

Fall 2026

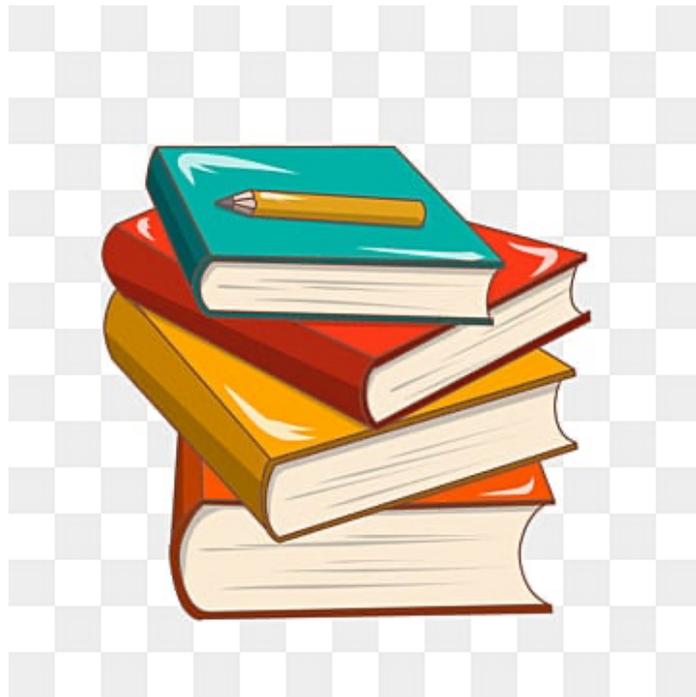
Course Descriptions

Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Humanities

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Is Philosophy a Great Major for YOU?

The WVU Philosophy Department is an intellectually vibrant department, with an energetic faculty devoted to outstanding research, teaching, and service. We offer a BA in Philosophy and minors in Religious Studies (both a regular and an online option), Applied Ethics, and Philosophy. We have a well-earned reputation for outstanding undergraduate teaching and mentoring that is comparable to a top-tier liberal arts college.

We have a long and distinguished tradition of student success and fulfillment. Our graduates include an impressive number of members of Phi Beta Kappa, Truman Scholars, Fulbright Scholars, Eberly Scholars, Neil S. Bucklew Scholars, Mountaineers of Distinction, a Newman Civic Fellow, and a recipient of the Charles B. Rangel International Affairs Graduate Fellowship. Our students are gaining admission, often with generous funding, to top graduate programs, law schools, and medical schools.

If you are a person who wants to live a purposeful and meaningful life, the study of philosophy will be valuable, interesting, and deeply enjoyable for you. Our students have the opportunity to grapple with deep questions and pressing contemporary problems about ourselves, our societies, and our world. How should we live our lives? What are our ethical obligations toward others? What is a just society? Are race and gender social constructs? Is time real? 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.

Beyond the personal satisfaction of engaging in a careful study of life's big questions, the study of philosophy prepares students for employment in fields that demand sophisticated critical thinking skills, clear communication of complex ideas, and the ability to deal effectively with ambiguity. The analytical and communication skills emphasized in philosophy are a valuable asset in many satisfying careers, including law, health care, education, politics, public policy, counseling, and business. As you probably know already, philosophy students consistently score exceptionally well on standardized exams such as the LSAT, GRE, MCAT, and GMAT.

Data collected by PayScale.com and shared by the World Economic Forum compared mid-career salaries among graduates from 20 different undergraduate majors. Philosophy came in 5th place, earning the highest rating among all humanities majors, all social science majors, all business majors (except economics), and several STEM majors. PayScale.com also collected data on starting salaries among 50 different majors and philosophy majors ranked #16. These data demonstrate that philosophy offers a great return on investment that is comparable to engineering.

For more info, contact:

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Philosophy Course Descriptions

Philosophy 130 satisfies area 5 of the GEF

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

Matthew Talbert

Students will be introduced to different theories about what makes actions right or wrong. These normative ethical theories will then be applied to contemporary debates concerning issues such as abortion, animal rights, the use of torture, responsibility for war crimes, and climate change.

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**

Sam Bennett

Students will be introduced to different theories about what makes actions right or wrong. These normative ethical theories will then be applied to contemporary debates concerning issues such as abortion, animal rights, the use of torture, responsibility for war crimes, and climate change.

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 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

Geoff Georgi

Philosophy as it is practiced in many places around the world today (including here at WVU) originated in ancient Greece. This course introduces students to ancient Greek thought, with an emphasis on how philosophy was understood by those who first took themselves to be doing it. While the majority of the course will focus on Plato and Aristotle, we will also read selections from the pre-Socratic philosophers who influenced them and from the philosophical traditions that developed in Greece after the death of Alexander the Great.

Pre-Requisite: Phil 100

PHIL 285

Ethics Bowl

3 hr

Dan Demetriou

This course is for students interested in improving their ability to think and speak about current, controversial issues in a fun and competitive context. The Association for Practical and Professional Ethics (APPE) Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl is an annual nationwide debate competition where teams vie to give the best analyses of topical professional, personal, and social/political controversies. The course involves analyzing the cases provided by the APPE for that year's competition, forming team positions, and practicing fluent delivery of those positions in both presentations and cross-examination. Commitment and attendance is essential. The course culminates in an (expenses paid) competition at a regional contest for the travel team, with the possibility of earning a berth at the National competition in the following spring. Students not on the travel team may participate in an online regional competition. Highly recommended for students planning careers in politics, law, or fields with a strong leadership dimension.

Philosophy 301 satisfies GEF 5
Pre-Requisite: 3 hours of Philosophy

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.

Pre-Requisite: 3 hours of Philosophy or Religious Studies interdepartmental major

PHIL 308

Philosophy of Religion

3hr

Sharon Ryan

In Philosophy of Religion, students will carefully unravel and analyze several philosophical puzzles in Western theism. We will consider puzzles about petitionary prayer; divine forgiveness; incarnation; omniscience and free will; and the viability of conceptions of the afterlife, heaven, and hell. We will also think through some questions in religious epistemology including whether it is possible for us to know, or believe rationally, that a divine being who is worthy of worship exists. What is faith? Is faith an intellectual and spiritual virtue? What is the relationship between faith and rationality? What should we rationally conclude when we notice that equally reasonable people come to opposing views on religious questions with no easy answer? We will wrap up the course with a careful study of the problems of suffering, evil, and divine hiddenness.

Pre-Requisite: 3 hours of Philosophy or Religious Studies interdepartmental major

PHIL 320

Aesthetics and Philosophy of Art

3hr

Ariane Nomikos

What is a work of art? Must art be beautiful? Does it matter if “a five-year-old could have made that”? Are judgments of art merely matters of taste, or can they be right or wrong? What distinguishes aesthetic experience from moral, practical, or scientific experience—and is art its only source?

This course introduces students to major issues in aesthetics and the philosophy of art while moving beyond a narrow focus on the fine arts. In addition to examining traditional questions about the nature, interpretation, and value of art across historical and cultural contexts, we will explore the emerging field of everyday aesthetics. From museums and popular media to food, fashion, design, ritual, and the natural world, aesthetic experience shapes how we perceive and inhabit our lives. By bringing philosophical theories into conversation with artistic practices and ordinary experience, the course invites students to see aesthetics not as a specialized concern, but as a central feature of human life.

Pre-Requisite - 3 hrs. philosophy

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

The course will cover topics in metaethics and normative ethics. Metaethics is concerned with the fundamental nature of morality and the significance of moral claims. Metaethical topics addressed in this class will include: "Are values subjective or objective?" and "What is the nature of moral reasons?" Normative ethical theories articulate standards for judging whether an action is right or wrong. Here, we will be concerned with the various advantages and disadvantages of consequentialist and deontological normative perspectives. In the last section of the course, we will take up the question of an agent's moral responsibility for their actions.

Pre-Requisite - 3 hrs. philosophy

PHIL 323 **Social and Political Philosophy** **3 hr**
Dan Demetriou

This course looks at social and political norms and asks what justifies them and whether you think they can be improved given contemporary controversies we hear argued about every day. Switching frequently between traditionalist/conservative, liberal, and left/progressive lenses informed by reading classic figures such as Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Mill, Marx, Rawls, Nozick, and Burke, we begin by asking what does (and what should) make a group of people a "society" and/or "a people." We then explore competing answers to perennial questions about the nature and demands of (social) justice, liberty, equality, and community. In the final third of the course and as determined by student interest, we will look at debates over some mix of applied topics such as migration, colonialism, climate, animals, national identity, heritage, freedom of expression, race, gender, democracy, multiculturalism, sex, marriage, and family.

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 – 3 hours of Philosophy

PHIL 354 **Themes in Continental Philosophy** **3 hr**
David Hoinski

This course concerns Deleuze and Guattari's brilliant 1991 text *What Is Philosophy?* This text is extraordinary because it attempts to situate philosophy in relation to (1) art, (2) science, and (3) politics, while it also concerns what philosophy is in itself. Deleuze and Guattari define philosophy as "the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts," and they provide a concise and highly useful account of what a concept is. At the same time, they also introduce the mysterious notion of "the plane of immanence" upon which concepts live and move. They also emphasize the crucial importance for philosophy of conceptual personae: the Madman, the idiot, Socrates, Dionysus, Zarathustra, and so forth. Overall this course provides an unusual opportunity to consider what philosophy itself is while also considering the questions of science, art, and politics. We will furthermore follow the method of close reading, about 5 pages per class meeting.

Pre-Requisite – 3 hours of Philosophy

PHIL 393A **Philosophy of Love** **3 hr**
David Hoinski

What is love? Is it something we do, or something that happens to us? What is the goal of love? How do we understand the relationship between different kinds of love, e.g., familial love as opposed to romantic love, and where does friendship fall into our understanding of love? Is there an art of loving or some other way to become more loving? In this course we will explore these and other questions related to love through a careful study of some famous and not-so-famous texts, including C. S. Lewis' *The Four Loves*, Plato's *Symposium* and *Lysis*, Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, bell hooks' *All About Love*, Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving*, Alain Badiou's *In Praise of Love*, and Thich Nhat Hanh's *How to Love*.

Religious Studies Courses

Religious Studies 102 satisfies area 7 of the GEF

RELG 102 **Introduction to World Religions** **3 hr**

Joseph Snow

This course is an introduction to the comparative study of world religions. We hope to explore the ways that religious traditions construct worlds of meaning, analyze the human situation, and speak of power and mystery. We shall address the multi-religious contexts in which Americans and many other people live

today in the 21st century; and consider how people with different religious beliefs and practices can cultivate respect for, and dialogue with, diverse traditions of others. Such inquiries can sometimes be disorienting, for the sense of religion many of us might feel in the United States has been mediated largely through the monotheistic histories contained within Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Traditions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shinto, Sikhism, and Jainism, as well as Indigenous religions and New Religious Movements, may have very different sets of assumptions, notwithstanding a multiplicity of divinities, an absence or abundance of scriptural authority, as well as historically and contextually specific ritual practices. With the more recent spread of religious pluralism and the movement toward inter-faith dialogue, many of these traditions will seem very much like an "other" way of being in the world. In order to learn about these other religions in a reflective way, we'll attempt to keep two important perspectives in mind: *Imaginative Sympathy*— Please take seriously the worlds of peoples involved, assume that religious thoughts and/or practices carry real meaning for any person or group under consideration; and *Critical Distance*—Try to raise questions that may not be raised by the participants, such as, what effect does this faith/practice have on the participant? On society? What kinds of values does a given text suggest or implicitly depend upon? What are the conceptions of human nature that texts and practices envision? What does a given dimension of any tradition show to be fundamental to human happiness and welfare?

RELG 102 **Introduction to World Religions** **3 hr**

Aaron Gale

This course introduces students to five of the most widely recognized religions in the world today: Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Despite some commonalities, each religion is unique regarding its history and practice. Therefore, the goals of this course are primarily twofold: 1. to provide students with an understanding of how each religion evolved historically and spiritually, and 2. to explore the contemporary practice of each religion. In addition, we will study some of the interactions that have taken place among the religions.

RELG 219 The History of Christianity 3 hr

Aaron Gale

This course explores the birth and evolution of Christian thought from its inception until approximately the modern era. The emphasis of this course is therefore on the significant events and people that helped to shape Christianity. Some of the individuals we will discuss include Jesus of Nazareth, St. Paul, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas. In addition, other topics related to the study of Christian thought will be examined. Examples of such topics include the early relationship between Judaism and Christianity, monasticism, and the Crusades. Ultimately, then, this course will: 1. explore how Christianity developed within the confines of the ancient world, and 2. provide students with the knowledge necessary to identify and explain key Christian events and people integral to the religion's growth.

RELG 303 Studies in Christian Scripture 3 hr

Alex Snow

This course will approach the New Testament from a rigorously historical perspective. We will situate the writings of the New Testament thoroughly within the historical, cultural, social, political, literary, and ideological worlds from which it emerged. We will endeavor to explore beneath the surface to find clues not only about such traditional issues as authorship, sources, and dates, but also about what is a vibrant field of study and social history. We will ask historical questions of the texts and of the events that they either narrated or presupposed. We will maintain an interest in the history of the text and the formation of the canon of the New Testament; in the historical Jesus; in the historical Paul; in the history of the Johannine community; in the historical realities lying behind Matthew, and 2 Corinthians, and Revelation; just to name a few. We will also strive to be highly comparative, asking potential and perennial questions like: How does John compare with the Synoptics? How do the Synoptics compare with each other? How does the preaching of Jesus compare with the accounts of the Gospels; or even more specifically, the theology of Paul? How does Paul's theology stack up against the letter of James; or even the book of Hebrews? How does the book of Revelation compare with everything else? We will strive to be contextually, inter-textually, and intra-textually critical, engaged in rigorous scholarship around both historical and contemporary constructions of Christian scriptures, so that we can see what the critical questions are and what evidence is typically adduced to answer them.

RELG 335 Religion and Science 3 hr

Alex Snow

This course is an introduction to, and survey of, the professional, popular, and academic relationships between religion and science, based on the issues raised by following questions: Where did we come from? Where are we going? In the beginning, why did the 'Big Bang' occur? Do quantum physics challenge our assumptions about reality? Is evolution God's way of creating? Is human nature determined by its genes? Can God act in a natural, law-bound world? Will human life come to an end as the universe evolves? And what about the universe itself — will it come to an end at some point, or will it go on forever? In order to understand better what we mean by "religion" and "science" we must think more critically about the conceptual status of such categories, while simultaneously using and participating in the contexts of various religious and secular cultures, viewing them as diverse and complex expressions of the human condition.

Magic and religion are terms which are often understood in relation to each other; however, our own understanding of what these words mean impacts our understanding of how they relate to each other. Is magic something separate from religion? Is magic a part of religious practice? Is religion somehow more real or legitimate than magic? This course will explore ancient, premodern, and (post)modern ideas of the relationship between magic and religion.

Humanities Courses

Humanities 101 satisfies area 6 of the GEF

HUM 101 Introduction to Western Civilization 1 3 hr
****Staff****

In this course we will examine civilizations across the Western world and their interactions with each other and others from the age of Mesopotamia to the Renaissance. As we read about and discuss these civilizations, we will consider their trends and shifts over time and how those changes impact social organization, culture, traditions, social value, religions, art, philosophy, and political institutions.

Humanities 102 satisfies area 6 of the GEF

HUM 102 Introduction to Western Civilization 2 3 hr
****Staff****

This course is an interdisciplinary, historical survey of western culture from the Renaissance to the present. Students will gain an understanding of this period by investigating and critically reflecting on the art, architecture, philosophy, religion, literature, politics, science, and music of this period.

HUM 231 Greek and Roman Civilization and Culture 3 hr
Aaron Gale

Examination of the numerous ways in which Greek and Roman cultures intersected, coincided, and at times collided. The relationship has no parallel in world history in that their contact created a unique fusion of cultural expression identified as "Greco-Roman."