

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
UNDERGRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

Spring Semester January 31 – May 13, 2022

PHI 101 LAW Introduction to Philosophy

Dr. James Lawler

T Th, 5:00 PM – 6:20 PM

Class #: 22361

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.

PHI 101 MUR Introduction to Philosophy

Justin Murray

ONLINE

Class #: 22362

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.

PHI 105 MUR Contemporary Moral Problems

Staff

ONLINE

Class #: 22364

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.

PHI 105 PHI Contemporary Moral Problems

Staff

M W F, 9:00 AM – 9:50 AM

Class #: 22363

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.

PHI 107 VIN Introduction to Ethics

Dr. Sarah Vincent

T Th, 8:00 AM – 9:20 AM

Class #: 19919

How should I live? What makes an action right or wrong? How can we justify answers to moral questions in the face of disagreement? In addressing questions like these, we will weave together ethical theories with specific applications of those theories. Theories to be discussed may include, but need not be limited to, Cultural Relativism, Subjectivism, Egoism, Social Contract Theory, Virtue Ethics, Kantianism and Utilitarianism. We'll consider how such theories inform our moral commitments in contexts like the criminalization of drugs, sexual morality, gender equality, racial justice, animal rights, and more.

PHI 212 HOV Introduction to Philosophy of Religion

Dr. David Hershenov

M W F, 2:00 PM – 2:50 PM

Class #: 22372

This course will focus upon questions of natural theology, that is, questions about what may be known about God's existence, nature, and relationship to the world via human reason, unaided by divine revelation. We will examine five proofs alleged to demonstrate God's existence that are inspired respectively by Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, and Leibniz. Then we will draw out what the nature of God must be if the arguments for God's existence are sound. The proofs support the traditional Western philosophical conception of God as having the attributes of simplicity, immutability, immateriality, incorporeality, necessity, perfect goodness, omniscience, omnipotence, will, love, and incomprehensibility. We will conclude the class with objections to the proofs for God's existence and examine whether the attributes they ascribe to God are compatible with the extent of evil in the world, the diversity of religious conceptions, the existence of God being "hidden" from so many reasonable people, and the deliverances of science. The main text will be Ed Feser's *Five Proofs of the Existence of God*.

PHI 234 LON Environmental Ethics

Dr. Duane Long

ONLINE

Class #: 23273

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

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

Dr. David Hershenov

M W F, 10:00 AM – 10:50 AM

Class #: 18897

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.

PHI 237 LON Medical Ethics: Social & Ethical Values in Medicine

Dr. Duane Long

ONLINE

Class #: 22369

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.

PHI 250 VIN The Meaning of Life

Dr. Sarah Vincent

M W F, 12:00 PM – 12:50 PM

Class #: 24602

What is the meaning of life? Is there any real point in anything? 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 topics like purpose, happiness, community, struggle, and mortality. Readings will be heavily interdisciplinary – including philosophical, psychological, and literary texts.

PHI 301 LON Writing Philosophy

Dr. Duane Long

T Th, 12:20 PM – 1:40 PM

Class #: 24471

This course will cover all the crucial skills for writing a sophisticated philosophy paper, ranging from deciding on a topic to doing a literature review to organizing an argumentative structure to integrating sources and proper citation and bibliographic information. The course will be writing intensive, but crucial for anyone wishing to develop their philosophical writing and valuable to anyone in the humanities or intending to enter a field where clear written communication is of value.

PHI 333 BEE Epistemology

Dr. James Beebe

M W F, 11:00 AM – 11:50 AM

Class #: 24472

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, 9:00 AM – 9:50 AM

Class #: 20947

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.

PHI 345 VIN Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art

Dr. Sarah Vincent

M W F, 10:00 AM – 10:50 AM

Class #: 22378

What makes something 'art'? Who decides what counts? Is everyone's interpretation of an artwork's meaning equally valid, or is expertise important? Why do some of us appreciate a particular work of art, but others don't connect to it? Can art liberate us? How have commodification and reproduction changed the artworld or our engagement with it? Throughout this course, we'll consider questions like these, bringing philosophical theories into conversation with artworks of your choice (including, but not limited to, paintings, novels, songs, plays, and films).

PHI 380 LAW Nineteenth Century Philosophy

Dr. James Lawler

T Th, 2:00 PM – 3:20 PM

Class #: 22370

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.

PHI 417 BRA Modal Logic

Dr. David Braun

M, 1:00 PM – 3:40 PM

Class #: 24269

This course will introduce a variety of logical systems beyond first-order predicate logic that are commonly used in philosophy. We will spend most of our time on modal logic (the logic of necessity and possibility). We will, however, begin with ordinary sentential logic. We will describe its semantics and proof theory in a more rigorous way than is common in beginning logic courses. We will then show that the semantics and proof theory "match" in a certain sense. More precisely, we will introduce a proof system for propositional logic, and show that every theorem of this system is valid (this result is called "soundness"), and we will also sketch a proof that every valid sentence can be deduced within this system ("completeness"). We will then turn to modal logic. We will consider the proof theory and semantics of several systems of modal logic, and the soundness and completeness of those systems. Depending on time, we will discuss some of the following: tense logic, deontic logic, counterfactual conditionals, first-order predicate logic, modal first-order predicate logic, and definite descriptions.

Required work: Approximately fourteen homework assignments, and approximately three exams. The last exam will occur during the **final exam** period.

Pre-requisite, strictly enforced: Philosophy 215 (Symbolic Logic) at UB or instructor permission. I strongly encourage undergraduate students who have taken Philosophy 215 to contact me before they enroll in this class; they should enroll in this class only if they got excellent grades in Philosophy 215. Students who have not taken Philosophy 215 at UB, but who believe that they have taken an equivalent course, or who think they are otherwise qualified to take the course, must contact the instructor before enrolling.

PHI 485 GRA Integrating PPE

Dr. David Gray

T Th, 2:00 PM – 3:20 PM

Class #: 24270

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.

PHI 489 BEE Special Topics: The Science of Morals

Dr. James Beebe

W, 1:00 PM – 3:40 PM

Class #: 24271

This course is an introduction to moral psychology, an interdisciplinary field of research that combines philosophical theorizing about morality with empirical research (from psychology and other cognitive and social sciences) on how people think about moral matters and how they act in light of their moral values or beliefs. Students will learn about and critically examine the ways that psychologists draw upon philosophical theories to guide their empirical research and the ways that philosophers and scientists argue that empirical findings should shape philosophical thinking about morality.

PHI 489 LAW Special Topics: Descartes' Meditations

Dr. James Lawler

T Th, 11:00 AM – 12:20 PM

Class #: 24671

Descartes' *Meditations* is one of the major texts of the history of modern philosophy. It is a relatively short, accessible text, designed to be meditated on in a spirit of quiet contemplation. The main focus is on the existence of God and the nature of the human being, understood in the light of the new sciences of modern era.

Descartes argues that modern science requires an intellectual break with direct sensory experience as the foundation of knowledge, and so presupposes confidence in the powers of reason. Sensory experience by itself leads to the pre-modern worldview, epitomized by the philosophy and science of Aristotle, with the sun revolving around the earth as we directly see it doing. But the new science of Copernicus and Galileo holds that the reality is just the opposite of the way things appear in sensory experience: it is really the earth that revolves around the sun. The new sciences presuppose therefore that human reason can overcome the limits of direct sensory experience.

But if we can't rely on sense experience to know the reality of things, if our senses so clearly deceive us, how do we know we can rely on our reason? This is where Descartes' arguments for the independent reality of the rational mind and the existence of God become crucial to modern science itself. We can trust our reasoning abilities, Descartes

argues, because we can know that a God who would not deceive us exists and creates us as beings who can think for ourselves.

The course will relate Descartes' ideas on these topics to the philosophical background in the work of Plato and Aristotle, as well as to later developments that presuppose Descartes' *Meditations*, in Hume and Kants, as well as in the 20th century existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre.

Undergraduate Tutorial Sections:

PHI 498 Philosophy Undergraduate Tutorials

PHI 499 Philosophy Undergraduate Tutorials

Meeting days and times as arranged with professors.