

Philosophy Course Descriptions

PHIL 1301: Introduction to Philosophy

In this course, you will become familiar with a number of major philosophical questions, as well as with a variety of philosophical theories that try to answer those questions. We will discuss a series of classic and contemporary essays that focus on the nature and scope of our knowledge, the free will problem, the problem of personal identity, the nature of the mind, ethical dilemmas and issues of social justice. The course emphasizes clear and careful thought, discussion and writing about key philosophical problems and the development of argument reconstruction and critical analysis skills.

PHIL 2303: Introduction to Logic

The course introduces you to some basic concepts and methods employed to analyze and evaluate arguments. We will look at several logical systems (e.g., syllogistic logic, propositional logic and predicate logic), and will examine their relative strengths and weaknesses. We will practice employing these formal tools to identify, analyze and evaluate a wide variety of arguments. Although time constraints will not allow us to focus on standardized tests such as the LSAT, GMAT or GRE, the skills acquired by studying logic do help candidates get good scores on such tests. More generally, developing one's ability to think logically is a precondition of success in most domains of inquiry, as well as in everyday communication.

PHIL 2306: Introduction to Ethics

We will begin by studying the nature of philosophical approaches to ethics, and to ethical argumentation. We will then examine and discuss a variety of ethical theories and principles; and we will put this background to use in an exploration of ethical problems that arise in professional life.

PHIL 3306: History of Eastern Philosophy I

What is the nature of reality? What are the relationships between reality and mind? Does the self endure through time? Is science the only way to cognition? Is intuition an alternative (or supplement) to scientific approach? What is the importance of spiritual practice? Does spiritual practice lead to a genuine cognition?

These topics appear to have been treated differently in the East and the West. Eastern philosophical and spiritual traditions seem to assume that reality is mind-dependent--they seem to lean towards some versions of idealism. Western schools of thinking tend to assume that reality is mind-independent--they seem to display realist leanings. Eastern traditions seem to put emphasis on meditation and spiritual practice. In the

West we tend to put emphasis on science and intellectual quest. Are these differences real and fundamental or only apparent?

In the course we will attempt to address this issue by studying the points of view of both Eastern and Western philosophy. We will focus on the various schools of Hinduism and Buddhism--especially the schools of Madhyamika Buddhism (exemplified in Zen Buddhism and Vajrayana (Tibetan) Buddhism). The readings will include the classic Indian, Chinese, Tibetan and Japanese texts, as well as some writings by contemporary practitioners and scholars.

PHIL 3307: History of Eastern Philosophy II

What is the nature of reality? What are the relationships between reality and mind? Does the self endure through time? Is science the only way to cognition? Is intuition an alternative (or supplement) to scientific approach? What is the importance of spiritual practice? Does spiritual practice lead to a genuine cognition?

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Eastern traditions seem to put emphasis on meditation and spiritual practice. In the West we tend to put emphasis on science and intellectual quest. Are these differences real and fundamental or only apparent?

In the course we will attempt to address this issue by studying the points of view of Eastern philosophy, with a special emphasis on the various schools of Buddhism. The readings will include the classic Indian, Chinese, Tibetan and Japanese texts, as well as contemporary commentaries.

PHIL 3327: American Philosophy

This course is an introduction to American philosophy and the influential movement known as 'Pragmatism'. We will focus on three major philosophers from the classical period: Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1910), and George Santayana (1863-1952). Our primary concern will be with epistemological and metaphysical issues: scepticism, the rejection of foundationalism, the role of belief in inquiry, verification and meaning, the nature of truth, and the idea that the habits of human conduct must provide the basis for philosophical analysis. No familiarity with the material will be presupposed but familiarity with the history of modern philosophy is definitely an asset.

PHIL 3342: Philosophy of Love and Sex

This course is a study of the philosophical and ethical dimensions of human social and sexual relationships. Since before Socrates, philosophers have had a keen interest in understanding the personal dimension of human relationships, a dimension which is essential to any sense of human flourishing. Following this long tradition of philosophical inquiry, the course will pursue discussions of these and other questions.

- What is love?
- What is lust?
- What kinds of personal relationships ought a person seek?
- What ethical issues enter into personal relationships?
- How does one make wise decisions about personal relationships?
- Does romantic love require sex? Does sex require romantic love?
- Is lust a vice or a virtue?
- What is 'natural' and what is 'perverse'?
- Why are love and sex so often the targets of social control?

PHIL 3343: Philosophy of Law

This course is an introduction to contemporary views about the nature and applications of the law. We will begin with an overview of various philosophical theories about what law and legal reasoning are. Subsequently, we will analyze various philosophical, legal, and moral problems related to 1) the right to privacy and autonomy and its relation to the problem of abortion; 2) theories of punishment and the justification for death penalty; and 3) the scope of personal liberty and the limits of legal paternalism. Class meetings will consist of both lectures and discussions. The emphasis will be put on rational procedures for evaluating controversies, both within philosophy and elsewhere.

PHIL 3344: Social and Political Philosophy

PHIL 3345: The Meaning of Life

This course is an exploration of one of the most profound philosophical issues: the meaning of life. While the general focus is philosophical, we will also draw on themes from literature, film, and religion, and findings from psychology and other sciences. The course has two basic but intertwined components. The first is divided into three general responses to the question of life's meaning: (1) the sceptical response, which criticizes the purported intelligibility of the question 'What is the meaning of life?' as well as various assumptions that concern the notions of 'meaning', 'value', and 'purpose'; (2) the theistic response, which claims that the meaning of life is to be found in the existence of a god; (3) the non-theistic alternative, which claims we must create personal meaning within a natural universe. The second component of the course examines a number of key metaphysical ideas that frame and support these responses.

PHIL 3346: Elementary Formal Logic

The course for this independent study consists of the study of basic technical methods and results in philosophical and mathematical logic including the following:

- Syntax and semantics of the Propositional and Lower Predicate Calculi (PC and LPC).
- Proof and model theory for PC and LPC.
- Metatheory results including consistency and completeness for PC and LPC.
- Zermelo-Fraenkel Set Theory (without the Axiom of Choice.)
- Incompleteness.

PHIL 4303: Minds and Machines

Early projections at the dawn of computing technology that computers would soon match and exceed humans in intelligence are now seen as quaint, if not ridiculous. Despite enormous gains in computing power, genuine artificial intelligence has proven entirely elusive. To be sure, computer scientists have had some modest successes. Yet capturing human-level intelligence in a machine has thus far proven to be an intractable problem. At best, we seem to have achieved insect-level intelligence in some of our more complicated robots. The fact that projections about Artificial Intelligence have proven false begs an important question:

What is it about human intelligence that makes the creation of human-level artificial intelligence so problematic?

This question is especially important in light of the fact that modern neuropsychology assumes the human brain is itself a kind of biological computer. That is, researchers operate on the assumption that we are meat machines. In light of this assumption, we consider some of the most important questions in Philosophy, Psychology, and Computer Science:

- What is the place of the mental in a physical universe?
- How does the human brain underwrite the human mind, if it does?
- Are artificial minds possible, and if so, how?
- Are computational models of perception, intention, and action useful or deceptive?
- Is intentionality compatible with mechanism?
- Is autonomy compatible with mechanism?
- Is consciousness compatible with mechanism?
- Is identity compatible with mechanism?
- Are emotions compatible with mechanism?

It is not our goal in this course to argue that Artificial Intelligence is impossible. Rather, it is our goal to understand what makes human intelligence such an extraordinary and astonishing phenomenon by carefully considering some of the more important skeptical challenges to the possibility of artificial intelligence. Along the way, we learn a great deal about machines, on the one hand, and human minds, on the other.

Topics include:

- Dualism, Idealism, and Materialism
- Functionalism and Computational Psychology
- The Turing Test for Machine Intelligence
- Computability and the Church/Turing Thesis
- Searle's Chinese Room Thought Experiment
- The Frame Problem
- Representationalism and Connectionism
- Mechanism and Autonomy
- Robot Intentionality
- Personhood and Personal Identity
- Consciousness

PHIL 4304: Metaphysics

The course will introduce you to a number of central problems in metaphysics. We will discuss the following questions among others: How do things persist through time in spite of changes in properties? In the case of persons, in virtue of what are you now one and the same person as the kid from your old family photo? What is the nature of causation? Is talk of the cause "necessitating" the effect justified? Can a deterministic picture of the universe be reconciled with free agency? Is free will possible if the universe turns out to be indeterministic? What is the nature of particulars and universals (i.e., the properties that particular things have), and what is the relation between them? How should modal claims (i.e, claims about possibility, necessity, etc.) be interpreted?

PHIL 4305: Epistemology

The course will introduce you to a number of central problems in the theory of knowledge (i.e, epistemology). We will discuss the following questions among others: What is it to know something? What is the scope of our knowledge? Is knowledge of the external world possible? Can I conclusively rule out the possibility that I might be a brain in a vat? Can epistemic justification be fully determined by external factors that the subject has no awareness of? If justifiers must be mental states, is the structure of justifying reasons foundationalist or coherentist?

PHIL 4321: Ancient Philosophy

This course is a reading and discussion seminar devoted to the two major figures of Ancient Western Philosophy, Plato and Aristotle. Our focus will be a close reading of their major texts. Our emphasis will set the stage for the philosophical transition to the medievals and, eventually, the moderns. The course concludes with a discussion of the philosophical problems discovered by Ancient Western Philosophy. There are no prerequisites.

PHIL 4322: Modern Philosophy

This course is an introduction to the leading figures of the Modern philosophy era (1600-1800). The central focus is on the epistemological and metaphysical issues discussed in the writings of Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, and Hume. Our goal is to uncover the presuppositions and analyse the arguments found in both rationalist and empiricist accounts of knowledge, the nature of the universe, and our place within it.

PHIL 4323: Contemporary Philosophy

This course is a study of early Anglo-American Analytic Philosophy and major themes in the development of philosophy in the twentieth century. Important figures include Gottlob Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Bertrand Russell, G.E. Moore, C.D. Broad, A.J. Ayer, Alonzo Church, Rudolph Carnap, W.V.O. Quine, Gilbert Ryle, John Searle, Carl Hempel, Richard Hare, Peter Geach, G.E.M. Anscombe, J.L. Austin, Ruth Barcan Marcus, Donald Davidson, Saul Kripke, Peter Strawson, Norman Malcolm, Hilary Putnam, and David Lewis. Major themes include Philosophical Analysis, Logicism, Skepticism, Logical Atomism, Logical Positivism, Emotivism, Holistic Verificationism, Ordinary Language Philosophy, and Philosophical Naturalism.

PHIL 4330: Philosophy and History of Science and Technology

Plato pointed out that the world is notoriously not what we perceive it to be: A straight straw appears bent in a glass of water; A bucket of tepid water feels hot to a cold hand and cold to a hot hand; A red flower looks gray in moonlight. (Indeed, the world is radically different than what we perceive it to be if our best physics is correct!) What, then, is the nature of reality, how can we have knowledge of it, and what use can we make of that knowledge? The audacious enterprise of science is to discover answers to these questions.

Every culture has made significant contributions to our understanding of the world and our capacity to change it to better suit our needs. Yet the history of science and technology raises a number of fundamental questions:

- Why should we expect the world tomorrow to be anything remotely like it was today?
- What is a scientific theory, and how do scientific theories from different disciplines relate to one another?
- What is the nature and justification of a law of nature?
- Is the notion of a completed science coherent?
- Can science ever be completed?
- What is a scientific explanation, and how does it differ from other kinds of explanations?
- Does science reveal the fundamental nature of reality, and is revealing the fundamental nature a goal humans should expect to achieve?
- What are the characteristics of scientific progress and what factors contribute to it or detract from it?
- What are the scope and limits of technological progress?

- What is a scientific revolution, and how does a scientific revolution change the technical and cultural aspects of the society in which it occurs?
- How does a technological advance change the scientific and cultural aspects of the society in which it occurs?
- Should science and technology always be pursued, or is there a point at which we ought not go further?
- Why is Evolutionary Theory a scientific theory but not Creationism?
- How are scientific explanations justified?
- How do we adjudicate between competing scientific theories?
- Can all sciences be reduced to physics?
- Is it legitimate for a scientific theory to postulate the existence of unobservable entities?
- Does scientific knowledge make technology possible, or does improvement in technology make scientific inquiry possible?
- What distinguishes a scientific discipline like chemistry or psychology from a pseudo-science like alchemy or para-psychology?
- Why is Evolutionary Theory a scientific theory but not Creationism or Intelligent Design?
- Are psychology and the so-called social sciences legitimate sciences?
- How is it that mathematics, a largely arm-chair discipline, works so well in scientific explanation and prediction as to be indispensable?

PHIL 4331: Issues in Philosophy of Religion

Standard philosophical methods are used to explore such issues such as the existence and nature of God, the problem of evil, and the relationship between morality and religion.

PHIL 4332: Moral Issues in Contemporary Medicine

We will begin with an examination of the nature of morality, and of various moral theories and principles. In the remainder of the course, we will put this background to use in an exploration of various moral issues that arise in medicine: including informed consent, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, genetics, and the distribution of medical resources. We will read, discuss, and write about articles presenting different viewpoints on the issues, and case studies relevant to the issues.

PHIL 4333: Environmental Ethics

Why should we care about the planet and its nonhuman residents? Do animals have moral rights? Are there any grounds for including into the sphere of morality rain forests, ecosystems, natural landscapes, and future generations? The course will introduce standard ethical theories and methods of philosophical analysis. This background will be used to find rational answers to these and similar questions.

PHIL 4390: Topics in Philosophy

Study of important philosophical themes and figures. May be repeated for credit when topics vary.