CCNY Summer 2015 Philosophy Courses

June Session: 6/1-6/25

Philosophy and the Art World (PHIL 11202: despite lower-level number, can be counted as a "Core Area" course in place of 32500, or a "PHIL course above 30000", for PHIL Majors and Minors)

This course introduces students to the philosophical study of art, and of our judgment of art, through historical and/or contemporary readings. The course includes 4 field trips, to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the 9/11 Memorial Museum, and the new Whitney Museum, and trips to experience art in New York. There is an old saying that “there is no disputing about taste”, but in fact we all have debates about our artistic preferences. Are there facts about good and bad art that reasoned discussion can discover? How are debates about art different from debates about science, logic, or ethics? Why do we care about art in the way that we do? Topics covered may include representation, taste, the authority of criticism, artistic sincerity and authenticity, and the relationship between the criteria for argument and agreement in aesthetics and in domains such as logic and science. Authors covered may include Kant, Hume, Danto, Cavell, Fried, and Scruton.

Nietzsche (PHIL 35001: for PHIL Majors and Minors, can be counted as a "core area" "Major Philosophers" course or a "PHIL course above 30000")

Morality is Nietzsche’s subject. And yet Nietzsche is subject to morality. So is he post-modern or pre-modern? To use his language: Is he the question or the question mark? He keeps beginning to explain how the past led to the present, and what future this present might lead to, but there are gaps in his explanations. Are they there on purpose, or is something stopping him from letting causes produce their effects? The answer will help you decide whether he has understood morality as no one did before him, or has fallen into it just like everyone else; for Nietzsche’s slips and slides about causal explanations coincide with his slipups about morality.

This course will cover three books and one essay by Nietzsche: The Birth of Tragedy; “On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life”; Thus Spoke Zarathustra; On the Genealogy of Morals. These, together with secondary works, will speak to a tension in his thought, between his efforts to look impartially at morality, and the temptation that he never stops feeling, to speak of moralities and spheres of knowledge in morally charged language.

This paradox might grip everyone who tries to speak “objectively” about morality. That may be the best reason to read Nietzsche now. It looks easy to speak from a high and knowing position about morality, to pronounce upon it and mark it for execution. It’s something else to carry out the sentence.

Logical Reasoning (PHIL 20100)

This course provides students with an introduction to the elements of logical reasoning. Basic rules and methods of assessing validity and proving arguments as they occur in natural language are introduced (such as truth tables and rules of inference). The goal of the course is to enable students to translate and evaluate arguments in natural language using the basic tools of modern logic. The focus of this course enables it to serve as an excellent form of preparation for SATs, LSATs and other standardized tests, as well as an analytic resource for further academic studies.

July Session: 6/29-7/23

The Philosophy of Conspiracy Theories (PHIL 11203: despite lower-level number, can be counted as an "additional PHIL course above 30000" for PHIL Majors and Minors)

This course uses the idea of conspiracy theories to explore basic issues in the theory of knowledge. Typically we think that theories are more likely to be true when they provide unifying explanations—that is, when they explain a wide variety of phenomena as the result of one cause, or law, or other explanatory principle. Reasonable people understand that theories which invoke conspiracies are likely to be false. But conspiracy theories typically provide unifying explanations. Further, there is often no obvious evidence against conspiracy theories. So why are they likely to be false? This class will include contemporary and/or historical philosophical readings, and may include topics such as belief revision and logic, skepticism, topics in philosophy of science such as confirmation and explanation, and topics in cognitive science such as cognitive bias and fallacy.

Introduction to Logic (PHIL 20200)

This course introduces students to the basics of modern logic. Topics covered include truth-tables, the rules of inference for the propositional calculus, and introduction to quantification theory. It focuses both on rules for producing formal proofs, and for translating natural language arguments into logical notation. Primarily designed as a preparation for advanced logic, the course would also be very useful for anyone expecting to deal extensively with complex reasoning.