

Spring 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 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.

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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 then bring our critical tools to bear on the work of two of the greatest philosophers of the Western tradition: Plato and René Descartes. Finally, we'll read and discuss recent essays on consciousness, science and religion, 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 all of 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 various 20th and 21st century essays, polemics, and analyses, we will also come to appreciate several distinctive ways of doing philosophy.

Philosophy 100 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

This course is reserved for students taking a total of 12 credit hours or less for the entire semester.

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. This course will examine the philosophical ideas brought up in "The Good Place" and explore many of the show's philosophical references in greater detail. 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 a "good place," should we be striving to get there? 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

The purpose of this class is to examine several contemporary moral issues. We will be investigating multiple topics in this class, including: some basic moral foundations, reproductive ethics, health care and euthanasia, caring for the other, and a topic to be decided by student vote. Students should come to understand the issues involved in these topics, and should also develop the ability to critically analyze and support arguments.

Philosophy 130 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

PHIL 130

Current Moral Problems

3 hr

David Hoinski

This course aims to highlight and criticize a misguided sense of entitlement that results in the abuse of other human beings and of nature as a whole. Over the course of the semester, we will focus on some of the most characteristic and harmful effects of this selfish attitude, attending in particular to how it contributes to the abuse of farmland, farmers, women, and humans in general, as well as the earth and its atmosphere. We will read and study books by Wendell Berry, Kate Manne, and Bruno Latour in order to highlight these problems. Our primary goal will be to explore how philosophical ethics can counter, and provide an alternative to, the misguided sense of entitlement that has characterized much of modern human history. We will conclude the course by considering the presently unfolding climate change crisis and the possibility of responding to this emergency with both a new politics of the earth and a different way of human living.

Philosophy 170 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

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

Sharon Ryan

What's true? What should you believe? How should you organize your ideas so others can better understand you? This course will involve a careful study of critical thinking and reasoning. Students will develop their abilities to problem solve, make rational decisions, present and analyze arguments, communicate clearly and effectively, and write logically and succinctly. Students will learn to identify and avoid common fallacies and biases and develop intellectual virtues. 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 life.

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 212 satisfies area 5 of the GEF.

PHIL 212 **Philosophy of Sport** **3 hr**

David Hoinski

Compare and evaluate issues, ideas and arguments on the Nature of Sport, Aesthetic value in Sport, and Ethics in Sport. The course also explores the history and language of sport as it relates to understanding Sport.

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

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

In this course we will cover the philosophy of Ancient Greece from the Presocratics through Plato and conclude with an introduction to Aristotle. Among the topics that will be addressed are: the problem of change, appearance vs. reality, knowledge and human excellence, and the being of natural organisms. We will be reading the original texts and coming to our own conclusions about their significance. In particular, we will focus not only on what the philosophers are saying but also on how well their theories stand up to critical scrutiny.

Philosophy 248 area 5 of the GEF
Pre Requisite – 3 Hr. Philosophy

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

One of the primary traditions of modern “western” philosophy is empiricism, which may be broadly characterized as the belief that all of our knowledge about the world derives from experience, and consequently that experience is the ultimate criterion by which to evaluate every human claim to know. But what is experience? To what extent is it identical with sense-perception, and what might it involve beyond sense-perception? How is it possible to build up the whole human intellectual repertoire—including math, logic, the natural sciences, and philosophy—from exclusively empirical foundations? How are general or universal ideas like “being” and “one” possible? And finally, does it make sense to talk about a mind-independent reality, since after all we never have any experience of this? In this installment of PHIL 248, we will explore these and other questions through a careful study of some of the classic empiricist works of modern philosophy: John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, George Berkeley’s *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, and Thomas Reid’s *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*. These works set the agenda for an empiricist philosophy that continues to be highly relevant today, in particular to the way many people think about knowledge and science. Although it has been and still is the subject of numerous criticisms, empiricism remains a lively philosophical and scientific option. Hence the goal of this course will be to gain an educated view of empiricism, becoming aware of both its strengths and its limitations as a means of understanding our world.

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 301 Metaphysics satisfies area 5 of the GEF
Pre-Requisite- 3 hr. philosophy

PHIL 301 **Metaphysics** **3hr**
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 sort 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 something 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 308 satisfies area 5 of the GEF.
Pre Requisite – 3 Hr. Philosophy or Religious Studies interdepartmental major

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

Examines questions of belief in God's existence, life after death, the problem of evil, determinism and divine foreknowledge, or other topics bearing upon the nature of a religious orientation to life.

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

3hr

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.

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 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 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

What is law? When philosophers turn their attention to the study of law, they want to know what features are distinctive to law as law. The course thus begins with the study of some of the most influential theories of law, such as natural law, legal positivism, feminist jurisprudence, and so on. Through the lens of those theories, the course will turn to some fundamental questions concerning the application of law: What, if any, connection exists between the rule of law and morality? When, if at all, should law be used to restrict the liberty of individuals? What, if anything, justifies the infliction of punishment on those who violate the law? These questions will be examined through landmark court cases in which the main theories and principles of law are put to the test.

Philosophy 331 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

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, 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 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

3 hr

Scott Davidson

What is the status of the self in the wake of the shattering of the cogito that originated in the latter half of the 19th century with “the masters of suspicion” and continued in the 20th century with the “death of the subject”? This question will be confronted through Paul Ricoeur’s book, *Oneself as Another*, which is organized around a series of “who” questions: Who is speaking? Who is the agent? Who is the narrator? Who is responsible for good or bad actions? Applying tools from analytical philosophy and the history of philosophy, Ricoeur develops a grammar of the self in which the self turns out to be inextricably bound to the other. Through a careful and rigorous study of this book, students will be able to add their own voices to the ongoing debate over selfhood through seminar discussions, presentations, and formal papers