

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
UNDERGRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

Spring Semester January 25 – May 7, 2021

PHI 101 DON Introduction to Philosophy

Dr. Maureen Donnelly

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24349

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 about what we are, how much we can know about ourselves and the world around us, and whether we are free and responsible for our actions. 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 101 NOM Introduction to Philosophy

Dr. Ariane Nomikos

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24350

This course will introduce students to some of the central questions and debates in philosophy. What (if anything) can we know about the world we inhabit, and how? What does it mean to have knowledge? How do minds relate to bodies? What is consciousness? Is freedom necessary for moral responsibility? Do we have reasons to be good? How should we live and interact with the world around us? What is the extent of our ethical responsibilities to human and non-human animals? Under what conditions could a society be properly described as just? Is a just society even possible? Philosophers have grappled with questions of this sort for centuries, and so will we. By examining various historical and contemporary approaches to such questions, the importance of philosophical reflection for everyday life should become evident.

PHI 105 NOM Contemporary Moral Problems

Dr. Ariane Nomikos

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24351

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

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24352

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 DON Introduction to Ethics

Dr. Maureen Donnelly

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 21082

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.

PHI 107 GRA Introduction to Ethics

Dr. David Gray

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24353

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.

PHI 212 HOV Introduction to Philosophy of Religion

Dr. David Hershenov

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24362

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 215 BIT Symbolic Logic

Dr. Thomas Bittner

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24368

This course will be dedicated to learning symbolic techniques for evaluating the validity of arguments. We will formulate a symbolic language and learn to translate ordinary English sentences into it. We will then apply precise formal techniques for determining whether the symbolic versions of these arguments are valid.

Our textbook is one of the several most widely used and "standard" introductions to the subject: Patrick Hurley's *A Concise Introduction to Logic* (13th edition) **electronic version**.

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

Dr. David Hershenov

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 19808

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, rationing medical resources during the Covid 19 epidemic, defining death, increasing the number of organs available for transplant, conscientious refusals of health professionals to provide legal medical procedures, curing the disabled vs. changing the society to accommodate them, obtaining informed consent from patients, cloning human beings, and using biotechnologies to enhance the abilities of healthy people.

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

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24359

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 237 PHI Medical Ethics: Social & Ethical Values in Medicine

Staff

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 10761

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 248 LAW Philosophy and Popular Culture

Dr. James Lawler

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24369

Contemporary television programs and films, as well as popular novels, often contain the same issues, questions and probing reflections that philosophers have explored since the time of Plato. Stories that are told with skill and imagination in popular culture provide compelling illustrations of ideas treated abstractly by philosophers. Connecting the scenarios found in contemporary culture with the concepts developed by philosophers helps make these concepts seem more real and helps students to take them more seriously. Possible subjects for the course include *The Simpsons*, *The Matrix Trilogy*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Woody Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, *Star Wars*, Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion of the Christ*, and Dan Brown's, *The Da Vinci Code*. Classical writings to be discussed: Plato, canonical and gnostic Gospels, Kant, and Hegel.

PHI 322 GRA Philosophy of Social Sciences

Dr. David Gray

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24370

Considers theories within the social sciences and the issues of how, if at all, they are fundamentally different from the theories of physical sciences.

PHI 342 GRA Political Philosophy

Dr. David Gray

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 22472

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 NOM Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Art

Dr. Ariane Nomikos

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24372

What is a work of art? Is there some feature that all works of art have in common, and in virtue of which they qualify as “art”? Must all good art be beautiful? Does it matter if “a five-year-old could draw that”? Are judgments of artworks all just a matter of taste? And is art the only thing capable of producing aesthetic experience? Throughout this course, we’ll consider questions like these, both abstractly and in terms of different (traditional and popular) artistic media. This course will draw readings from both philosophers and artists themselves, as well as incorporate listening and (virtual) viewings.

PHI 356 LON Special Topics: Gender and Philosophy

Dr. Duane Long

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24371

This course investigates the notion of gender and how it impacts our philosophical thinking, especially with respect to our ethical intuitions, commitments, and characters. We will begin by briefly considering what it means to have a gender, where gender comes from, and what its relation to biological sex is. After this, we will look at claims that there is either a distinctively feminine moral perspective, or that there is at least a tendency for differences in moral outlook between men and women. Finally, we will consider the moral dimensions of the imposition of beauty standard on women and, increasingly, men as well, and the ethics of pursuing or providing cosmetic surgery as a way of fitting dominant beauty standards.

PHI 360 LON Ancient Philosophy

Dr. Duane Long

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24373

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.

PHI 380 LAW Nineteenth Century Philosophy

Dr. James Lawler

Delivery mode – online: recorded not real time

Class #: 24360

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. With his conception of dialectical reason, 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, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche argue that ultimate reality can be accessed by such non-rational means as religious faith or creative imagination.

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 Kierkegaard sees in socialism the end of freedom and 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.

All reading materials will be supplied by the instructor. Students will be required to take periodic quizzes, make one oral presentation to the class, and write an in-class essay for the final exam.

Undergraduate Tutorial Sections:

PHI 498 Philosophy Undergraduate Tutorials

PHI 499 Philosophy Undergraduate Tutorials

Meeting days and times as arranged with professors.