

Fall 2023

Course Descriptions

WVU Philosophy Department
140 Arnold Hall
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<https://philosophy.wvu.edu/>

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WVU Philosophy Department

The WVU Philosophy Department is an intellectually vibrant student-centered department, with an energetic faculty devoted to outstanding teaching and research. The department is dedicated to helping students to discern their guiding passion and life goals. With supervision and guidance from faculty mentors, students are encouraged to pursue their interests through independent research and collaboration with others. Through close mentorship, our graduates acquire a clear set of personal goals and are well prepared for the next step in their professional or academic endeavors. We are committed to fostering a community where all students and faculty feel encouraged to participate in the open and respectful exchange of ideas.

Our mission is to communicate and model the value of the examined life, a life focused on the pursuit and love of wisdom. Students have the opportunity to grapple with deep questions about ourselves, our societies, and our world. How should we live our lives? What are our ethical obligations toward others? What is the just society? Are race and gender social constructs? Is time real? Does God exist? Is consciousness a purely physical phenomenon? Do human beings have free will? Is it possible to know anything? Students practicing philosophy often come up with enlightening answers to those questions and learn to support their answers with sound reasoning. Through their philosophical investigations, students develop specialized skills and practices that are useful in all aspects of life. Philosophy students are trained to engage in careful and respectful dialogue about difficult ethical, social, and political issues. They develop patience and endurance for working through difficult conceptual problems with clarity and rigor. Philosophy students practice the art of imagining, presenting, analyzing, and applying interesting solutions.

The study of philosophy prepares students for employment in fields that demand sophisticated critical thinking skills and the clear communication of complex ideas. Philosophy majors consistently score very well on standardized exams such as the LSAT and GMAT. The analytical and communication skills emphasized in philosophy are valuable far beyond the boundaries of the classroom. Philosophy is a great preparation for students interested in many satisfying careers, including careers in law, health care, education, politics, counseling, and business.

The WVU Philosophy Department values and shares the mission of WVU and the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences in promoting the full development of students as individuals and as members of society, and in our commitment to creating a diverse and inclusive culture that advances education, healthcare and prosperity for all by providing access and opportunity; by advancing high-impact research; and by leading transformation in West Virginia and the world through local, state and global engagement

Philosophy Major Requirements, BA

Basic Core Requirements Phil 244, Phil 248, Phil 260
Philosophy Upper-Division Courses <u>Select one of the Following:</u> Phil 301 or Phil 302 <u>Select one of the Following:</u> Phil 321 or Phil 346
Philosophy Upper-Division Electives Select 9 hours at the 300 Level or Above in Philosophy
Philosophy General Electives Any PHIL Course at the 100-level or above
Capstone Experience PHIL 480 or PHIL 496

Philosophy Minor Requirements

The Philosophy minor is designed to acquaint students with a broad range of philosophical topics and skills, and to introduce them to the fundamental issues in philosophy. The minor consists of fifteen hours in Philosophy, with at least nine hours at the upper level (300 level or above). A grade of C- or higher must be earned in all courses counted toward the minor.

We have a brand-new minor in Applied Ethics!

Applied Ethics Minor Requirements

Core Courses		6
Phil 130	Current Moral Problems	
Phil 321	Ethical Theory	
or Phil 346	History of Ethics	
APPLIED THEORY*		6
Select two of the following:		
Phil 313	Philosophy of Race	
Phil 314	Philosophy of Sex and Gender	
Phil 315	Free Will and Moral Responsibility	
Phil 331	Health Care Ethics	
Phil 332	Environmental Ethics	
SPECIFIC AREA OF PRACTICE *		3
Select one of the following:		
Phil 285	Ethics Bowl	
Phil 491	Professional Experience	
Phil 497	Research	
Total Hours		15

Students must have completed at least 6 credits in the minor before being eligible to complete the Specific Areas of Practice requirement. A grade of C- or higher must be earned in all courses counted toward the minor.

* With the approval of the Philosophy Department, students may substitute up to one relevant course in philosophy or another department and apply it toward the Applied Theory or the Specific Area of Practice.

Fall 2023 Course Descriptions

Philosophy 100 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

PHIL 100 **Problems of Philosophy** **3 hr**
Devin Curry

In this course, we will take a whirlwind tour of philosophical inquiry. We'll begin by acquiring some of the basic tools of logical thinking, and sharpen those tools by identifying good, bad, and bullshit arguments in a US presidential debate. We'll then bring our critical tools to bear on the metaphysical and epistemological work of a few of the greatest philosophers in the European tradition. Finally, we'll read and discuss recent essays on science and religion, color, racism, moral partiality, and the meaning of life, amongst other topics. By the end of the course, we will have studied many (though not nearly all) of the big questions that make up the subject matter of philosophy. We may not walk away with satisfactory answers to these questions, but we will develop a deeper understanding of both the questions themselves and various possible ways of answering them. By immersing ourselves in Plato's 4th century BCE dialogues, Descartes's 17th century *Meditations*, and essays, polemics, and analyses from the 18th–21st centuries, we will also come to appreciate several distinctive ways of doing philosophy.

Philosophy 130 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

PHIL 130 **Current Moral Problems** **3 hr**
Matthew Talbert

This class will begin by introducing students to fundamental questions in ethics such as those having to do with ethical relativism and the relationship between ethics and God. Next, students will be introduced to several theories about what makes actions right or wrong. These ethical theories will be applied to contemporary debates concerning issues such as abortion, animal rights, euthanasia, and distributive justice.

PHIL 130 **Current Moral Problems** **3 hr**
David Hoinski

Our historical era will have been marked by extensive human migrations and also by the response of wealthy countries like the US and others of the “Global North” to these “strangers at our door.” Refugees, human beings in flight from persecution, war, crime, poverty, and natural disasters come to countries like the US often at great risk to themselves in an attempt to secure their basic human rights. Here we confront one of the great political and ethical questions of our time, namely, (and as the philosopher Bruno Latour puts it) “how can we organize to welcome the refugees?” Answering this question requires us to consider the further questions of who should count as a refugee and what our ethical obligations are to such persons. In this course we will advance an answer to precisely these questions. Our particular investigation will place special emphasis on the application of ethical theories to real-world problems, while also focusing our thought on particular concepts, including strangers, humanity, and hospitality. We will read and discuss a number of short books that approach these topics—and the refugee crisis as a whole—from a variety of angles. Taking into account the conceptual and ethical difficulties that surround the questions of the stranger, hospitality, and humanity, we will aim to outline an ethical response

to refugees, both those to come and those who are even now arriving at our door.

PHIL 130 **Current Moral Problems** **3 hr**
Ariane Nomikos

This course will examine several contentious moral issues of the day using the tools of philosophy. Among the topics that may be discussed are abortion, capital punishment, climate change, euthanasia, distributive justice, global poverty, human enhancements, immigration, mass incarceration, online dating, policing, procreation, reparations, sex work, and vegetarianism. Some of the specific issues we consider will be predetermined by the professor; others will be selected based on student interest. To set up our engagement with these issues, whatever they may be, we will begin the course with an introduction to some basic terminology in ethics and a brief survey of some major moral theories.

PHIL 130 **Current Moral Problems** **3 hr**
Megan Hungerman

Over the duration of this course, we will be examining four current moral problems, which will carry us through the complete human life cycle; from sex, to birth, to death, and what comes between. You will get the opportunity to examine the topics from multiple angles, and differing viewpoints.

Course Objectives:

- Identify several current moral problems
- Evaluate those problems from differing angles
- Formulate personal opinions about the problems, and support those opinions

Philosophy 147 area 6 of the GEF

PHIL 147 Philosophy and Film **3 hr**
David Cerbone

This course provides an introduction to philosophical questions and problems using the medium of film. We will be viewing a variety of films over the course of the semester to consider how they frame, develop, and enact philosophical ideas pertaining to the nature of reality and our knowledge of it, the nature of the self and personal identity, the character of contemporary society and technology, and the meaning and value of life. The films we view will be accompanied by a variety of readings from the Western philosophical tradition.

Philosophy 170 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

PHIL 170 **Intro to Critical Reasoning** **3 hr**
Gary Ciocco

An introduction to skills of critical reasoning; the structure of deductive and inductive arguments; recognition of common formal and informal fallacies; application of reasoning skills to textbooks, news articles, editorials, advertisements, political speeches, and other arguments in ordinary language. We will also emphasize the importance of induction and role of language in our acquisition of knowledge and our understanding of arguments and issues.

Philosophy 244 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

PHIL 244 **History of Ancient Philosophy** **3 hr**
David Hoinski

Plato's Republic (or, in Greek, Politeia) is arguably the greatest single work of philosophy ever written. It concerns the question whether it is better for a person to be just rather than unjust. Is it really so important to try to become a good person? In order to answer this question, Plato gives us a dialogue of epic proportions, in which Socrates, Glaucon, Adeimantus, and others discuss the nature of social and political life, childrearing, the four cardinal virtues (wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice), the nature of the soul (psychology), the relations between men and women, the family, the nature of philosophy and philosophical education, epistemology, metaphysics, the different kinds of political regimes, and the relation between pleasure and the good, amongst many other topics. Republic also features some of the most famous and profound stories and allegories in all of philosophy including the story of the ring of Gyges, the noble lie, the allegory of the cave, and the myth of Er. In this course we will conduct a careful study of the ten books of Republic paying special attention to Plato's famous (and infamous) notion of philosopher-rulers or the idea that philosophers should lead the political community for the good of humanity. We will also pay special attention to the way Plato discusses women in light of his proposal that women should receive the same education as men, should be able to serve in the military alongside men, and should have the same opportunity as men to become philosopher-rulers.

Philosophy 248 area 5 of the GEF

PHIL 248 **History of Modern Philosophy** **3 hr**
David Hoinski

Modern western philosophy is a broad historical category that covers roughly the period from 1600 to 1900 in European philosophy and is often further divided into early modern philosophy and late modern philosophy, with 1781 (the publication year of the first edition of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason) frequently cited as the turning point. This course will focus on early modern philosophy and in particular on the debate between rationalism and empiricism. We will study in depth the works of three philosophers, namely, René Descartes, John Locke, and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who are central to this debate. The debate between rationalism and empiricism is frequently presented as concerning epistemology (the study of what knowledge is, how we obtain it, and what we can know), and this characterization of the rationalism/empiricism debate is accurate so far as it goes. The deeper import of this debate, however, concerns the possibility of metaphysics, understood as the science of the basic nature of reality and/or god. Metaphysics in its early modern formulation (and one that has been in many ways decisive for all subsequent philosophy) concerns such subjects as the nature and existence of god, the nature of substance, the nature of soul and or mind, the nature of matter, the relation between body and mind, and the question of free will, amongst other topics. The nature of mind in particular will constitute a central theme of this course, especially insofar as we will be examining a central point of contention between empiricism and rationalism, namely, whether or not the mind possesses certain innate ideas independently of sense-perception. We

shall see that the possibility of metaphysics looks very different depending on how we decide this fundamental question.

Philosophy 260 area 3 of the GEF

PHIL 260 **Intro to Symbolic Logic** **3hr**
Geoff Georgi

This course is an introduction to contemporary formal (or symbolic) logic. Historically, the study of logic originated with Aristotle and the Stoic philosophers of ancient Greece. Discoveries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, led to a far more sophisticated understanding of logic. Thanks to these developments, formal logic is now central to many disciplines, including computer science, linguistics, mathematics, and philosophy. More generally, an understanding of the basic concepts of formal logic is indispensable for reasoning critically on any topic.

Philosophy 302 satisfies area 5 of the GEF
Pre-Requisite – 3 Hr. Philosophy

PHIL 302 **Theory of Knowledge** **3 hr**
Sharon Ryan

This course is an investigation into some of the most important issues in epistemology, including: the analysis of knowledge, skepticism and epistemic humility, disagreement and epistemic authority, the ethics of belief, and epistemic injustice.

Philosophy 312
Pre-Requisite- PHIL 100 or PHIL 120 or PHIL 130 or PHIL 140 or PHIL 170 or PHIL 212 or PHIL 260

PHIL 312 **Philosophy of Language** **3 hr**
Geoff Georgi

At the beginning of the 20th century, the philosophers Gottlob Frege, G.E. Moore, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein initiated a revolution in philosophy. Called the Linguistic Turn, this revolution promised to solve the most difficult problems in philosophy by careful reflection on the nature of language. For almost half a century, the philosophy of language was the dominant field of philosophy (at least in English speaking countries), and during this time it spawned several subfields of linguistics. But can the proper study of language really solve all philosophical problems? Or does it just raise further philosophical problems of its own? In this course, we will examine some of the central concepts in the philosophy of language—concepts like reference, meaning, and truth—in order both to assess the grand claims of the Linguistic Turn in philosophy, and to introduce students to the contemporary philosophical study of language.

Philosophy 321 satisfies area 5 of the GEF
Pre-Requisite- 3 hrs. philosophy

PHIL 321 **Ethical Theory** **3 hr**
Matthew Talbert

Students will be introduced to perspectives in metaethics and normative ethics. Metaethics is concerned with the fundamental nature of morality and the significance of moral claims. Normative ethical theories articulate standards for judging whether an action is right or wrong. Through consideration of various normative positions, such as consequentialism and Kantian ethics, we will be able to pursue more abstract topics in moral philosophy (such as the reputed distinction between doing and allowing). This course will involve significant amounts of writing and classroom discussion, and it is hoped that, besides providing a detailed introduction to metaethics and normative ethics, this class will also help students improve their ability to speak and write clearly about abstract topics.

Philosophy 331 satisfies area 5 of the GEF
Pre-Requisite – 3 hours of Philosophy or Pre-Med or Health Science Student

PHIL 331 **Health Care Ethics** **3 hr**
Daniel Miller

The course provides a framework for the ethical principles and concepts at work in medical decision-making, including the nature of rights, autonomy, justice, benefit, and harm. It explores difficult and controversial issues that arise in healthcare ethics, including autonomy and informed consent, life-sustaining treatment, reproduction, conscientious objection, justice and health care, and emerging technologies. Questions include: What does consent involve, and to what extent must a patient be informed about what they consent to? How can we balance competing rights among patients, their families, and health care providers? How should we make medical decisions concerning patients who fail to meet the standards of competence but lack an advance directive? To what degree should we prioritize the life of a fetus? Is healthcare a moral right? Would it be permissible for parents to genetically enhance their children?

Pre-Requisite - Prior coursework in philosophy or a major in the sciences

PHIL 332 **Environmental Ethics** **3 hr**
Ariane Nomikos

Imagine that you are the last human left on earth and that you will soon die. (Don't worry, you've lived a long, full life and you're actually pretty ready to go at this point.) When you are gone, the only life remaining will be plants, microbes, and invertebrates. For some reason, you find yourself standing next to the last remaining redwood tree and you think to yourself: "It sure would be fun to destroy this tree before I die!" Would it be *wrong* for you to destroy the last remaining redwood?

Perhaps the most fundamental question in environmental ethics concerns our attitude towards the nonhuman world. Thus, in the first part of this course, we ask: *what really matters*? Do beings without experiences, such as redwoods, have moral standing? In other words, are trees the sort of things to which we can have obligations? Are ecosystems? And how about nonhuman animals? Does the ability to suffer imply that an organism should be treated with respect, or is

something more required, like the capacity for self-conscious moral agency? In the second part of this course, we will ask: *what really works?* That is, how can we apply our answers to the previous questions to concrete problems like climate change.

Philosophy 355 satisfies GEF.5

PR: 3 Hrs. Philosophy

PHIL 355

Existentialism

3 hr

David Cerbone

The term “existentialism” has come to be associated with a broad array of works and ideas in literature, psychology, drama, and film, but its original home is within philosophy. The aim of this course is to provide an introduction to the collection of philosophical views commonly labeled “existentialist.” We will begin by considering two texts, from Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, which articulate in broad brushstrokes a philosophical outlook or attitude often associated with existentialism. Both texts may be understood as responding to the felt absence of meaning or value in the world, what Nietzsche refers to as “the death of God.” We will consider both the points of commonality and divergence between these two views, and use them as a basis for working our way through further and, in many cases, more difficult texts. The second part of the course will be devoted to a careful reading of selections from the four most prominent philosophers associated with the existentialist tradition: Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and, again, Jean-Paul Sartre.

PHIL 393B – SPTP Freud as Philosopher

3 hr

David Hoinski

At least since Plato philosophy has made the imperative “know yourself” central to its endeavors, and Immanuel Kant contends that all philosophical questions are reducible to one, namely, what is a human being? One of the greatest discoverers and theoreticians in the domain of this question, however, was neither by training nor by profession a philosopher. Instead Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) trained in medicine prior to developing psychoanalysis whereby he became the progenitor of the tradition and practice of psychotherapy that continues to play an enormous role in contemporary society. Freud’s primary concern was indeed therapeutic, attempting to care for and heal patients suffering from various mental illnesses. One of his great insights, however, was that the mental illnesses he treated were not simply weird aberrations from normal human mental health but were rather on a continuum with normal mental health and therefore enlightening about human psychology as such. Indeed, in the course of his analyses of his patients and their dreams, as well as through his studies of jokes, parapraxes (“Freudian slips”), and other phenomena, he came to discover a central feature of human psychical life in general, namely, the unconscious (das Unbewusstsein). In this course we will gain an understanding of Freud’s theory of human nature with special emphasis on the concept of the unconscious and the complex role Freud argued it plays in human psychical life. We will study Freud’s two primary models of the human psyche including the famous “second topography” consisting of the ego, the superego, and the id. We will furthermore consider Freud’s argument about the importance of human sexuality within human nature, a subject that Freud pursued to a much greater extent and in greater depth than did any philosopher or scientist before him. We will also consider Freud’s understanding of the role of aggression, masochism, and anxiety in human life, as well as central Freudian concepts including

repression, transference, and the compulsion to repeat. Finally, we will consider Freud's use of the conceptual apparatus of psychoanalysis to interpret society, religion, and culture in general. Students will thus gain an appreciation for what psychoanalysis can tell us about ourselves human beings in our valiant quest for self-knowledge.

Philosophy 480 Satisfies the Capstone Experience and Writing requirement
Pre-Requisite: 12 hrs in philosophy, 6 hrs of PHIL 300 or higher

PHIL 480 Capstone Seminar
David Hoinski

3 hr

All students enrolled in the Capstone will meet with 393B.

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