearly without the less important details, focusing on their philosophical relevance to show how these ideas can improve the clarity of various debates. The ideas to be discussed are taken from areas such as formal logic, probability theory, mathematics, linguistics, and the philosophy of language.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2100. Paradoxes of decision (6 credits)**

The aim of the course is to introduce a variety of tools from decision theory. Decision theory is arguably one of the most important topics in philosophy because of its pervasive influence on a wide range of traditional philosophical topics, including ethics and epistemology. The central question is: which actions are rational in the face of risk or uncertainty? Some of the writings on this topic are very technical, but the course will try to skip over technicalities as much as possible and introduce most of

the main topics via a series of paradoxes or puzzles. Topics which will be covered include objective and subjective expected utility theory; Newcomb's problem and causal decision theory; game theory and the Nash equilibrium; and evolutionary game theory and the evolution of the social contract.  
Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2105. Vagueness, indeterminacy, and uncertainty (6 credits)**

Many major areas of philosophy somehow have to deal with imprecision, or the absence of various facts. For example, many of the terms of ordinary language, such as 'is bald', are vague. Many questions, such as when a human being becomes a person, do not seem to have determinate answers. Even when there are facts, we are often uncertain of them. But we need to reason about these topics; we need to be precise about imprecision. This course will examine a variety of tools for doing this. Some of these tools have a technical flavour, such as nonclassical logic and probability theory. While the course does not presuppose mathematical knowledge, it does assume that students are prepared to philosophically engage with such tools.  
Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2110. Knowledge (6 credits)**

Theory of knowledge deals with the nature and possibility of knowledge and its limits. We shall address questions that include: Is Scepticism possible? Are some kinds of knowledge more basic than others? Are our views of the world really true or just elaborate stories that serve our purposes? Can philosophers learn about knowledge from psychology and physiology? What could philosophers add to their stories? Is there one concept of justification (reason) or many (social and cultural differences)? Is truth an important goal of knowledge?  
Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2115. Skepticism and relativism (6 credits)**

Is knowledge of the world possible? And is there even an objective world for our knowledge to be about? These are the topics of skepticism and relativism. Sceptics challenge our ability to know anything about the world. Relativists contest that there is no absolute, objective truth. In this class, we will study both historical and contemporary thinking about these perennial topics. We will address ancient arguments for skepticism, but also look to more contemporary relativistic thinking about science, morality, and other matters.  
Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2120. Topics in analytic philosophy (6 credits)**

An advanced introduction to contemporary philosophy, this course will focus on a few areas of lively current debate. Students will have an opportunity to critically examine a sample of the best recent work in analytic philosophy. Careful attention will be paid to the roots of these debates in early analytic philosophy.  
Assessment: 100% coursework.

**PHIL2130. Philosophy of the sciences (6 credits)**

If we want to find out about the world around us, we look to science to provide the answers to our questions. But why? What justifies our faith in this enterprise? In this course, we shall investigate three related questions. First, what is the scientific method? We shall examine answers ranging from the rigid prescriptions of Popper to the anarchism of Feyerabend. Second, what reason do we have to think that the explanations provided by science are true? Here the answers range from optimism based on the success of science, to pessimism based on our repeated rejection of past theories. Along the way, we shall critically consider notions such as progress, objectivity, and the difference between science and non-science. We shall examine how philosophical questions arise in actual scientific practice. Third, what is the relation between science and society?

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2140. Philosophy of social science (6 credits)**

The social sciences have descriptive and normative components. They attempt to understand and explain human life and activities. But they also provide the basis for, or make, recommendations about how human life and activity should be. The course will look at one or both of these aspects of the social sciences. Some of the social sciences, such as economics, are quite mathematical. In years in which these are studied, students should be prepared to discuss the interpretation and implications of major theorems, such as Arrow's impossibility theorem in social choice theory, or Harsanyi's aggregation theorem in welfare economics.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2150. Philosophy and biology (6 credits)**

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution had a huge impact on the way we think about mankind's place in the world. In this course we will discuss some of the philosophical consequences of this impact. No previous knowledge of the theory is required as we will begin with a critical introduction to its development and main features. Later in the course we will also consider the contemporary debate concerning the scope and limits of evolutionary theory.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2210. Metaphysics (6 credits)**

Metaphysics is perhaps the broadest area of philosophy because it takes everything as its subject: metaphysics is the study of reality. This class, of course, cannot cover everything, but we will tackle some of the most persistent metaphysical questions that have troubled thoughtful people for centuries. At the same time, metaphysics is one of the most contested areas of philosophy. Different philosophers mean very different things by 'metaphysics', and a vast number of topics and questions are classified as 'metaphysical'. While some philosophers regard metaphysics as the most fundamental philosophical discipline, others have rejected metaphysics as meaningless or misguided. In this class, we will explore a variety of metaphysical topics, and come to better understand this controversial area of philosophy. Among the questions we might explore are: What makes an object identical across time and change? What is the nature of space and time? Does God exist? Do we have free will? Are there universals, or just particular objects? Does everything exist in the same way, or are there different ways of being? Why does anything exist at all? Many of us think that we know the answers to these questions, but do we have good reasons for these beliefs? In this class, we will learn to appreciate the difficulties that these questions pose, and develop the sort of critical skills necessary to come to have good reasons for our beliefs about these fundamental and timeless philosophical issues.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

**PHIL2216. Philosophy of physics (6 credits)**

In this course we will explore the relationship between physics and philosophy at various points in the history of the two disciplines. By using particular physical theories, both classical and contemporary, we will explore issues that emerge at the intersection of physics and metaphysics, and the changes in our understanding of these ideas and concepts. Topics might include the nature of space and time, determinism, causation, laws of nature, the nature of material substance and others.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2217. Issues in contemporary metaphysics (6 credits)**

Metaphysics is a very broad subject area, within which different, more specific debates can be distinguished. This course will focus on one or two specific, longstanding such debates in metaphysics. Examples of such topics include: the nature of properties, theories of modality (necessity, possibility), realism and antirealism. For the exact topics in a given year, contact the course coordinator.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2312. Probability, epistemology, and ethics (6 credits)**

This course provides an introduction to topics in ethics and epistemology which involve questions about probability. Traditional views about ethics and epistemology say little about probability. But at least in epistemology, a more recent view is that just about all epistemology should be understood in terms of probability. It is at least arguable that probability is just as important for ethics. The course will survey a number of topics in ethics and epistemology where the “traditional versus probabilistic” contrast arises, and will examine the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2420. Chinese philosophy: metaphysics (6 credits)**

We study Chinese views of reality, human nature, language, wisdom and the relation of each to human society. Our main texts will be Daoist texts from the classical period, but we shall also discuss Neo-Daoism, Buddhism and Neo-Confucian metaphysics.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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***Group II: Mind and Language*****PHIL2070. Pragmatism (6 credits)**

This course is in two unequal parts. In the first and longer part, we shall study the writings of the classical pragmatists: Peirce, Dewey and James; in the second, we shall look more briefly at some of the so-called ‘neo-pragmatists’ such as Quine, Davidson and Putnam. We shall then consider the question of the relationship between these two schools, and think seriously about the recent suggestion that the earlier is in fact the better.

Topics to be discussed include: truth and knowledge; religion and science; and rationality, personality and aesthetics.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

**PHIL2075. The semantics/pragmatics distinction (6 credits)**

One of the central issues in contemporary philosophy of language and linguistics concerns whether and where one should draw the line between semantic meaning and pragmatic meaning, or the meanings of the words and sentences a speaker uses, and what a speaker means in using those words and sentences. One reason the issue is central is that there are debates over the semantic meanings of certain expressions, e.g. names and definite descriptions. Without a general account of the difference between semantic and pragmatic meaning, these debates cannot be settled. Another reason the issue is central is that there are some who, in a roughly Wittgensteinian manner, deny that there is any real sense to be made of the notion of semantic, or literal, meaning. According to them, there is, therefore, no line between pragmatic and semantic meaning at all. In this course we will try to determine whether the distinction can be drawn, and, if so, where.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2220. The mind (6 credits)**

The human mind is the nexus of a number of great mysteries. What is the nature of self? Is the mind identical to the brain, or is it an immaterial substance? Is Artificial Intelligence possible, and can computers experience emotions and other feelings? Are our actions free, or are they determined by our genes and upbringing? We shall be exploring some of these issues and other related topics in this course.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2230. Philosophy and cognitive science (6 credits)**

We shall look at some of the philosophical issues involved in studying minds and behaviour scientifically. We might discuss questions such as: Can we explain all mental phenomena in computational terms? What is consciousness? What is the role of language in thinking? How useful are neural networks in understanding the mind?

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2245. Philosophy and emotions (6 credits)**

What is an emotion? Is it a feeling, like the sensation of butterflies in the stomach that we experience when we are in love, or is it something more complex, something like a thought or a judgement? What is the relationship between emotions and knowledge? Why do we form emotions in response to things that we know are not real, like literature and movies for example? These and other questions will be the focus of this course.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2260. Seminar in mind and language (6 credits)**

The philosophy of mind and language occupies a central place within analytic philosophy. This course provides an advanced introduction to selected topics in the area, through intensive reading of recent publications. The course will be conducted mainly as a seminar, and students are required to give presentations and to participate in discussion. This format is intended to help students deepen their understanding of analytical and argumentative skills in philosophy. Topics might include: the semantics of natural language, philosophical foundation of linguistics, consciousness, philosophical issues relating to mental representation.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

**PHIL2410. Mind and language in Chinese thought (6 credits)**

The philosophy of mind and language plays a crucial role in the philosophical dialectic of classical China. This course will guide students in reconstructing this dialectic and exploring its philosophical significance by interpreting and critically evaluating selected early Chinese philosophical texts that treat mind, language, and interrelated aspects of psychology. Issues to be discussed include the nature and functions of the heart-mind (*xīn*), its relation to other organs, the nature of perception and knowledge, semantic theories, and the role of language in knowledge and action. Texts may include the *Analects*, *Mozi*, *Mencius*, *Daodejing*, *Xunzi*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Lushi Chunqiu*. Students will be encouraged to read the original sources in Chinese, but translations will be made available for those without reading knowledge of classical Chinese.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2460. Philosophical Chinese (6 credits)**

In this course, we shall learn to analyse grammatically and semantically the language used in the classical texts of Chinese philosophy. The analysis will help us construct arguments in favour of or against various interpretations and translations. We briefly discuss texts from the *Analects* of Confucius, the *Mozi*, the *Zhuangzi* and then do a detailed analysis of the *Daode Jing*.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2510. Logic (6 credits)**

This is an introduction to formal logic. We will review sentential and predicate logic. We will discuss theorems about formal systems of logic, including soundness and completeness. Time permitting, we will discuss advanced topics such as Gödel's incompleteness theorems, computability, Tarski's theorem, or modal logic. Students are expected to know some elementary formal logic before enrolling in this course. In preparation, students can take PHIL 1068 or study the online material on logic produced by the department. For further details, please contact the department.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2511. Paradoxes (6 credits)**

Paradoxes are arguments which proceed from highly plausible assumptions, through highly plausible and usually simple steps to highly implausible conclusions. Some examples: Zeno's paradoxes of motion, Kant's antinomies, the Liar and the paradox of the surprise examination. What such paradoxes show is that there is something deeply wrong with some of our most fundamental ways of thinking. We shall attempt to find solutions to certain of these paradoxes. Students are expected to know some elementary formal logic before studying this course. To prepare for the course, they can either take PHIL2006, or study the online material on logic produced by the department. For further details, please contact the department.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2520. Philosophy of logic (6 credits)**

When thinking about inference, a number of concepts come to our attention, such as *truth*, *logical constants*, *propositions*, *necessity*, *consequence*, *logical form*. Various questions with which the course deals include: "What is the relation of Logic to reasoning?"; "What does the existence of paradoxes tell us about our accepted logical principles?"; "What is the best way to represent arguments in ordinary language if we wish to study the validity of such arguments?" "Are there types of discourse which are

by nature fuzzy, demanding a fuzzy logic for their representation?"; "Must logic fit empirical facts, or is it a 'pure' discipline?" Students are expected to know some elementary formal logic before studying this course. To prepare for the course, they can either take PHIL2006, or study the online material on logic produced by the department. For further details, please contact the department.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2610. Philosophy of language (6 credits)**

What is a language, and what is involved in knowing or understanding a language? In this course we will see how philosophers and linguists answer such questions as the following: What is a language? What makes linguistic expressions meaningful? What can logic tell us about the grammar of natural languages? Are human beings born with a universal grammar? What is the difference between what we mean and what we convey when we say something? How does a metaphor work?

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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***Group III: Moral and Political Philosophy***

**PHIL2080. Marxist philosophy (6 credits)**

The world has changed a great deal since the time of Marx. But Marxism, duly updated and refined, still has a lot to teach us about the nature of human society and historical change, the capitalist organization of society, the foundation and limits of liberal democracy, the constitution of power and the political. These and other issues raised by Marxism are, or ought to be, among the central concerns of political philosophy or philosophy of history. We will examine how Marxism, especially contemporary Marxism, can serve as a useful critique of liberal political philosophy and liberal political institutions. We will also discuss how Marxism itself needs to be transformed or reconceived in order to create an appealing democratic vision of genuine contemporary relevance.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2101. Paradoxes of Cooperation (6 credits)**

The course deals with applications of game theory and decision theory to important philosophical problems to do with cooperation. These problems arise especially in ethics, epistemology, political philosophy, philosophy of social science, and social choice theory. Problems of cooperation arises between different people, and also the same person at different times. Many of the problems to be discussed take the form of simple and easily understood paradoxes. Puzzles about cooperation include: How does language arise? Can rational agents make credible threats or promises? How does what a group believes depend on what its members believe? Do rationality and common interest guarantee cooperation?

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2310. Theories of morality (6 credits)**

Moral judgments are about what is good or bad, right or wrong, and virtuous or vicious. Normative theories (like utilitarianism) try to explain what sorts of behaviors and actions are good or bad, or right or wrong. The topic of this course, however, is metaethics. Metaethical theories are about normative ethical theories: they try to explain what is distinctive about moral judgments, and how they are similar to or different from other kinds of judgments. In this course, we shall explore the nature of moral judgments, and how they are related to motivation, truth, and objectivity. Do moral judgments always



accompany motivation to act in a certain way? How can moral judgments be true or false? Is morality relative or absolute? These are the key metaethical questions we shall explore together in the course.  
Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2315. Value theory (6 credits)**

The aim of the course is to examine a variety of questions about goodness. It will cover three main topics: goodness for people; the distribution of goodness for people; and the goodness of creating new people. Topics to be covered include: the quality of experience, desire satisfaction, and objective goods; interpersonal comparisons, primary goods and capability sets; the measurement of goodness for people; utilitarianism; fairness and equality; giving priority to the worse off; the impartial spectator argument; veil of ignorance arguments; Harsanyi's aggregation theorem; the nonidentity problem; and the repugnant conclusion. The course will pay special attention to the way the utilitarian and contractualist traditions treat these topics, and what they agree and disagree about.  
Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2320. Happiness (6 credits)**

Happiness is something we all strive for, despite the fact that we have only hazy and inconsistent notions of what it would involve. Is it a psychological state or the condition of living a good life? Is it to be gained by withdrawing from the world, or engaging in it? Are we, in some sense, designed to be happy, or is it always an impossibility? This course will lead students through some of the most influential conceptualisations of happiness in the Western tradition. We will consider, in detail, the work of Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*), J.S. Mill (*Utilitarianism*) and Freud (*Civilisation and Its Discontents*). This focus will allow us to explore a range of ideas about the nature of happiness and the possibility (or impossibility) of our achieving it. Particular emphasis will be placed on the ongoing influence of these conflicting ideas in our contemporary world.  
Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2340. Moral problems (6 credits)**

Many practical problems give rise to moral controversies. Among the questions to be considered in this course are "Should one person treat all others equally?"; "Is abortion a type of killing, and is it acceptable?"; "Should certain types of pornography be banned?"; "Can capital punishment be justified?"; "Is it right to take affirmative action in favour of groups who have been discriminated against in the past?"; "Should old people be helped to die, if that is what they wish?". These are all "large-scale" questions, but we shall also be discussing less grand, but no less important moral dilemmas that we each confront from time to time.  
Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2341. Bioethics (6 credits)**

This course will examine some of the most debated questions in bioethics both from the perspective of individual decision-making and population level policy making. Some of the questions to be discussed are, 'Can researchers conduct medical experiments on human beings?'; 'Should parents have a right or a duty to create genetically enhanced "designer babies"?'; 'Should we have a market for organs?'; 'Should the government "nudge" people to eat healthy and exercise?'; and 'What are the limits of personal responsibility in health?'. While discussing these questions, this course will also explore concepts that are often encountered in arguments in bioethics such as coercion, dignity, and autonomy.  
Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2345. Social contract theories (6 credits)**

In this course we study the major modern theories of social contract, starting with the seventeenth-century *Leviathan* of Thomas Hobbes, which places the state above its subjects. Later in the same century John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* argued that the contracting parties to the state would seek protection of their property above all, and that they could dismiss a non-performing government, an inspiration for the American Revolution. Jean-Jacques Rousseau rejected the positions of Hobbes and Locke, basing his social contract on the will of all jointly to secure the common good, or "general will". John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* in the twentieth century bases the democratic system on a conception of social justice grounded in equality of basic rights and regard for the least advantaged members of society.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2350. Philosophy of law (6 credits)**

We shall set the scene by contrasting classical Western and Chinese views of law. Then we shall focus on what moral and political presuppositions are required to justify the rule of law. This will guide our view of how one ought to reason in interpreting the law, and finally see what the implications of theory of law are for our views of punishment, rights, justice, equality, responsibility, insanity, and negligence. This course should help you evaluate the arguments for the importance of the rule of law in Hong Kong. Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2355. Theories of justice (6 credits)**

All of us care about justice but perhaps you seldom pause to reflect on the nature of justice and the many difficult issues which justice raises. This course introduces you to these issues and systematic ways of thinking about them. In a nutshell, justice is concerned with the question, How should the benefits and burdens of social cooperation be distributed among members of society under conditions of scarcity and conflicting values? Or, as Serge-Christophe Kolm puts it, "What should be done when different people's desires or interests oppose one another and cannot all be fully satisfied? Justice is the justified answer to this question and its science is the theory of justice." We will think about this question at two levels: the distribution of fundamental rights and duties in the basic structure of society; and the distribution of goods in particular domains, such as health care. Since controversy abounds at both levels, we will discuss and compare a variety of positions, including those of John Rawls, Brian Barry, Amartya Sen, Ronald Dworkin, Robert Nozick, Serge-Christophe Kolm, Norman Daniels, and Francis Kamm. We will also consider whether, and to what degree, Western theories of justice such as these are useful for thinking about issues of justice in Hong Kong and the PRC at large.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2360. Political philosophy (6 credits)**

This survey course addresses fundamental questions in the history of political philosophy. Questions about government, justice, property and rights will be addressed through the work of a range of historical and contemporary thinkers. Philosophers to be studied may include Aristotle, Hobbes, Marx, Rawls, and others.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

**PHIL2362. Liberal democracy (6 credits)**

Liberal democracy is the dominant political value and form of government in terms of power and influence in the world today. It is supposed to be a coherent combination of liberalism and democracy, and yet there are deep tensions between these two components. It is by identifying these tensions that we can best understand the workings of liberal democracy as a form of government and assess its plausibility and appeal as a political value. Within this context, such familiar topics as political agency, freedom, rights, and private life will be seen in a fresh light.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2365. Philosophical problems of modernity (6 credits)**

This course will focus on responses to one of the key questions that is posed by twentieth century European philosophy: that is, what is the nature of this modernity in which we live? According to Marx, the experience of modernity is one in which “all that is solid melts into air”; while according to some contemporary philosophers this is precisely the experience of *post*-modernity. In this course, we will examine the responses of key 20th century philosophers to the question of modernity and postmodernity (these may include, Benjamin, Adorno & Horkheimer, Habermas, Foucault, Lyotard and Bauman). Particular attention will be paid to the way this questioning has led to a reconceptualisation of ethics and politics in contemporary societies.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2369. Philosophy of nature (6 credits)**

In this course we will develop an understanding of historically and philosophically significant approaches to the environment such as *anthropocentrism* (mainstream environmentalism) and *biocentrism* (deep ecology). We will read authors both from the history of philosophy (Bacon, Descartes and Locke) as well as modern philosophers. We will look at the implications of these philosophies in recent environmental controversies in Hong Kong.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2375. Philosophy of art (6 credits)**

This course focuses on the philosophical issues which arise when we consider the nature of aesthetic appreciation and judgement. These are some of the questions which will be discussed in the course: What is *mimesis*? Does art simply mirror nature? Is beauty merely “in the eye of the beholder”? What differences might there be between aesthetic appreciation of art and aesthetic appreciation of nature? What is the relation between art and society? What is the difference between the sublime and the beautiful? These and other questions will be explored through the work of philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Hume, Kant, Dewey, Heidegger Foucault and Lyotard.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2380. Philosophy and literature (6 credits)**

This course introduces two ways of studying philosophy and literature in relation to each other. On the one hand, we shall try to illuminate a range of philosophical, particularly ethical, problems through a close reading of literary texts (which may include the work of Dostoevsky, Henry James, Franz Kafka, and James Joyce). On the other hand, we shall bring the resources of philosophy to bear on questions of literary theory and interpretation (for example, the role of the reader, the position of the writer and the ethics of reading). Both philosophical essays and literary works will be used in the course.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2390. Philosophy of religion (6 credits)**

Topics discussed will include: the nature of religious experience, the existence of God, life after death, religion and morality, religion and reason.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2430. Chinese philosophy: ethics (6 credits)**

An introduction to comparative moral philosophy, with readings drawn from the classical Chinese tradition as well as from modern, analytical sources. Figures likely to be taken up include Confucius, Mencius, Mo Tzu and Han Fei Tzu. Attention will be given to the historical development of Chinese moral thinking through these key representatives. Questions to be taken up include the question of whether traditional Chinese thought can have relevance to us in the modern world, and how our beliefs about our nature may shape our beliefs about what is moral or immoral.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2480. Confucianism and the modern world (6 credits)**

This course introduces some of the central ideas of Confucianism, particularly as they have been developed by Neo-Confucian thinkers, and considers the contemporary meaning and relevance of these ideas for societies with a Confucian tradition. The thematic focus of the course is on whether and how (Neo-)Confucianism promotes or hinders economic, political and cultural modernization. We shall also discuss how (Neo-)Confucianism interacts with Western ideas, and (in the case of the PRC) Marxism in the process of social transformation.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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***Group IV: History of Philosophy***

**PHIL2001. The beginnings of philosophy (6 credits)**

The contents of this course will vary from year to year, but it is likely to include important early thinkers like Plato and Aristotle in the West, and/or Confucius and Lao Tze in China.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2002. Early modern philosophy (6 credits)**

This course is an introduction to the thought of the major figures of Western philosophy of the 17th and 18th centuries. We will read major works from among Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and some lesser known pieces by some women writing in the era. In particular, we will focus on the topics of *self*, *world*, and *God*. What is the self? What makes me the same person over time? What is the nature of reality, and what can we know about it? What is the nature of God, and can we know whether he exists? We will explore how these important thinkers thought about these questions, and other important philosophical topics such as free will, causation, science, and skepticism.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

**PHIL2005. Hellenistic philosophy (6 credits)**

After the classical period of Plato and Aristotle Greek philosophy saw a number of new developments with decisive consequences for the western philosophical tradition. It is in the Hellenistic age that we see the re-emergence of atomist physics, the origins of the debate over free will and determinism, and a turn towards scepticism concerning the possibility of knowledge both in Plato's Academy and in Sextus Empiricus' Pyrrhonian response to the epistemological optimism of the Stoics and Epicureans. This course will examine these developments as they played out not only in metaphysics, logic, and ethics, but also in physics, medicine, grammar, and even music.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2010. Plato (6 credits)**

This course offers a general introduction to the central concerns of Plato's philosophy. It focuses on Plato's early and middle dialogues in which the enigmatic character of Socrates is central. It addresses Plato's teachings on the role of philosophy in the life of the individual, the relation between knowledge and virtue, and his contribution to questions about the nature of love and desire.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2011. Aristotle (6 credits)**

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BCE) researched virtually every aspect of human knowledge, producing works that influence philosophy and many other fields down to the present. This course looks at his political and social philosophy; we will read his *Parts of Animals*, *Politics* and *Constitution of Athens*, examining his concepts of nature, human nature, slavery, property, citizenship, democracy, education and the ideal city.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2020. Descartes (6 credits)**

The standard accounts of Descartes' philosophy have tended to focus on his late metaphysics and epistemology, but this course is intended as an introduction to many more of the interesting aspects of Descartes' thought. We shall, of course, discuss some of the standard issues in their rightful place (and discuss what that place might be), but we shall also consider Descartes' contributions to, and philosophical thoughts about, e.g. physics, mathematics, and medicine. (*N.B.* No specialist knowledge of these areas is required). The reading will be a combination of Descartes' primary texts (recently published in a very clear translation) and contemporary secondary material.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2025. Hume (6 credits)**

David Hume (1711 – 1776) was one of the great founders of modern empiricism. This course will serve not only as an introduction to Hume's philosophy, but also as an introduction to modern empiricism as developed especially in the analytical tradition of modern philosophy. The course will appeal especially to students interested in the theory of knowledge, metaphysics and philosophy of mind, as well as to students interested primarily in the history of philosophy.

The course takes up key topics in Hume, such as: Hume's theory of ideas; the formation of reason and imagination; knowledge of the external world and skepticism with regard to the senses; induction; causation, probability and the idea of necessary connection; personal identity; freedom and determinism, reasoning in animals; miracles; virtue and vice in the context of Hume's naturalism. Readings will be

drawn primarily from Hume's *A Treatise on Human Nature* and *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2027. Rousseau (6 credits)**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was one of the most important philosophers of the French eighteenth century. He was critical of the Enlightenment's fascination with science, arguing that virtue, community and a kind of freedom, not technological 'progress', should be the goal of human striving. In this course we seek to understand Rousseau's thought in its historical context; we consider how he can be considered a philosopher for our own time, who respected the rights of nature as well as those of humanity. We read selections from his *Confessions*, and the entire texts of his *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, and his *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality among Men*.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2030. Kant's critical philosophy (6 credits)**

The topic of this class is Kant's Critical Philosophy, a period of Kant's work beginning with the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. The focus of the course will be either on his "theoretical philosophy", especially the *Critique of Pure Reason*, or his "practical philosophy", especially the *Groundwork for the metaphysics of morals*.

For the former we will discuss central claims and arguments in the *Critique*: the distinction between a priori and a posteriori, analytic and synthetic judgments, space and time, concepts and objects, the nature of causation, the nature of the self, Kant's critique of metaphysics.

For the latter we will discuss important concepts like the categorical imperative, acting from duty, and the good will. We will contrast Kant's approach to the foundation of morality with competing moral systems.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2035. Philosophy of the Enlightenment (6 credits)**

The eighteenth-century European philosophical movement known as "The Enlightenment" called all previous philosophy into question, destabilizing conventional views of humanity, nature, society and the cosmos; the Enlightenment influences philosophy to this day. This course examines important European thinkers such as Francis Bacon, Bernard Mandeville, Denis Diderot, Jean le Rond D'Alembert, Julien Offray de La Mettrie, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant from a *historical* as well as philosophical perspective.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2039. Kierkegaard (6 credits)**

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is a profoundly original thinker, philosophically distinctive for his pseudonymous polemics, Socratic interrogation of contemporary Danish 'Christendom', Pascalian critique of Cartesian doubt, and existential attack on rationalism and idealist speculation, particularly the Hegelian philosophical 'system'. This course will focus on how these dialectical engagements and exchanges help to structure Kierkegaard's conception of three 'stages' or 'spheres' of existence (aesthetic, ethical, and religious) around the interrelated questions of truth and paradox, immediacy and reflection, anxiety and despair, irony and humour, freedom and necessity.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

**PHIL2040. Nietzsche (6 credits)**

Nietzsche occupies a special place in Western thought, both as a wholesale critic of the philosophical tradition that went before him (e.g. Socrates, Kant), and as a precursor of certain philosophical trends that are important today (e.g. Foucault, Derrida). This course offers an overview of Nietzsche's philosophy (including the will to power, perspectivism, nihilism, eternal return) and discusses Nietzsche's influence on contemporary thought.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2050. Philosophy of history (6 credits)**

This course looks at ideas of a universal, "sacred history" stemming from Judaism and Christianity, as articulated by St. Augustine, and moves on to the secular idea of an underlying, universal pattern to the seeming chaos of human history expressed in the writings of thinkers from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. Readings will include excerpts from the writings of Herder, Kant, Condorcet, Hegel, Popper and Fukuyama.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2060. Wittgenstein (6 credits)**

Wittgenstein said that his aim in philosophy was "to show the fly the way out of the fly bottle". By this he meant that certain preconceptions, oversimplifications and poor analogies had led philosophers to construct misguided theories about such things as sensation, meaning, understanding and the nature of language, and that it was his task not to construct alternative theories but to point out the ways in which the theorists (including his earlier self) had become entrapped. This programme may appear modest, but Wittgenstein's approach has had far-reaching consequences and his work has received more discussion than that of any other twentieth century philosopher and has influenced philosophy and many other disciplines.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2077. Habermas (6 credits)**

The important German philosopher Habermas, combining strengths of the Continental and Anglo-American philosophical traditions, has developed a highly influential theory on a wide range of moral, political and historical issues. This course is designed to provide a general introduction to Habermas's interdisciplinary, comprehensive, and politically engaged way of doing philosophy. Topics covered include discourse ethics, the public sphere, social action and rationality, technology and science as ideology, the nature of modernity, and legitimation problems in late capitalism.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2085. Contemporary European philosophy (6 credits)**

The contents of this course will vary from year to year, but it is likely to cover various important twentieth century thinkers (these may include Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Foucault, Derrida) and/or major movements in twentieth century European thought (such as phenomenology, existentialism, structuralism and poststructuralism). Details will be announced in good time in the departmental booklet '*Choices in Philosophy*'.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2090. Foucault (6 credits)**

The work of French philosopher Michel Foucault (1924-1984) has been enormously influential in many fields: from philosophy and politics to social theory and gender studies. This course offers a general introduction to this work, with particular focus on power, knowledge and sexuality. It will end with a consideration of Foucault's contribution to a contemporary re-thinking of subjectivity and ethics.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2440. Confucius (6 credits)**

This course will look at modern interpretations of traditional Confucianism, primarily from the perspective of modern analytical philosophy, but with some attention also to the sociological literature, and to modern applications of Confucianism, for example in Singapore.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2442. Mencius (6 credits)**

Mencius, the most influential of Confucian philosophers, presents interesting challenges to interpretation. Does his philosophy provide a basis for a Chinese theory of human rights? Is his conception of human nature defensible today? Which tradition of interpretation (mind or principle) gives the most plausible interpretation? We shall discuss these questions while looking at some modern scholarly interpretations of Mencius in his ancient context.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2443. Xunzi (6 credits)**

Xunzi was an extremely influential Confucian of the late Warring States period whose writings are among the most elegant and tightly argued in the history of Chinese philosophy. The Xunzi covers a wide range of topics, including ethics, moral psychology, political philosophy, epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and even economics and military affairs. The aim of this course is to guide students in close reading, interpretation, and analysis of the Xunzi, in order to develop students' ability to interpret and critique primary sources in Chinese philosophy. Class discussion will focus on Xunzi's epistemology, philosophy of language, ethics, political philosophy, and moral psychology. Class meetings will be devoted to joint interpretation of passages from the Xunzi, reconstruction of their arguments, and small-group discussion of topics assigned by the instructor. We will also call attention to relations between Xunzi's views and contemporary ethics, epistemology, philosophy of language, and moral psychology.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2445. Mohism (6 credits)**

The Mohists were the first Chinese philosophers to attempt to develop systematic ethical and political theories and arguments. They came to advocate a Way that, they thought, best promoted benefit and reduced harm. It called for an end to warfare, exclusive moral attitudes, moderation in social expenditure, a rejection of traditional ritual extravagance, and conformity in moral judgment. In defending this Way, the Mohists developed a philosophical vocabulary that became fundamental to early Chinese philosophy. In this course we will study Mohist writings and some Confucian and Daoist responses to them. The issues we discuss will include the role of government and the justification of political authority; the integration of particular relationships within universalist moral frameworks; the demandingness of ethics, especially of ethical or political views according to which the current state of



things is massively unjust; the nature of consequentialism; and Mohist ideas about language, knowledge, and argument.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2450. Zhuangzi (6 credits)**

In this course we shall explore different lines of interpretation of Zhuangzi's Daoist philosophy. Students will participate in defending either relativist, sceptical or mystical readings of key passages. We shall start our analysis with the historical context and some textual theory. Then we shall discuss several chapters in some detail, including the historical account of the development of Daoism in "Tianxia", the relativism in "Autumn Floods" and "Free and Easy Wandering", and finally the analytic scepticism and pluralism of the "Essay on Making Things Equal".

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2451. Philosophers' views of China in early-modern Europe (6 credits)**

This course examines the varied views of China, its philosophy and government in the writings of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ("early-modern") philosophers ranging from Leibniz to Rousseau. The debates broached at the time (e.g. is China a model for Europe or not?) resonate down to the present day.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2470. Moral psychology in the Chinese tradition (6 credits)**

Issues pertaining to moral psychology played a central role in the philosophical discourse of ancient China. This course will guide students in reconstructing this role and exploring its philosophical significance by interpreting and critically evaluating selected early Chinese philosophical texts related to motivation, moral education, moral cultivation, moral reasoning, and action. Class time will be divided between lecture and discussion. Students will be asked to read primary source texts and participate actively in class discussion. They will be encouraged to read the original sources in Chinese, but translations will be available for those without knowledge of classical Chinese.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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**PHIL2800. Buddhist philosophy (6 credits)**

This course will introduce students to Buddhist philosophy. Topics to be covered will likely include the philosophy of the Pali sutras, early Mahayana philosophy, and Chinese Chan Buddhism. We will focus on understanding Buddhist ideas and arguments, thinking about them critically, and reflecting on the issues they raise.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

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### **3000- and 4000-LEVEL COURSES**

The following courses are open only to philosophy majors. Only one of them should be chosen to fulfill the capstone requirement.

#### **PHIL3920. Senior essay (capstone experience) (6 credits)**

This is a one-semester capstone course for third- and fourth-year Philosophy majors. Each student will be required to audit and attend a 2000-level philosophy course (on top of the 54 credits of level 2000/3000/4000-level courses), and to write a substantial philosophy essay on a topic related to the course under the supervision of an adviser of the student's choosing. The student must obtain the approval of the course teacher and supervisor before the semester. (The supervisor may be the teacher for the audited course, but need not be.) The essay is expected not to exceed 5,000 words, and should be submitted in accordance with a schedule agreed upon with the supervisor. Assessment will be based entirely on the completed thesis.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

Non-permissible combination: PHIL4810 and PHIL4920.

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#### **PHIL4810. Senior seminar (capstone experience) (6 credits)**

This is a one-semester capstone course for fourth-year Philosophy majors. The course will focus on readings tailored to students' interests. Students will be required to give a presentation and to complete a 2,500 word essay on a topic approved by the course teacher.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

Non-permissible combination: PHIL3920 and PHIL4920.

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#### **PHIL4920. Senior thesis (capstone experience) (12 credits)**

This is a full-year capstone course only for fourth-year Philosophy majors. Each student will write a substantial philosophy thesis based on independent research, supervised by a teacher in the Philosophy Department. A student must obtain prior approval in the third year from a teacher, who would agree to supervise the project, and approve the thesis topic by June 15. Approval will only be given to students with exceptionally good grades. The student will then have to work on the thesis over the summer and be able to demonstrate progress made. If the progress is adequate, work on the thesis may continue; if not, the student will have to take two other courses instead. The length of the thesis is expected to be around 10,000 words, to be confirmed by the supervisor. It should normally be submitted not later than the last day of classes of the second semester of the final year. Assessment will be based entirely on the completed thesis.

Assessment: 100% coursework.

Non-permissible combination: PHIL3920 and PHIL4810.

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