PHIL 190-01: Philosophy of Psychiatry (Fall 2015) – Dinshak
In this seminar we will reflect on the nature of mental disorder (the very idea of it, attempts to treat it, its ethical and experiential dimensions) and its intersections with themes in the philosophy of science and philosophy of mind such as classification, reduction, explanation, the mind-body relation, the unity and fragmentation of the mind, delusions, hallucinations and other unusual sensory experiences. Here are some questions we will take up: What is a mental illness? Is psychiatric classification valid? Is our concept mental illness a valid one? What is the relation between understanding the brain and understanding people? What value judgments, if any, inform the practice of psychiatry (e.g., diagnosis and treatment)? What makes these questions pressing for psychiatry? We will also look at the anti-psychiatry movement in the 1960s, including its philosophical and political underpinnings, and consider how recent discussions in the philosophy of psychiatry can be understood as responses to this movement. Our philosophical explorations will be informed by careful consideration of particular psychiatric conditions (e.g., schizophrenia, addiction, depression, and autism).

PHIL 190-02: Husserl (Fall 2015) – Stone
An examination of the thought of Edmund Husserl, early 20th century German philosopher and founder of phenomenology, through readings from two of his major early works, the Logical Investigations and the Ideas pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. Husserl was a major influence on many philosophers of the following generations, including his student Martin Heidegger and on Rudolf Carnap (one of the main founders of logical positivism), so we will look especially at aspects of his system that produced strong responses later on.

PHIL 190-01: Gender and the Brain (Spring 2016) – Orlandi
Is there a female brain and is it inherently different from the male brain? The claim that there are differences between the two sexes in attitude, ability, and temperament is not new. The further claim that such differences ground and justify differences in role, employment and remuneration, is also not new. What is somewhat new is the recent appeal to the fast-developing field of neuroscience to ground and justify such claims. Methods of brain imaging, together with a host of research in cognitive science, allegedly give us a new tool to explain the observed behavioral differences between females and males. Such differences are hypothesized to be due not to different cultural and social influences, but rather to different innate cerebral endowments. The differences are presumably 'essential'. The female brain is said to be naturally prone to sympathizing, while the male brain to systematizing. This position has marshaled a number of supporters, but also some important criticism.

This class is devoted to shedding light on this debate by reading the work of two of its leading participants, together with some relevant empirical research. We will read the works of Simon Baron-Cohen and Cordelia Fine, and some of the additional studies that they appeal to. The aim of the class is to evaluate this important debate and to get acquainted with some foundational issues in the philosophy of neuroscience and of cognitive science, such as the issue of innateness. The books for this class are:


Additional Readings will be made available online.

PHIL 190-02: Philosophy of Religion (Spring 2016) – Otte
This seminar will focus on the role of the passions in epistemology, with particular concentration on how this topic arises in philosophy of religion. The dominant view in philosophy has been that the passions should exert little or no influence in what it is rational to believe, but some philosophers have argued that it is rational for the passions or affections to play a significant role in what we believe. For example, an important question is whether it is rational to go beyond our evidence and form religious beliefs based on our passions and affections, or whether we should ignore our passions and affections in deciding whether the evidence is sufficient for rational religious belief. For four or five weeks we will investigate Kierkegaard’s Philosophical Crumbs and a commentary on it by Evans. We will then look at recent analytic philosophers whose work is relevant to this topic. We will spend a week on Plantinga’s religious epistemology and one on van Fraassen’s formal voluntaristic epistemology. Other topics that may be looked at are Moser’s religious epistemology, and Buchat’s discussion of decision theory and when it is rational to have faith. The course material contains material from continental philosophy to very formal modern analytic philosophy. Roughly speaking, the course will begin with continental philosophy and end with formal analytic epistemology. Students will write several short papers and give a presentation to the class. Students will be expected to actively participate in class discussion.