Fall 2021 Course Offerings - PHILOSOPHY

Department of Philosophy and Religion

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**PHIL 101 (and 101-Honors). Introduction to Philosophy**

An introduction to the basic problems and concepts of philosophy–––the nature of humankind and the self, ethics, theories of knowledge, philosophy of religion, etc., as revealed in the writings of the major philosophers. May be used for general education credit.

**PHIL 120. Critical Thinking**
An introduction to the techniques for analyzing and evaluating information in everyday experience. The functions of language will be discussed. Techniques for judging the strengths of arguments and the reasonableness of the arguments' premises will be examined. This course cannot be used to fulfill the B.A. Philosophy requirement.

**PHIL 150. Ethical Reasoning**
An introduction to the principles and techniques of rational decision making in ethics, including analysis of arguments and fallacies, ethical theories, and applications of moral principles to moral issues. This course cannot be used to fulfill the B.A. Philosophy requirement.

**PHIL 218. Philosophy of Religion**

Permission to register will be granted to any student who asks! (1) With deep respect for each person in the class and for both Western and Eastern Religions, the course examines the concepts of God and humanity in their reciprocity. (2) The course considers the strengths and weaknesses of the problem of religious belief in the face of deep human suffering and also considers the strengths and weaknesses of Freud's, Kierkegaard's, and Kant's concepts of morality and God since people often connect religious belief and moral values. (3) The course considers the strengths and weaknesses of the classical arguments of Thomas Aquinas (along with David Hume's challenges) from causality, from the contingency of being, and from order and purpose in the universe. (4) The course considers Mysticism and an Existentialist approach to God as well as the Pragmatist argument from John Dewey for belief in God as a symbol of the better angels of our nature in contrast with the Pragmatist argument from William James for belief in God as a real being.

**PHIL 250. Introduction to Symbolic Logic**

This is an introductory class in symbolic logic. Symbolic logic is the science of argumentation using formal languages. We will start with propositional logic, then go on to predicate logic. We will learn how to translate between English and logical languages, how to use truth tables to test for logical properties, how to construct derivations of valid arguments, and how to establish the invalidity of invalid arguments.

**PHIL 285. Philosophy, Art, and Literature**

This course will study artistic works (literary or otherwise) for their philosophical content. Related issues in the philosophy of art for example, the nature of tragedy, theories of interpretation may also be considered.

**PHIL 300. Knowledge and Belief**

An extensive examination of theories of knowledge and philosophical problems concerning knowledge and belief. *Prerequisite:* [PHIL 101](https://catalog.jmu.edu/content.php?filter%5B27%5D=PHIL&filter%5B29%5D=&filter%5Bcourse_type%5D=-1&filter%5Bkeyword%5D=&filter%5B32%5D=1&filter%5Bcpage%5D=1&cur_cat_oid=41&expand=&navoid=1548&search_database=Filter#tt2378)*or permission of the instructor.*

**PHIL 315. Logic and Legal Reasoning**
Application of symbolic logic (first-order logic with identity) to legal language and deductive legal argument. Will include close logical analysis of at least one of the following: Supreme Court brief, Supreme Court decision, Supreme Court oral argument. *Prerequisite: PHIL 250* or permission of instructor.

**PHIL 330. Moral Theory**

Moral theory is a branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of rightness, wrongness and living well.  This course is an advanced study of classical and contemporary work in meta-ethics and normative ethical theory, with some attention to the implementation of moral theories in practice.  We begin with three fundamental questions of moral theorizing, “Is morality relative?” “Do (or should) human beings act only from self-interest?” and “Does morality depend upon religion?”  Subsequently, we examine several influential moral theories, concentrating on virtue ethics, utilitarianism and deontological ethics.  Throughout the course, we will examine such questions as “What is the nature of right and wrong?” “Why be moral?” “What are the components of human flourishing?”  “Who or what is morally considerable?” and “Are moral judgments gendered?”  Students will read influential philosophical writings about morality, write philosophical essays, participate in a group presentation on a philosophical treatise, and take midterm and final exams.  Throughout the semester, students should also participate actively in class discussions, sharing comments and questions about the readings and about morality.

**PHIL 340. Ancient Greek Philosophy**

This is a general introduction to ancient Greek philosophy covering what is clearly among the most influential periods in the history of Western philosophical thought. Yet, the surviving materials from Thales, Protagoras, Plato and Aristotle – among other Greek philosophers – are not just curious antiques. Even though these thinkers lived and wrote some 2,400 years ago, grappling with the philosophical curiosity and effort that endures in their writings is mind-sharpening and mind-expanding: Plato’s gripping and inspiring rendering of Socrates’ commitment to philosophical questioning during his trial and until his death in the *Apology* and the *Phaedo*, Gorgias’ sparkling irony and spoof of abstract metaphysics in his *On The Nonexistent*, or Heraclitus’ moody aphorisms are very much unlike archeological finds like a Spartan shield or Athenian vase from the same time period which we find sitting protected behind glass in museums, only to be gazed at. Ancient Greek philosophers grapple with philosophical questions not dissimilar to ours, probing metaphysics and ethics, epistemology and logic, asking questions like how many kinds of things exist and what are things ultimately made out of? What is real, what is reality, and is change real? Are we capable of acquiring knowledge in a strict sense about the changing natural world, about ultimate principles of reality or the divine, or does our cognitive labor only ever yield subjective opinions? If not, what are proper objects of knowledge? Besides nature, can we have moral knowledge, an objective understanding of the Good, Justice, or Beauty? Can we know what the best kind of life for a human being is? Their answers allow for and demand the hands-on work of philosophical questioning and talk-back.

In this course, you are invited to retrace the emergence and growing sophistication of philosophical thought over a time period of roughly three hundred years. We will work together by way of class discussion and close reading, lecture and shorter writing assignments on different kinds of materials from the pre-Socratic philosophers and Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. While we will occasionally also touch on the historical and cultural context in which these materials were produced, we will concentrate on the philosophical content and the answers to the various sorts of metaphysical, epistemological, or ethical problems.

**PHIL 341. Modern Philosophy**

This course will engage with a range of fundamental philosophical problems, ideas, and arguments, through study of the work of seven of the most prominent philosophers in the modern Western tradition: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant. We will focus especially on issues in metaphysics (What is the ultimate nature of reality? — Can God’s existence be proved? — How are mind and matter related? — Do we have free will? — and so on) and epistemology (Can anything be known with certainty? — If so, what is it, and how do we know it? — Is all knowledge ultimately dependent on the senses? — and so forth). Works studied will include Descartes’ *Meditations*, Spinoza’s *Ethics*, Leibniz’s *Monadology*, Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Berkeley’s *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Hume’s *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, and Kant’s *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*.

**PHIL 343. Stoics, Skeptics and Epicureans**

This course will focus on philosophy from the Hellenistic and Roman periods (4th C. BCE through 5th C. CE), with a special emphasis on Epicureanism (Epicurus, Lucretius), Stoicism (Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius), and Skepticism (Cicero, Sextus Empiricus). *Prerequisite:* *One other PHIL course or permission of the instructor.*

**PHIL 390. Special Topic: History of Ethics**

This course covers the moral philosophy of Hume, Kant and Nietzsche. The focus will be on their account of moral judgment, moral motivation, freedom of the will and nature of our obligations to others. The account that each offers is very different from what the others offer. However, there are some important similarities as well. Kant was deeply inspired by Hume, but thought he had to be wrong. Nietzsche has the same attitude towards Kant. Students will be asked to decide which of three comes closest to the truth.

**PHIL 396. Philosophy of Physics**
This course examines the philosophical foundations of physics. Some of the philosophical issues explored in the course may include how various theories in physics impact metaphysics, ontology and/or epistemology. Topics may include the nature of space and time, special relativity, general relativity, quantum theory, classical mechanics, thermodynamics and/or cosmology. *Prerequisite: PHIL 101.*