Graduate Seminars 2025-2026

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
YORK UNIVERSITY

Fall 2025

PHIL 5802 Core Practical Philosophy 1

I. Boran/M. O'Brien

Mandatory for MA students; PhD students may take this by special arrangement

Offers an advanced survey of some central themes in contemporary practical philosophy. It is designed to ensure that students have sufficient background to pursue graduate-level research in these areas.

PHIL 5803 Core Practical Philosophy 2

I. Boran/M. O'Brien

Mandatory for MA students; PhD students may take this by special arrangement

Provides a forum for further discussion of the central themes in contemporary practical philosophy. It is designed to prepare students to write the comprehensive examination in practical philosophy.

PHIL 6800 First Year Seminar

J. Beck/ G. Rini

This course is for incoming PhD students only

This course is required of all first-year PhD students. It is designed to familiarize them with the Graduate Program in Philosophy and to impart the skills needed to complete the PhD. Each year, it is co-taught by two course directors with different research specializations. Together, they explore a single topic or theme, through two different frameworks.

This year's topic: Over the past decade, AI has been progressing at an astonishing pace. This progress raises issues of great philosophical importance, both theoretical and practical. For example, what does the AI boom tell us about human minds? Should we conclude that the human mind is a computer? If convolutional neural networks can match or exceed human

performance on object recognition, does that mean the human visual system just is a convolutional neural network? If large language models are able to reason, what does that tell us about the relation between language and thought? Under what conditions, if any, should we attribute consciousness to a machine learning system? And could an artificial intelligence ever qualify as a moral agent or a person deserving our moral concern?

PHIL 6155 Accelerating Technicity

J. Vernon

Phenomenology and Alterity: This course concerns the possibility, nature, and consequences of the subjective experience of something truly 'other'. Does our experience of an external world necessarily refer to something beyond consciousness, and thus 'other' to it? Or, to the contrary, does all seeming externality ultimately reduce to what phenomenally appears within the experiencing subject, or to the 'same'? Is our own experience of selfhood ineluctably marked by the influence of 'otherness'? Or is our experience of alterity dependent upon its relation to our determinate experience of self? Is 'otherness' primarily thought (and thus conceptual/mental) or felt (and thus affective/corporeal)? Does the experience of 'otherness' entail, or perhaps only truly arise in, the recognition of other subjects? If so, under what conditions can we justifiably attribute subjectivity to other beings? Is our relationship to others as subjects primarily an epistemic one? Or does it first arise in and through our recognition of ethical obligations we have regarding them?

This course provides an intensive, chronological survey of developments in the phenomenology of alterity through close readings of works by, among others, Edmund Husserl, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Emmanuel Levinas. By extension, it serves as an advanced introduction to the Continental tradition of phenomenological investigation through varied experiences of 'otherness'.

PHIL 6355 Philosophy of Cognitive Science

K. Lande

Causation in Cognition and Beyond

In this course, we'll think through how we recognize, investigate, and remember causal relationships. We'll examine theories of what causation is from the philosophy of science and metaphysics, proceeding to look at accounts of how the mind grasps causal relations in reasoning, perception, memory, and action. The course will revolve around a core issue. It is natural to think that causal relations are inferred, not observed. Causal relations characteristically are deep and complex features of the world that lie far below the observable surface. Determining causality sometimes requires scrutinizing thousands of datapoints from experiments and developing ingenious causal hypotheses. On the other hand, it seems like we

can observe some causal relations, as when we observe one pool ball coming into contact with and launching another or when we observe our own actions having effects on the world. Moreover, contemporary cognitive science understands perception to involve “unconscious inference”; there is a sense in which all observation is inference of some kind. The question of our seminar, then, is: How is causation represented in different parts of the mind? What are the underlying differences and commonalities, for example, between causal reasoning and causal perception? Readings will include Woodward's recent book Causation with a Human Face, as well as articles from various subfields of philosophy and cognitive science. The seminar will be co-taught with Prof. Sara Aronowitz (University of Toronto) and will be held at the St. George Campus of the University of Toronto.

PHIL 6230 Metaphysics

J. Chung

The desire to know has been claimed to be at the centre of many of our activities. Is it, however, possible to know, and what might be some of the benefits, and drawbacks, of taking seriously that it isn’t? If it is possible to know, what might be the contours and purposes of this process or state of knowing or knowledge? This course will involve us in an investigation of these and related questions, tailored as much as possible to individual students’ interests. We’ll be reading and discussing cutting-edge work on questions purportedly concerning knowing and knowledge and connecting it with (other) questions that we’re particularly passionate about. Much of the course will therefore be devoted to workshopping students’ writing so that each student might best engage the readings in a manner that suits them and over time develop a high-quality paper based on our explorations.

Winter 2026

PHIL 5800 Core Theoretical I

C. Verheggen/B. Huss

Mandatory for MA students; PhD students may take this by special arrangement

This course offers an advanced survey of some central themes in contemporary theoretical philosophy, drawn from recent work in metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophies of mind, language, and science. It is designed to provide background for those who pursue graduate-level research in these areas.

PHIL 5801 Core Theoretical II

C. Verheggen/B. Huss

Mandatory for MA students only

Taken in conjunction with 5800, this course provides a forum for further discussion of central themes in contemporary theoretical philosophy. It is designed to prepare students to write the comprehensive examination in theoretical philosophy.

PHIL 5340 Ethics and Societal Implications of AI

P. Moosavi

This course examines the social and ethical implications of AI and data-driven technologies. Potential topics include algorithmic injustice, transparency and trust, online manipulation, social media and misinformation, AI governance, and AI moral status, among others.

PHIL 6300 Major Figures in the Philosophy of Language

C. Verheggen

The major figure will be Ludwig Wittgenstein, focusing on the prospects for a philosophical account of the nature of meaning that does not employ or presuppose the notion of meaning and, if no such reductive account is forthcoming, on the remaining prospects for a constructive account. In addition to the writings of Wittgenstein (principally Philosophical Investigations) and of his most famous commentator, Saul Kripke (Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language), we'll be reading from James R. Shaw's Wittgenstein on Rules: Justification, Grammar, and Agreement (OUP 2023) and Alexander Miller's Blind Rule-Following and the Possibility of Meaning (OUP 2024).

PHIL 6500 Major Figures in Political Philosophy

Z. El Nabolsy

This course will focus on the work of two major figures in nineteenth-century African philosophy, James Africanus Beale Horton (1835 – 1883) and Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832–1912). While we will deal with what they have to say about classic problems in political philosophy, e.g., what is the basis for the legitimacy of political authority? What is the best form of social and political organization for human beings? We will primarily be focusing on their contributions to philosophy of history, philosophy of race, and philosophy of culture (and philosophy of science as it relates to philosophy of culture and philosophy of race). A sampler of some of the questions we shall pose: given that the concept of progress has strong historical associations with colonialism, did Horton and Blyden make an unjustified concession to the

ideologues of colonialism when they endorsed the concept of progress? Is there something like a distinctive "African Personality" as Blyden maintained, if so, is it worth defending? Is the preservation of particular modes of social and political organization a necessary condition for the preservation of African cultural identity? How is the concept of race operationalized in their writings? What did Horton and Blyden make of the philosophical writings of their European contemporaries?

No background knowledge is required (although you should be prepared to receive a crash course on the history of West Africa during our first meeting).

PHIL 6505 Major Problems in Political Philosophy

I. Boran

This course focuses on one or more major problems in political philosophy, including, but not limited to, the problem of justice, equality, the authority of the state, the rights of individuals, the nature of citizenship, the ownership of property, the problem of freedom, the redistribution of wealth, and the nature of social contracts.

PHIL 6245 New Directions in Theory of Knowledge

J. Keeping

From feminist epistemology to existential phenomenology to robotics and embodied A.I., there has been a growing acknowledgement of the crucial role of the body and embodiment in knowledge and cognition, running counter to the epistemology of the empirical sciences and the conceptualization of knowledge as objective, detached, and propositional. This course will examine these trends and consider alternative approaches to knowledge and science as embodied and situated.

Philosophy Seminars Offered in Other Departments

Fall 2025

SPTH 6655 Encounters between Heidegger, Levinas, and Black Thought

M. Cauchi

Offered under the Department of Social & Political Thought

This course stages an encounter between the work of Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and contemporary Black thought (Wynter, Wilderson, Moten, Farred, among possible others) on the questions of being, alterity, politics, and race.