

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
GRADUATE COURSE DESCRIPTIONS**

Spring Semester January 5 – May 6, 2025

[PHI 576 Hume](#)

Dr. Lewis Powell and Dr. Stewart Duncan
Wednesday, 1:00 PM – 3:40 PM
Class #: 23656

Hume's *Treatise* is a big book full of arguments, which we could easily study in isolation. But it's a big book full of arguments that are aimed at other philosophers, and it's interesting and useful to think about those disagreements. In this seminar, we'll think about the first book of the *Treatise* ("Of the Understanding") alongside some of the other views Hume was reacting to, drawing on, or directly opposing. So we'll think about Hume, but also about philosophers such as Hobbes, Locke, and Malebranche. Topics will include the nature and origin of ideas, causation and necessity, and judgment and understanding.

This seminar will include an intensive writing option.

[PHI 579 PPE Grad Seminar](#)

Dr. Ryan Muldoon and Dr. Alex Schaefer
Tuesday, 1:00 PM – 3:40 PM
Class #: 20696

This seminar will explore key themes related to the open society from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The key themes are diversity, institutions, and social change. The disciplinary perspectives are economics, evolutionary theory, sociology, and philosophy. The aim of the seminar is to deepen our understanding of the dynamics of an open society by noting similarities - or perhaps irreconcilable differences - in how these disciplines analyze the key themes mentioned above. Readings will be drawn from a variety of authors, including Douglass North, Joseph Schumpeter, Robert Boyd and Peter Richerson, Michael Polanyi, John Stuart Mill, and Hannah Arendt.

[PHI 598 Introduction to Ontological Philosophy](#)

Dr. Barry Smith

ONLINE

Class #: 24086

This course provides an introduction to central themes in the history of philosophy viewed from an ontological perspective. The course is designed to be of interest to both philosophers and those with a background in computer and information science. Topics treated will include:

1. A brief history of ontology from Aristotle to the Human Genome Project
2. The ontology of social reality
3. Ontology leaving the mothership of philosophy
4. Why computer science needs philosophy
5. The Semantic Web
6. Towards a standard top-level ontology
7. Ontology and the Federal Government Data Integration Initiative (anno 2009)
8. The meaning of life

[PHI 637 Special Topics: Logic of Ontology](#)

Dr. John Beverley

ONLINE

Class #: 24090

Humans are perplexing. Many engage effortlessly in discourse without violating conversational norms. Some accurately diagnose treatment options for medical conditions, based on minimal information. Some identify lemmas needed to prove theorems too complex for automated approaches. Humans are *perplexingly* good at solving complicated tasks. Artificial Intelligence communities have, for decades, worked to design computing systems able to solve complicated tasks as well as humans can. Siri, autonomous vehicles, Computer-Aided Diagnosing systems, and automated theorem provers, are examples of the fruits of such labor. For such feats of computing ingenuity to work properly, however, relevant knowledge must be represented in formalisms interpretable by computing systems.

One goal of this course is to provide students with a deep understanding of formalisms underwriting contemporary knowledge representation. We will examine several 'Description Logics' which reflect decidable fragments of First-Order Logic and provide formal foundations for widely used semantic web languages. Semantic web languages – such as the Resource Description Framework – in turn provide concrete vocabularies used to represent information across the web. Another goal of this course is to provide students with a deep understanding of these semantic web languages, emphasizing their importance to the development of ontologies – structured vocabularies comprised of human and computer interpretable terminological content representing entities in some domain. Students will gain competency in the application of semantic web languages to represent the philosophical commitments of one of the most important ontologies in the world: Basic Formal Ontology (BFO).

Ontology modeling of this sort is just a first step towards capturing the perplexity of human intelligence. Students will take a further step towards that goal in this course by exploring how exactly ontologies like BFO are used in the real world. To that end, students will learn to use the Protégé ontology editor to represent BFO hierarchies, automated reasoners native

to Protégé to check for logical consistency, the SPARQL semantic web querying language to extract important information from BFO-conformant data sets, and the SHACL semantic web language to validate dynamic updating of BFO-conformant ontologies. Throughout, students will learn to use Github – a common version control environment in the ontology developer toolkit, and in doing so gain insight into how knowledge represented using semantic web standards is revised and maintained across a wide range of stakeholders, users, and contributors.

Will, at the end of this course, students be able to capture the perplexing human ability to solve complex tasks? Probably not. Students will, however, be able to recognize how far contemporary Artificial Intelligence research has progressed towards that goal, viewed through the intersecting lenses of logic and ontology.

PHI 637 Special Topics: Ontologies of Solitude and Gerotranscendence

Dr. Regina Hurley
Monday, 1:00 PM – 3:40 PM
Class #: 23657

Research on solitude and gerotranscendence remains siloed, despite significant overlaps in their focus on older adults and related psychological outcomes. The ambiguity surrounding key constructs within each field complicates efforts for meaningful integration. In this seminar, we will focus on clarifying and understanding the primary constructs pertinent to these areas, such as loneliness, solitude, and notions of psychological well-being. Students will actively engage in the development of the Solitude Ontology and the Gerotranscendence Ontology, both designed to extend from the upper-level Behavior Change Intervention Ontology.

PHI 637 Special Topics: Ontology of Economics

Dr. Barry Smith
ONLINE
Class #: 24085

The goal of the course is to give the students conceptual tools to understand and evaluate critically the philosophical assumptions of different schools of thought in economics. Debates between different approaches in economics may be viewed in part as ontological debates as to the nature of social entities such as prices, markets, economic actors. Hence, the course aims at introducing the core categories that determine the world of economics and exploring how different interpretations of these categories can support different economic claims and systems.

Part One of the course introduces topics in social ontology with an eye on economic applications: agency, complexity, information, collectivity, speech acts, claims and obligations. Part Two analyzes themes underlying the works of the main contemporary economic schools of thought, including classical and neoclassical economics. Keynesian economics, institutional economics, Austrian economics, complexity economics, and Marxist economics. Austrian economics will be given special prominence because it is arguably the economic school of thought that makes the most open use of philosophical categories in its

theories. Part Three will introduce AI technology as a bearer of new possibilities and a new understanding of the working of economic processes and of society as a whole.

Individual Tutorial Course Sections

See [HUB Registration site](#) for Individual Tutorial Course Sections with Philosophy Department Faculty, to be arranged with permission of instructor:

PHI 599 Graduate Tutorial

PHI 605 Supervised Teaching

PHI 701 MA Thesis Guidance Tutorials (Arranged with Professor)

PHI 703 Dissertation Guidance Tutorials (Arranged with Professor)