

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
UNDERGRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

**Spring Semester January 30 – May 12, 2023**

**PHI 101 LAW Introduction to Philosophy**

**Dr. James Lawler**

T Th, 11:00 AM – 12:20 PM

Class #: 20614

The course will provide a general description of the basic philosophies of major civilizations evolving in world history. The background history to the development of these world philosophies will first be presented to provide context for understanding the differences in distinctly philosophical positions. Philosophies provide general meanings to human life in reflective form with rational justifications, rather than in the form of religion with its appeal to emotion and its dependence on authority and tradition. The first worldviews that evolve into philosophical theories are the early religions of the world, beginning with the animistic outlook of hunter-gatherers in which human beings understand themselves in a spiritual/emotional connection with the surrounding natural world. The major philosophies of India and China, the philosophies of the East, provide philosophical reflective meanings that are continuous with this animistic background, while the philosophies of the West, beginning with Greek philosophy, break from such animistic unity with the surrounding world.

After providing this general framework, the course first examines the major philosophical concepts of India, China, and ancient Greece in the context of distinctive characteristics of these three civilizations, so as to show the connection between their philosophical orientations and these historically specific characteristics. The course then examines the development of philosophy in Western Europe in the context of the rise of modern science—as both a development and transformation of ancient Greek philosophy under the impulse of the new sciences and the new historical experiences. The course examines philosophies of the Renaissance and early modern Enlightenment of Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, in the British tradition, and Descartes and Leibniz in continental Europe.

**PATHWAYS: PHI 101 Introduction to Philosophy satisfies the following pathways:  
Cultures, Art and Imagination; Human Nature; Global Cultures and Expression.**

## **PHI 101 PHI Introduction to Philosophy**

**Staff**

ONLINE

Class #: 20615

Philosophy is a broad field of inquiry, encompassing questions about the nature of the world around us, our own natures, our values, and about how we should live our lives. In this course, we will look to historical and contemporary writings on a vast array of issues, including debates in ethics, free will, metaphysics, and epistemology. Our inquiry will span from the extremely practical to the extremely abstract, and students will develop philosophical skills for engaging with these debates.

The course examines general topics in various areas of philosophy showing different sides of issues; develops critical thought and philosophical method.

**PATHWAYS: PHI 101 Introduction to Philosophy satisfies the following pathways: Cultures, Art and Imagination; Human Nature; Global Cultures and Expression.**

## **PHI 105 DON Contemporary Moral Problems**

**Dr. Maureen Donnelly**

M W F, 9:00 AM – 9:50 AM

Class #: 20616

In this course, students will acquire basic ethical concepts and apply them to critical moral issues of our time. We will consider a variety of positions on issues such as social justice, the environment, and our duties to help those in need. Emphasis will be placed on understanding and appreciating, though not necessarily agreeing with, multiple points of view.

**PATHWAYS: PHI 105 Contemporary Moral Problems satisfies the following pathways: Conflict, Violence and Resolution; Economy, Business and Society; Equality, Power and Justice; Health, Sexuality and Society; Human Nature.**

## **PHI 105 PHI Contemporary Moral Problems**

**Staff**

ONLINE

Class #: 20617

This course will philosophically examine contentious moral issues of the day. Among the topics that may be discussed are abortion, capital punishment, affirmative action, obligations of wealthy nations to poor nations, duties to non-human animals, vegetarianism, sex workers, pornography, legalized gambling and lotteries, gun control, drone warfare, human enhancements through drugs and prostheses, homosexual marriage, racial profiling, and legalization of currently illegal drugs.

**PATHWAYS: PHI 105 Contemporary Moral Problems satisfies the following pathways: Conflict, Violence and Resolution; Economy, Business and Society; Equality, Power and Justice; Health, Sexuality and Society; Human Nature.**

**PHI 107 DON Introduction to Ethics**

**Dr. Maureen Donnelly**

M W F, 11:00 AM – 11:50 AM

Class #: 18826

Introduces value theory, good and bad, justification of obligations to others, relationship of free choice and determinism, and contemporary moral problems analyzed by ethical principles.

Nearly everyone assumes that some human actions are morally good (or at least morally permissible), while other actions are morally wrong. However, there is often considerable disagreement over the moral worth of particular actions. The primary purpose of this class is to examine different principles which have been advocated for distinguishing between morally acceptable and morally unacceptable actions. Special attention will be paid to principles which are based on substantial philosophical arguments and which purport to be independent of specific cultural practices. We will also consider: i) the extent of a person's responsibility for his or her actions and ii) what reasons can be given for choosing good actions and refraining from bad actions. Students should expect regular readings from historical and contemporary sources. Grades are based on written homework, regular class participation, and examinations. No prior background in philosophy is required for this course.

**PATHWAYS: PHI 107 Introduction to Ethics satisfies the following pathways: Economy, Business and Society; Environments, Technologies and Policy; Health, Sexuality and Society; Human Nature.**

**PHI 115 PHI Critical Thinking**

**Staff**

ONLINE

Class #: 23553

Examines techniques of problem solving, decision making, and evaluating pros and cons of an issue; organizing data; forming strategies and giving reasons; perceptual, cultural, emotional, intellectual, and expressive blocks to thinking; and simple inductive reasoning and statistical fallacies. Students will also learn the basics of inductive, deductive, categorical, and propositional logic.

**PHI 234 LON Environmental Ethics**

**Dr. Duane Long**

ONLINE

Class #: 21226

Examination of how humans should interact with the environment, both as individuals and as members of groups or organizations.

**PATHWAYS: PHI 234 Environmental Ethics satisfies the following pathways: Communities, Populations and Spaces; Environments, Technologies and Policy; Equality, Power and Justice.**

**PHI 237 HOV Medical Ethics: Social & Ethical Values in Medicine**

**Dr. David Hershenov**

T Th, 9:30 AM – 10:50 AM

Class #: 17936

The course is designed both to provide moral guidance for future medical professionals and enable citizens who don't work in the health sciences to develop informed and reasonable positions about the most important bioethical issues of the day. Students will become familiar with leading arguments on both sides of the following contemporary bioethical controversies: abortion, euthanasia/physician-assisted suicide, commercial surrogate motherhood, enhancing human abilities, defining death, organ transplants, conscientious objection, curing the disabled vs. changing the society to accommodate them, patient autonomy and informed consent, rationing scarce resources and mandating vaccinations during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The course is designed to present competing views about the above topics. Even if students don't switch sides on an issue due to the course readings, lectures and discussions, the hope is that they will not only be able to give a stronger defense of their own positions but will also come to better appreciate the considerations that favor the opposing side. This might play a small role in making public debate more civil and reasonable.

The methodologies employed in the class should make students more aware of their own basic values, perhaps revealing to them commitments of which they were previously unaware. Students will learn how to construct philosophical arguments and critically read philosophy essays. All the required readings will be made available through UB Learns.

**PATHWAYS: PHI 237 Medical Ethics satisfies the following pathways: Equality, Power and Justice; Health, Sexuality and Society.**

**PHI 237 LON Medical Ethics: Social & Ethical Values in Medicine**  
**Dr. Duane Long**  
ONLINE  
Class #: 20619

This course will explore issues with the beginning and end of human life and the roles of doctors, patients, family members, and other important figures in determining the legal and moral issues that these phases of life bring up.

**PATHWAYS: PHI 237 Medical Ethics satisfies the following pathways: Equality, Power and Justice; Health, Sexuality and Society.**

**PHI 250 VIN The Meaning of Life**  
**Dr. Sarah Vincent**  
T Th, 9:30 AM – 10:50 AM  
Class #: 22302

What is the meaning of life? Is there any real point in anything we do? Are we just thrown into the world and forced to make our way through until, eventually, we die? This course will confront such questions. In doing so, we will consider various suggestions about what might give life meaning, as well as discuss related topics like the nature of happiness, what a good life might require, our obligations to our future generations, and whether death is bad. Readings will be heavily interdisciplinary – including philosophical, psychological, and literary texts.

**PHI 329 BEV Metaphysics**  
**Dr. John Beverley**  
M W F, 10:00 AM – 10:50 AM  
Class #: 23551

Metaphysics is a sub-discipline of philosophy focused on investigating the most fundamental categories of existence, such as properties, substances, persons, facts, events, etc. Metaphysicians construct theories designed to explain – and sometimes explain away – such categories. Metaphysical theories are, unlike scientific theories, not testable empirically, they are justified insofar as they explain the nature of fundamental categories, how they relate to one another, and how they relate to empirical phenomena. In this course, we will explore metaphysical theories designed to explain the nature of time, existence, modality, and probability. In doing so, we will learn common methodologies and argumentative strategies used to defend and critique such theories, so that by course end, we will be equipped to construct, motivate, and defend our own metaphysical theories.

**Pre-requisite:** One prior PHI course.

### **PHI 333 BEE Epistemology**

**Dr. James Beebe**

M W , 3:30 PM – 4:50 PM

Class #: 22186

Epistemology is the field of philosophy dedicated to examining the nature and limits of knowledge and rationally justified belief. In this course, we will consider the following questions:

- Do we really know what we think we know? If so, how?
- Is reality knowable? If so, to what degree?
- What's the difference between knowledge and belief?
- Is there a difference between knowledge and true belief? If so, what is it?
- What makes some beliefs more rationally justified than others?
- Under what circumstances are we justified in believing what other people tell us?
- If people who are just as well-informed as we are disagree with us, should that affect our own beliefs? If so, how?

This course will be an active introduction to epistemology, meaning that you will be doing – and not just reading about other people doing – epistemology from Week 1. You don't need to have read about epistemology before doing the epistemological tasks that will be assigned.

### **PHI 342 GRA Political Philosophy**

**Dr. David Gray**

M W F, 10:00 AM – 10:50 AM

Class #: 19698

What is Justice? Is it something we have reason to want? Are rights real things, or did we just make them up? When is the state allowed to coerce us? Why have a state at all? If we have one, how do we justify it? This course will explore modern political philosophy, with a focus on the justification and legitimate purpose of the state, and how the basic structure of society influences how we engage with each other as citizens. To explore these issues, we will look at the development of the Social Contract tradition, and responses to it. This course starts by examining the earliest hint of social contract theory, first raised by Glaucon in Plato's Republic. This will begin our discussion of justice, and what kind of thing it is. After that, we will jump ahead in history to look at what is in many ways the most important book ever written in political philosophy, Hobbes' Leviathan. Much of the rest of the course is an attempt to respond to Hobbes. The two main responses to Hobbes in the Modern era were from Locke and Rousseau, each going in quite different directions. We will see that David Hume in many ways ended the social contract tradition with a powerful critique, while Rawls famously brought it back to life in the 20th century. Rawls has since come to dominate the landscape in political philosophy – much of the work in political philosophy for the past 40 years has been a response to him. We will close the course by considering several contemporary critiques of this approach. The course surveys political theories in a systematic or historical way.

**PATHWAYS: PHI 342 Political Philosophy satisfies the following pathway: Equality, Power and Justice.**

**PHI 345 VIN Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art**

**Dr. Sarah Vincent**

M W F, 9:00 AM – 9:50 AM

Class #: 20622

What makes something 'art'? Is everyone's interpretation of an artwork's meaning equally plausible, or is expertise important? Why do some of us appreciate a particular work of art, but others don't connect to it? How should we define 'beauty'? Can art have ethical value? Throughout this course, we'll consider questions like these, bringing philosophical theories into conversation with various artworks.

**PATHWAYS: PHI 345 Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art satisfies the following pathways: Cultures, Art and Imagination; Economy, Business and Society; Human Nature; Global Cultures and Expression.**

**PHI 347 VIN Gender and Philosophy**

**Dr. Sarah Vincent**

M W F, 12:00 PM – 12:50 PM

Class #: 23552

How has gender discrimination impacted the academic discipline of philosophy? In what ways are women challenging the philosophical canon? What can philosophy tell us about the causes of and solutions to the oppression of women? In what ways does that oppression intersect with race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, and socioeconomic status? In what ways does socialization shape concepts like 'masculinity'? Does patriarchy hurt men too? This course will engage questions like these. All are welcome. Let's work together to think about how academic philosophy can improve on this front and how it may be able to provide avenues of resistance to gender prejudice.

**PHI 360 LON Ancient Philosophy**

**Dr. Duane Long**

T Th, 12:30 PM – 1:50 PM

Class #: 23550

Western philosophy is a cumulative practice: the questions we ask, the answers we consider live possibilities, and the frameworks we deploy to understand phenomena have a long history of development over years, generations, and centuries. In this course, we look to the early beginning of the practice of philosophy, understood as the practice of (1) offering reasons and arguments to (2) reach defensible beliefs about a topic. We will examine in detail the works of Plato and Aristotle, as well as extrapolate as best we can about the views of Socrates, considering their views on reality, knowledge, and ethics.

**PATHWAYS: PHI 360 Ancient Philosophy satisfies the following pathways: Communities, Populations and Spaces; Human Nature.**

**PHI 380 LAW Nineteenth Century Philosophy**

**Dr. James Lawler**

T Th, 2:00 PM – 3:20 PM

Class #: 20620

In his systematic philosophical works, Kant attempts to resolve the contradictions in early modern philosophy between materialist empiricism and idealist rationalism. In his conception of appearance and reality, Kant seeks to reconcile the antinomies of matter and spirit, determinism and free will, self-interest and morality, secular science and a religion indicated by reason itself.

If Kant's positions culminated one stage in the history of Western philosophy, they started a second stage, in which they were put to the test in various ways. Hegel, followed by Marx, argues that an expanded conception of reason can resolve the oppositions generated by Kant's abstract conceptual analysis. More impressed by Kant's stress on the limits of reason, Nietzsche argues that ultimate reality can be accessed by creative imagination. William James takes Kant's limits of reason as a basis for an alternative to materialist science that justifies religious faith in human immortality.

Such philosophical perspectives were generally linked to the central questions of social life. Kant establishes moral limits to the freedom of the market of Adam Smith's laissez-faire capitalism. Hegel provides grounds for what is now called welfare-state capitalism. Marx argues that human freedom and democracy require the egalitarian economics of socialism. By contrast Nietzsche draws from the Darwinian struggle for survival grounds for transcending humanity itself, for the creation of the Superhuman. William James returns to Kant in his essay for a pragmatic spiritualism as an alternative to materialism.

**PATHWAYS: PHI 380 Nineteenth Century Philosophy satisfies the following pathways: Cultures, Art and Imagination.**

**PHI 485 GRA Integrating PPE**

**Dr. David Gray**

M W F, 2:00 PM – 2:50 PM

Class #: 22031

This course will explore advanced issues at the intersection of philosophy, political science and economics. Each discipline explores complex social problems with its own toolkit, and with its own set of questions. The goal of this course will be to integrate these different approaches into a richer lens on how we can confront complex social issues.

**Pre-requisite:** PHI 185

Undergraduate Tutorial Sections:

PHI 498 Philosophy Undergraduate Tutorials

PHI 499 Philosophy Undergraduate Tutorials

*Meeting days and times as arranged with professors.*