

Fall 2021 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 vibrant, 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 BA Requirements
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

Fall 2021 Course Descriptions

Philosophy 100 satisfies area 5 of the GEF.

PHIL 100
Devin Curry

Problems of Philosophy

3 hr

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 then 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 epistemological and metaphysical thinking of a few of the greatest philosophers in the European tradition. Finally, we'll discuss recent thinking about 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.

Philosophy 130 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

PHIL 130
David Hoinski

Current Moral Problems

3 hr

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, literally human beings in flight from political repression, poverty, war, crime, and the ravages of climate change, 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 Bruno Latour), “how can we organize to welcome the refugees?” Answering this question requires us to consider the further question of our ethical obligations to refugees, and in this course that is exactly what we will do. Our particular investigation will place special emphasis on the topics of humanity, hospitality (or welcome), and the stranger, 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, welcome,

and humanity, we will aim to outline an ethical and humane response to the refugees, both those already in our midst as well as those even now arriving at our door.

Philosophy 130 satisfies area 5 of the GEF
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PHIL 130 Megan Hungerman	Current Moral Problems	3 hr
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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 satisfies area 6 of the GEF
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PHIL 147 David Cerbone	Philosophy and Film	3 hr
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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 experience of it, the nature of the self and the self's relation to others, the character of contemporary society and technology, and the meaning and value of life (and death). Films include work by the Wachowski brothers, Ridley Scott, Spike Jonze, Ingmar Bergman, Lars von Trier, and Akira Kurosawa. Readings are drawn from throughout the Western philosophical tradition and include selections from Plato, Descartes, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein.

Philosophy 170 satisfies area 5 of the GEF
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PHIL 170 Sharon Ryan	Intro to Critical Reasoning	3 hr
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This course is a careful study of critical thinking and reasoning. Students will develop their abilities to present and analyze arguments; organize their ideas; and communicate clearly, logically, and effectively. Students will learn to identify and avoid common fallacies and biases. This course is a great 100-level course for any student who wants to be a better thinker in every area of study and in all aspects of their lives.

Philosophy 170 satisfies area 5 of the GEF
Online Only

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

PHIL 244 **History of Ancient Philosophy** **3 hr**
Megan Hungerman

As stated in the course catalogue, this course will exam the history of ancient philosophy, beginning with the pre-Socratics, covering Plato and Aristotle, and ending with an examination of the Hellenists and Roman philosophers. Students should learn about the basic philosophical movements within the ancient period, as well as become familiar with some of the key philosophers. While the course cannot hope to cover every development, or major work, within ancient philosophy, we will do our best to cover as much as we can. Ancient philosophy creates the base for all subsequent philosophy and philosophical thought within the Western world. By learning about this period within philosophy, students will also expand their knowledge of the history of philosophy in general.

Philosophy 244 satisfies area 5 of the GEF. Pre Requisite – 3 Hr. Philosophy
Honors Only

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

In this course we will focus especially on the highest and best idea according to Plato: the idea of the good. Our study will pursue the idea of the good in both its theoretical (metaphysical) and practical (ethical) dimensions through a careful study of key works by Plato and Aristotle. We will read and discuss Plato's dialogues Meno, Philebus, and Symposium, as well as Aristotle's great treatise The Nicomachean Ethics and his Metaphysics, Book Lambda (Book 12), which concerns god or the unmoved mover. In the course of our study we will pay close attention to the relation between the good and pleasure as Plato and Aristotle conceive it. We will also emphasize the topics of knowledge, education, and virtue in order to understand how Aristotle and Plato conceive

the relation between the contemplation (or theory) of the good and the practice of a decent human life.

Philosophy 248 satisfies area 5 of the GEF. Pre Requisite – 3 Hr. Philosophy
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PHIL 248 **History of Modern Philosophy** **3 hr**
David Hoinski

Modern western philosophy is a broad historical category that roughly covers the period from 1600 to 1900 in European philosophy. René Descartes (1596-1650) is generally recognized as the initiator of modern philosophy, and in many ways we are still today working within the parameters established by Descartes especially insofar as contemporary philosophy still adheres to the primacy of the first-person perspective. The historical period of modern philosophy 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 late modern philosophy and in particular on the relation between two 19th-century German philosophers: Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Schopenhauer was heavily influenced by Kant and indeed viewed his own philosophy, laid out in his magnum opus *The World as Will and Representation* (1819), as the proper consummation of the Kantian philosophy. Nietzsche in turn was heavily influenced by Schopenhauer, but he also reacted strongly against Schopenhauer’s metaphysics as well as his ethics of resignation. In this course we will compare and contrast the philosophies of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer paying special attention to their metaphysical and ethical views and above all to their differing views of the self or subject, the first-person starting point of Descartes’ philosophy. In the course of our study, we will read and discuss Schopenhauer’s *The World as Will and Representation* as well as various works by Nietzsche relevant to his confrontation with Schopenhauer. We will also consider the thesis that Nietzsche brings traditional western metaphysics to an end thus preparing the ground for new philosophical approaches to truth in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Philosophy 260 satisfies 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 301 satisfies GEF 5 and also requirements for philosophy major and minor

PHIL 301 **Metaphysics** **3 hr**
Geoff Georgi

This course is an introduction to contemporary analytic metaphysics. Metaphysics deals with some of the oldest and most basic questions in philosophy: what kinds of things exist? What is the status of the categories we use to think and talk about things that exist? What is the nature of time and space? What is change? What is it for one thing to cause another? What is it for some things to exist necessarily, while other things exist only contingently? Analytic metaphysics approaches these classic questions using the tools of rigorous argument, analysis, and intuition.

Philosophy 306 satisfies GEF 5 and also requirements for philosophy major and minor

PHIL 306 **Philosophy of Mind** **3 hr**
Devin Curry

This course will survey important historical and contemporary strands in the philosophy of cognition and consciousness. By way of close engagement with philosophical and scientific texts, we will address both metaphysical questions—*what’s the relation between minds and brains? Could computers think or feel? Can nonhuman animals? And how are our cognitive systems organized?*—and epistemological questions—*how do you know that other people (or animals) are conscious? How well do we know our own minds, anyway? (Do you know whether you dream in color or in black-and-white?) And how can psychologists and neuroscientists study minds scientifically?* Students will also learn how to write a paper arguing for an original thesis in the philosophy of mind.

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

PHIL 321 **Ethical Theory** **3 hr**
Daniel Miller

This course involves examination and critique of competing theories of rightness and goodness, including consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. Central 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 own 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 323 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

PHIL 323
Scott Davidson

Social/Political Philosophy

3 hr

At the close of the Second Discourse, Rousseau observes that “it is plainly contrary to the law of nature that children should command old men, fools wise men, and that the privileged few should gorge themselves with superfluities, while the starving multitude are in want of the bare necessities of life.” His words are often read as a revolutionary call to overcome social inequality. But what is equality and how should it best be achieved? While political philosophers widely agree about the importance of equality, they often disagree about just what equality means and the best means to achieve it. Does it mean equality according to political freedoms, opportunity, need or merit? These different possible meanings of equality have important consequences for our assessment of society today. In particular, we will examine the American ideal of society as a meritocracy which awards talent and effort. Does it achieve its ideal, is this ideal worth striving for, and what might be its negative side effects?

Philosophy 325 satisfies objectives 4 & 6 of the GEC
Pre Requisite – 3 Hr. Philosophy or Pre-Law student

PHIL 325
Scott Davidson

Philosophy of Law

3 hr

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, and so on. 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. 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

PHIL 331
Daniel Miller

Health Care Ethics

3 hr

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, organ donation, 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 deal with cases of advance directives where a patient met the standards of competency at one point but later fails to meet those standards? To what degree should we prioritize the life of a fetus? Is healthcare a moral right? Should vaccines be mandatory? We will examine these issues from both a theoretical perspective and through realistic case studies.

Philosophy 355 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

PHIL 355
David Cerbone

Existentialism

3 hr

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