

Spring 2022 Course Descriptions

WVU Philosophy Department

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EBERLY COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

What is Philosophy?

Philosophy is one of the oldest intellectual traditions. Philosophers ask some of the most profound questions about ourselves, our societies, and our world, and often come up with surprising answers to those questions. Have you ever wondered whether time is real? What justice requires, or whether anything is really right or wrong? Whether it is possible to know anything? These are fundamental philosophical questions.

But philosophy is not just about asking profound questions, or thinking deep thoughts. Contemporary philosophy is also about tackling questions like these with creativity, clarity, and rigor.

Why Study Philosophy?

Students in philosophy are encouraged to contribute their own ideas to class discussions, while being trained to think carefully and to communicate their ideas clearly, both in speech and in writing. Philosophy majors consistently score higher on exams like the LSAT than majors in most other disciplines. The analytical and communication skills emphasized in philosophy are valuable far beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

Philosophy at WVU

The WVU Philosophy Department is a student-centered department, with an energetic and dedicated faculty devoted to outstanding teaching and research. 100% of our teaching is focused on undergraduates. If you are looking for a high-quality education and a lot of attention from enthusiastic professors who love what they do, the WVU Philosophy Department might be the right program for you.

Philosophy Major/Minor/Pre-Law Requirements

Major Requirements

A major in philosophy requires 30 hours in philosophy, including 18 hours of work at the 300 level or above. The following courses are required: Phil 244, 248, 260, 321 or 346, 301 or 302, and 494 or 496*.

Pre-Law Area of Emphasis in Philosophy

The study of Philosophy provides an exceptionally strong preparation for law school. The course of study for a pre-law philosophy major includes all requirements for the major as well as PHIL 130, 323, and 325.

Minor Requirements

Any student admitted to an undergraduate degree program at WVU may complete a minor in philosophy. The minor is designated 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 15 hours in philosophy, with at least nine hours at the upper level (300 level or above).

*Students who decide to write a senior thesis should make arrangements with a faculty member during the semester preceding the one in which he or she plans to write the thesis. Only students who have a 3.7 average or higher in philosophy courses are eligible to write the senior thesis. In unusual circumstances, an exception may be made at the discretion of the faculty member. Please consult your advisor and the WVU Philosophy Department Guidelines for more information.

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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, race and 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.

PHIL 100 Problems of Philosophy 3 hr
Scott Davidson

The TV series “The Good Place” begins with a cast of characters who find themselves wrongly assigned to a place in heaven that they have not deserved. In that context, they become concerned with the question of how to become a good person and turn to the study of philosophy. But we don't need to wait that long and can explore the questions brought up in “The Good Place” here and now. What is the good life? Can we do good in a complex world? Is anyone as bad as their worst deed? And if there really were a “good place,” would it be desirable? This course will use scenes and themes from the television series as a vehicle of reflection on these questions in the context of our own lives.

Philosophy 130 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

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

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

Our historical era will have been marked by a proliferation of 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 threats to their basic human rights such as political persecution, war, crime, poverty, and natural disasters, come to countries like the US often at great risk to themselves to seek a better life for themselves and their children. Here we confront one of the great political and ethical questions of our time, which is, in the words of the philosopher Bruno Latour, “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 this is exactly what we will do. Our particular investigation will place special emphasis on the topics of the stranger, humanity, and hospitality, and we will read and discuss a number of short books that approach these topics from a variety of angles. These include David Livingstone Smith’s *On Inhumanity*, Zygmunt Bauman’s *Strangers at Our Door*, David Owen’s *What Do We Owe to Refugees?*, Serena Parekh’s *No Refuge: Ethics and the Global Refugee Crisis*, and Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle’s *Of Hospitality*. 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 already in our midst as well as those even now arriving at our door.

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

In this course, students will be introduced to contemporary ethical debates concerning issues such as responses to the Covid-19 pandemic, animal rights, climate change, abortion, gender identification, and voting rights.

Philosophy 147 satisfies objectives 4 & 5 of the GEC and area 6 of the GEF
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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
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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 Pre-Requisite – 3 Hr. Philosophy
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PHIL 244**History of Ancient Philosophy****3 hr****David Hoinski**

Given the cultural and political importance of rhetoric in the ancient world, it is understandable that ancient Greek and Roman philosophy made rhetoric a central concern. Due primarily to Plato, philosophy has long been doubtful about the value of rhetoric, because whereas philosophy is concerned with truth, rhetoric seems to care only about winning arguments through persuasion or even manipulation. Plato also raises a question whether rhetoric is (or can be) a science or craft rather than a mere knack. Some people just seem to be persuasive public speakers and writers without being able to give a rational account of how they are able to persuade. In this course we will approach the study of ancient philosophy from the angle of rhetoric, beginning with Plato's criticism of rhetoric in his dialogue Gorgias. We will then consider his argument about the proper or philosophical use of rhetoric in Phaedrus, in which he also proposes criteria for a rational or scientific rhetoric. We will then engage in a careful study of Aristotle's Art of Rhetoric that attempts to meet the Platonic criteria for such a science, and that also includes one of the first systematic treatments of the human passions including anger, fear, and shame that writers and public speakers can use to move and produce persuasion in their audiences. Finally, we will consider the development of the art of rhetoric found in Roman philosophers and rhetoricians especially Cicero and Quintilian. A central goal of the course will be to understand how ancient philosophers thought about the nature of rhetoric, its uses and abuses, and its relation to their own central concern: philosophy.

Philosophy 248 area 5 of the GEF

Pre-Requisite – 3 Hr. Philosophy

PHIL 248 History of Modern Philosophy 3 hr

Megan Hungerman

A study of selected writings by major philosophers of the Western world from Descartes to Kant.

Philosophy 260 area 3 of the GEF

Pre-Requisite- 3 hr. philosophy

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 GEF 5 and also requirements for philosophy major and minor

PHIL 302 Theory of Knowledge 3 hr

Geoff Georgi

Philosophical inquiry into the nature of knowledge began with Plato. In his classic dialogue Meno, Plato raised several questions that still exercise philosophers, including (i) what distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief? and (ii) how do we come to have knowledge? But it was Descartes's Meditations on First Philosophy that has had the largest influence on epistemology—the study of knowledge. Descartes asked us to imagine that we are being deceived by an evil demon, so that not only our senses, but reason itself, is unreliable. By raising the possibility of such systematic doubt, Descartes confronts us with the question (iii) is it possible to know anything? In addition to these traditional questions, this class will address more recent philosophical questions about the relationships between knowledge, politics, ethics, and society.

Philosophy 308 satisfies area 5 of the GEF.

Pre-Requisite – 3 Hr. Philosophy or Religious Studies interdepartmental major

PHIL 308 **Philosophy of Religion** **3 hr**

Daniel Miller

This course explores a number of questions about religious belief and the nature and existence of God as conceived in the major monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Questions include: Is God the best explanation for the existence and order of the universe? Is it ever rational to accept a miracle claim? Does science threaten the rationality of religious belief? What bearing does the pervasiveness of religious experience have on the rationality of religious belief? Does the existence of evil or of divine hiddenness disprove God? What is the relationship between God and morality? If God exists and has infallible foreknowledge of all future events, can humans nevertheless act freely? Should religious belief be based on reasoned evidence, faith, or both?

PHIL 313 **Philosophy of Race** **3 hr**

Devin Curry

We will begin this course on the ethics and metaphysics of race with an examination of several varieties of racism and race-thinking. Studying the ethics of lay, medical, and scientific (mis)uses of the concept of race will inevitably lead us back to the basics. What is race, anyway? Is it biologically real? Is it illusory? Is it socially constructed? As we'll see, several theorists have converged on the view that these metaphysical questions should be pursued always with an eye towards pragmatic ends in the fight against racism. Thus, we'll conclude by debating the merits of three of those social and political ends: reparations, integration, and insurrection.

Philosophy 314

Pre-Requisite: Phil 100 or Phil 130 or Phil 170 or WGST 170

PHIL 314 **Philosophy of Sex and Gender** **3hr**

Alyssa Beall

An examination of philosophical, religious, and ethical debates about the nature of sex, gender, and sexuality. Topics covered include the nature of biological sex, the construction of gender, and the diversity of sexual expression. We will explore how society and religion affect perceptions of these categories, and how different groups maintain (and/or critique) their own norms and standards.

Philosophy 315

Pre-Requisite: 3 hours of Philosophy

PHIL 315 Free Will and Moral Responsibility 3hr

Matthew Talbert

In this class, students will be introduced to different theories about what is required for free will and to central positions in the debate about whether free will is compatible with determinism. Next, students will be introduced to theories about what it means to hold individuals responsible for their behavior and to theories about what is required for moral responsibility. In the last context, we will consider whether certain environmental factors (such as having had an abusive upbringing) or psychological impairments undermine moral responsibility.

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

PHIL 321 Ethical Theory 3 hr

Daniel Miller

This course is primarily focused on different theories of the right and the good. Guiding questions include: What makes right acts right? Is the only relevant factor the amount of good an act produces, or are other considerations also relevant? What is it for something to be good or valuable? Can anything be intrinsically good or bad beyond what we subjectively experience? Are genuine moral dilemmas possible? The course also explores metaethical questions: Do we have good reason to be moral even when it's not in our self-interest? Do moral judgments make claims that can be true or false? If so, what sorts of evidence could there be for them? Are moral judgments the products of reason or of feeling?

Philosophy 325 satisfies area 5 of the GEF
Pre-Requisite – 3 Hr. Philosophy or Pre-Law student

PHIL 325 Philosophy of Law 3 hr

Scott Davidson

The central aim of this course is to teach students how to think like a lawyer. First, we will examine the question: What is law? When philosophers turn their attention to this question, they want to know what features are distinctive to law as law. The course thus begins with a study of some of the most influential answers to this question, such as natural law, legal positivism, American legal realism. After studying those theoretical paradigms, the course will turn to the topic of legal reasoning. Through the study of landmark cases, we will examine the role of reason in constitutional interpretation and construction. Students will learn how to think like a lawyer by carefully analyzing and evaluating complex legal arguments in court opinions. Mastery of the common types of legal

argument will prepare students for law school and more broadly to navigate complex and deeply contested topics of public concern.

Philosophy 331 satisfies area 5 of the GEF
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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?

PHIL 341 Philosophy and Death 3 hr

David Cerbone

Whether we like it or not, all of us will (eventually, someday, inevitably) die. While this course cannot change that, it may change how you think about that inevitable eventuality. Over the course of the semester, we will examine a variety of philosophical questions and arguments pertaining to our mortality. We will start by considering views that make our earthly demise only a transition rather than an end by arguing for the immortality of the soul. In thinking about the adequacy of these arguments, we will also consider both the coherence and desirability of living forever (whether by continuing to exist after our worldly deaths or by never dying in the first place). In the second part of the course, we will examine questions and views oriented around the finality of death: Is death something to fear? What role does death play in contemplating the question of life's meaning? If death marks the absolute end of my existence, does that in some way deprive my life of meaning? In the final part of the course, we will examine a very different take on the idea of an afterlife by considering the ways in which the continued existence of others after my death affects the meaning of my life. Throughout the course, we will be reflecting on the status of our mortality: is it merely a contingent feature of our existence or is it rather in some way essential or constitutive of being the kind of beings we are? Readings will be drawn from classical sources (Plato, Epicurus, and Lucretius), the continental tradition (Heidegger, Sartre, and Camus), recent and contemporary work in Anglo-American (or analytic) philosophy (Bernard Williams, Thomas Nagel, John

Fischer, Samuel Scheffler), as well as more “hybrid” approaches (Martin Hägglund).

Philosophy 345 satisfies area 8 of the GEF
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PHIL 354 **Themes in Continental Philosophy** **3 hr**
Scott Davidson

This course will examine the development of biopolitics in contemporary continental philosophy. Biopolitics examines the intersection between politics and life. This includes the sovereign’s power to choose who lives and who dies as well as the increasing governance of personal and public health. We will cover figures like Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Jacques Derrida, and Achille Mbembe. Although their profound reflections on the realm of biopolitics develop in response to the formation of refugee camps, concentration camps, and the war on terror, their work can shed light on what is happening today in the time of Covid. They might even offer some insight into the big question of the world to come after covid: Should we get back to normal, build back better, dismantle, or go to where the wild things are?

PHIL 393A **Post-Truth and Democracy** **3 hr**
David Hoinski & Geoff Georgi

Are western democracies, and the United States in particular, in the midst of an epistemic crisis? In 2016, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) word of the year was “post-truth,” while the German language authority Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache selected “postfaktisch” as its word of the year. Since then, we have seen a US presidential administration introduce the phrase “alternative facts” into the public discourse, a global anti-vaccine movement prolonging a deadly pandemic, and a proliferation of political conspiracy theories that lead some of their followers to violence. These events, and others like them, suggest the disturbing prospect that truth doesn’t matter anymore in contemporary democracy, understood as political self-rule by the people.

But is this so-called ‘post-truth condition’ a recent phenomenon, or is its contemporary form just a new twist on an old problem? And what threat—if any—does it actually pose to contemporary democracy? Historians, philosophers, and sociologists have advanced several conflicting answers to these questions in recent years. Our immediate goal in this class is to critically examine some of these answers with an eye toward an account of post-truth informed by both classical and contemporary philosophy. Our larger goal is to give students a deeper understanding of the importance of truth, expertise, and education in contemporary democracy.

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: Wisdom and the Good Life 3 hr
Sharon Ryan

As students, philosophy majors have been dedicated to the pursuit of wisdom. This capstone seminar will provide philosophy majors with the opportunity to draw on their years of philosophical study to articulate and support their own conception of wisdom and the good life. What is wisdom? Does wisdom provide a secure route to the good life? What is the good life? What role does philosophical examination play in the development of wisdom and a good life? Does the good life include happiness? What is the significance of meaningful work and time for leisure in a good life? We will investigate answers to these questions by engaging with works from the history of philosophy and contemporary philosophy. By the end of the course, students will have their own well-developed conception of the good life as they prepare to embark upon the rest of their lives.