

York University – Department of Philosophy

Graduate Seminars 2026- 2027

Last Updated: July 2026

Fall 2026

PHIL 5802 Core Practical Philosophy 1

R. Rini

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 6800 First Year Seminar

R. Myers/C. Verheggen

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.

PHIL 6260 Philosophy of Science

Z. El Nabolsy

This seminar tackles the relationship between science and religion from the perspective of African philosophy. In contemporary Anglophone treatments of the relationship between science and religion, the religion in question is often taken to be Christianity, and more specifically Christianity as it has come to take shape in the aftermath of the triumph of the Scientific Revolution in early modern Europe. In this seminar, we will see how the choice of the “paradigmatic religion” influences the questions that we pose and the answers that we give to those questions. We will thus be concerned with Christianity but also with some of the non-Abrahamic African religions. The key question that we will be interested in answering is the following: does religion aim at the same things that science aims at? Is it reasonable to interpret religion as a theory of anything in the first place?

We will be interested in whether religion, like science, aims at the explanation, prediction, and control of natural and social phenomena. If so, does this mean that science will eventually render religion obsolete? Is a religious outlook that gives up on the goals of explanation, prediction, and control sustainable?

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Moreover, we will be concerned with how the philosophy of science that we adopt influences our answers to the aforementioned questions. For example, if you adopt an inductivist philosophy of science, then it might appear that religion is indeed a totally different kind of enterprise from science. However, inductivist philosophies of science have also been heavily criticized.

Much of the literature on the relationship between science and “non-Western” religions has been written from the disciplinary perspective of anthropology, and to this extent we will also be interested in investigating the implicit philosophy of science that anthropologists have adopted when they have contrasted “modern science” with “traditional African religions”.

PHIL 6355 Major Problems in Philosophy of Mind

J. Beck

This course will introduce graduate students to a variety of current topics in the philosophy of mind. Each week we will be joined by a visitor who specializes in the philosophy of mind. We'll read the visitor's work ahead of time and then discuss it with the visitor in class.

PHIL 6470 Topics in Applied Ethics

R. Rini

This is a skills seminar focused on the techniques and values of philosophical writing. (Ignore the official title; this is not a seminar in applied ethics. We had to fit it under some existing course number.) The aim of this seminar is for students to improve their ability to express philosophical ideas in writing, for both academic and public audiences. Work will consist of analysis of high quality writing samples (not all from within philosophy) and iterated development of students' own writing. We will also discuss the use of language models like GPT in writing, considering professional ethics as well as potential utility and hazards.

PHIL 6515 Issues Contemporary Political Philosophy

I. Boran

This course focuses on one or more of the central problems in contemporary political philosophy. The philosophical problems that may be studied include: justice, rights, duties, equality, property, and the authority of the state, as well as central problems in social contract theory, utilitarianism, liberalism, communitarianism, and Marxism.

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PHIL 6666 Exegesis in Philosophical Texts

S. Tweyman

Both Descartes and Hume (Descartes 1596-1650; Hume 1711-1776) write of the need for a revolution in philosophy, if philosophy is to advance knowledge. Given that both are thinkers of the Enlightenment, it is important to understand the culture of learning which these thinkers encountered and rejected, and the culture of learning each attempted to create.

The course will begin by looking at the Pre-Enlightenment culture of learning in England and France. In this spirit, it is worth noting that when the Princess Elizabeth of Denmark wrote to Descartes and inquired what she should read to prepare her for the study of Cartesian philosophy, he answered that the learning of the past could only prejudice her mind, and, therefore, she should refrain from studying the thinkers of the past. Or again, in the Preface to the *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes rejects the study of Aristotelian Logic, because it is not a logic of discovery, but is useful only to teach others what we already know (Descartes holds the teaching of the *Regulae* to be the true logic of discovery). In Hume's major philosophical works, he gives no weight or credit to any of his predecessors, with the exception of Isaac Newton, and (for his treatment of Abstract Ideas) Bishop George Berkeley.

In light of the fact that both Descartes and Hume explicitly reject a reliance on the writings/ thoughts of past thinkers, we must work through these philosophers with nothing to guide us except what they have written, and what they have written to critics who challenged their thoughts and arguments. This is the point at which exegesis enters, namely, when we realize that we must try to understand what these thinkers mean through what they say. Our study will reveal that in the case of both Descartes and Hume, there is an exoteric teaching and an esoteric teaching with regard to their respective philosophies. The 'exoteric' teaching is discovered through engaging with their respective writings. But the 'esoteric' teaching (which is much more interesting and important) can only be discovered by utilizing exegetical tools, which enable us to go beyond the words on the page, and to enter into the underlying teaching that these thinkers wish to convey. It is these tools that the course will strive to uncover.

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PHIL 5800 Core Theoretical I

C. Verheggen

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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 ensure that students have sufficient background to pursue graduate-level research in some of these areas.

PHIL 6150 History of Continental Philosophy

J. Vernon

This seminar will focus on the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the most brilliant, beguiling, and provocative philosophers in the Continental canon. Rather than focusing on a specific theme or period, we will cover a range of writings from across his career. One central focus of the course will be Nietzsche's 'fundamental conception' of eternal return, which he called the 'highest formula of affirmation that is attainable' (*Ecce Homo*), along with the controversial but influential interpretation of the concept developed by Gilles Deleuze. But, along the way, we will also explore Nietzsche's radical, shifting conceptions of truth, knowledge, morality, art, will, and power.

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.

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Book: Della Rocca, M. A. *The Parmenidean Ascent* (available via York Libraries online)
ISBN: 9780197510940

PHIL 6240 Epistemology
J. Hattiangadi

The concept of knowledge has resisted analysis since Edmund Gettier's paper raised objections to "justified true belief" sixty-five years ago, just as theories of the nature of knowledge have not survived Plato's admission of failure in the *Theaetetus*. In this course, we return to the study of knowledge, not just the concept, dividing it into two parts. One part is new knowledge, the other the existing store of knowledge. Criteria for the success of new knowledge will be studied in the first half of the course. They are found in successful uses of the experimental philosophy (or science) of the early Royal Society of London. Existing knowledge will be studied in subsequent seminars as tweaks to our adaptation as animals. Putting these parts of knowledge together, we will see why conceptual analysis failed to capture "knowledge" in terms of justified true beliefs with an additional clause. We will also examine whether our two-part description is adequate as a theory of knowledge.

PHIL 6370 Philosophy of Cognitive Science
J. Mahr

Examines a core topic in cognitive science (current candidates include the nature of abstraction or the nature of social cognition) through the lens of philosophy. The course will bring into dialogue work in cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and artificial intelligence with philosophical perspectives.

PHIL 6390 Philosophy of Action
R. Myers

Our focus will be on the debate between proponents and critics of the causal theory of action. We'll begin by looking at Anscombe's criticisms of the causal theory in the 1950s and Davidson's defence of it in the 1960s and considering why it was so widely thought at the time that Davidson had got the better of the exchange. We'll then look at the remarkable resurgence of support for Anscombe in recent years and consider whether that too has been taken too far. One question we'll be asking throughout is whether the differences separating Davidson's causal theory from Anscombe's alternative account are really as great as they, their

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followers, and their critics have supposed, and whether we learn more from both by treating them as allies rather than as foes.
