

PHIL491 003
Experimental Philosophy and Philosophical Methodology

Professor Eric Margolis

One of the most controversial issues in contemporary philosophy is how philosophy itself should be practiced. Is philosophy an a priori discipline? Should philosophers be content to develop their theories while sitting in the proverbial armchair? Proponents of experimental philosophy argue that philosophy needs to look at concrete empirical work on how ordinary people think and reason and that this work has important implications for a wide variety of philosophical debates—everything from semantics and epistemology to metaphysics and ethics. Some experimental philosophers have even argued that recent experimental work shows that traditional philosophical methods are hopelessly misguided. In this seminar, we will examine the experimental philosophy movement and how it relates to other approaches to philosophy.

Restricted enrollment

This course is restricted to fourth-year philosophy majors—other students require permission of the instructor. PHIL491 satisfies the Arts research requirement. Please note that different sections of PHIL 491 cover different topics and that topics change from year to year.

Grading scheme

Enrolled students will have a say in the requirements for the course (whether this includes homework, presentations, participation, short papers, etc.). My only ground rule is that there will be a research paper worth at least 50% of your total mark.

Participation

This course is a seminar and will involve a considerable amount of class discussion. I expect everyone to come to class on time and to be an active participant in these discussions.