

Fall 2017
Philosophy
Course Offerings

Undergraduate Courses

PHIL 100: Introduction to Philosophy
Professor Jeremy Proulx
TR 12:30-1:45 p.m.

This course is a historical introduction to some of the major themes and figures in Western philosophy. Through a reading of primary sources we will consider questions of the nature of truth, knowledge, reality, and the meaning of human existence. The objective of the course is to furnish all of you with the basic philosophical-historical contexts in which the discipline of philosophy has developed and thrived. We will explore the ways in which the concerns and issues that dominated a particular period in history gave momentum to the thought of some of history's most celebrated philosophical luminaries. Through the study of selections from Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Anselm, Aquinas, Descartes, Hume, Kant, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, James, and Sartre, we will explore questions like the following: How is the ancient conviction that philosophy should contribute to a better, happier life reflected both in the kinds of problems the ancient philosophers addressed, and in their approach to philosophical inquiry? How does Christianity change the nature of philosophical inquiry? What are the concerns, issues, and problems that propel the rapid development of philosophical ideas in the modern world? What gives rise to the nineteenth- and twentieth-century focus on history and the contingency of human life?

**PHIL 100 fulfills the General Education requirement for Knowledge of the
Disciplines in the Humanities.**

PHIL 100: Introduction to Philosophy
Professor Laura McMahon
TR 2-3:15 p.m.

“Philosophy” means “the love of wisdom,” and virtually any aspect of the world we live in—from the nature of reality, to the nature of knowledge, to the nature of morality and goodness, to the nature of beauty and art, to the nature of politics, to the nature of oppression and resistance—can be subject to philosophical investigation and critical scrutiny. The main theme that we will be exploring in this introductory course is the relationship between the human community and the human individual. The course will proceed in a generally historical fashion, tracing the manners in which Ancient, Modern, and Contemporary philosophers have thought about the course's central question: To what are individuals answerable?

In Part I, we will study major writings from the Ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle—as well as the contemporary moral and political leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., asking: in what ways are individuals who they are by virtue of the dominant norms and values of the communities in which they are raised? In what ways are individuals called upon to be critical of the dominant norms and values of the communities in which they were raised, and on what grounds? In Part II, we will turn to writings from the modern political thinker Niccolò Machiavelli and the modern moral philosopher Immanuel Kant in order to explore the nature and extent of individual rationality and morality. Is human reason reducible to the calculation of self-interest, and virtue reducible to power, as Machiavelli suggests? Or does the experience of moral answerability reveal to us that our freedom and rationality require us to follow a different law than the pursuit of our own happiness, as Kant argues? In Part III, we will turn to readings from contemporary philosophers John Russon and Simone de Beauvoir in order to explore the embodied, situated, and intersubjective nature of human experience and responsibility, asking: How do we require the aid of others to become capable and empowered as individuals to begin with? How do unequal social arrangements oppress or marginalize certain groups in society, and what form might resistance to such injustices take?

PHIL 100 fulfills the General Education requirement for Knowledge of the Disciplines in the Humanities.

PHIL 110: Philosophies of Life
Professor Jeremy Proulx
TR 11 a.m.-12:15 p.m.

In this course we will explore different philosophical accounts of life, meaning in life, and the value of life. What does it mean to be alive? Can a machine be alive? Is life inherently meaningful or is the constitution of meaning in life up to us? What is the value of life, for humans and more generally? Can the value of life be assessed? To address questions like this, we will read selections from Aristotle, Epictetus, Laozi, Nietzsche, Camus, and the Dalai Lama.

PHIL 110 fulfills the General Education requirement for Knowledge of the Disciplines in the Humanities.

PHIL 120: Introduction to Critical Reasoning
Professor Michael Doan
MW 2:00-3:15 p.m.
TR 2:00-3:15 p.m.

This is a course in critical reasoning, the methodology of philosophy. This course offers an introduction to the techniques of identifying and evaluating arguments. Our emphasis will be on the enhancement of reasoning skills through the study of arguments in their natural settings (e.g.

newspapers, political speeches, advertising). We will also explore such related topics as logical fallacies, inductive and moral reasoning, and the logic of explanation in the social sciences.

PHIL 120 fulfills the General Education requirement for Knowledge of the Disciplines in the Humanities, as well as the Logic and Reasoning requirement in the Philosophy Program.

PHIL 225: Philosophy & Society
Professor Laura McMahan
TR 11 a.m.-12:15 p.m.

In this course, we shall explore how our understanding of political structures is based on the ways in which we conceive of the human person, as well as on how our conceptions of what it is to be a person are formed by the political structures in which we live. To introduce the course, we shall explore the relationship between the individual and the *polis*—the city or state—in Plato’s *Apology*. We shall go on, first, to study historical and contemporary texts in political liberalism—a tradition based on the conception of human persons as rational, free, and equal individuals—from political philosophers such as John Locke and John Rawls. Second, we shall study works in the history of political conservatism—which emphasize the primacy of inherited traditions and social hierarchies over individual reason—from philosophers such as Edmund Burke. Third, we shall study ideas from the traditions of Marxist and Critical Theory—traditions that emphasize the manners in which, as members of groups, human persons are shaped by unequal and oppressive economic, social, and legal forces—from Karl Marx and contemporary feminists and philosophers of race. Throughout our studies of Liberalism, Conservatism, and Marxism, we shall critically inquire into the nature and roles of contemporary institutions in forming the experience and self-understanding of individuals. We shall conclude the course through a study of the nature of democracy and education—which at their best, perhaps, take up the most trenchant insights of each of Liberalism, Conservatism, and Marxism—through the work of philosopher John Dewey.

PHIL 225 fulfills the General Education requirement for Knowledge of the Disciplines in the Humanities, as well as the Values requirement in the Philosophy Program.

PHIL 226: Feminist Theory
Professor Peter Higgins
MW 12:30-1:45 p.m.
MW 2-3:15 p.m. (Honors section)

Feminist theory is an area of thought that seeks to expose, analyze and critically assess the justice of gender inequalities present in our society, in other societies, and globally. This course focuses on six sets of questions:

- What is feminism?
- What is gender? Is gender “natural”? Are norms of gender unjust?
- What is sexism? Why is sexism unjust?
- How is contemporary American society sexist, if at all? Are women oppressed? Are men oppressed?
- How should feminists reason about apparently sexist practices occurring outside of their own society?
- What are the ultimate goals of feminism? What would a gender-just society look like?

This is a foundational course for Philosophy majors and minors interested in social justice.

PHIL 226 fulfills the General Education requirements for Global Awareness and Knowledge of the Disciplines in the Humanities, as well as the Eastern/Global requirement in the Philosophy Program.

PHIL 229: Environmental Ethics
Professor J. Michael Scoville
TR 11:00 a.m.-12:15 p.m.
TR 3:30-4:45 p.m. (Honors section)

Environmental ethics focuses on the ethical aspects of the human relationship to nature, where “nature” is understood to include particular environments, various natural objects, and/or nonhuman beings. Questions to be discussed include: How does concern for nature relate to, and complicate, our obligations to present and future people? What counts as “natural” (e.g., when we speak of “the natural world”), and why is naturalness valuable? Which nonhuman beings or entities are morally considerable (all sentient beings? all living things? species? ecosystems? biotic communities? etc.)? What are the practical implications of acknowledging that nonhuman beings or entities are morally considerable? What are the most plausible conceptions of sustainability?

PHIL 229 fulfills the General Education requirement for Knowledge of the Disciplines in the Humanities, as well as the Values requirement in the Philosophy Program.
PHIL 229 also fulfills a core course requirement in the Environmental Science and Society Program.

PHIL 260: Existentialism
Professor Jeremy Proulx
TR 9:30-10:45 a.m.

This course is an introduction to some of the major figures in the wide-ranging school of thought referred to as Existentialism. Existentialist thinkers are a highly diverse group, with little to unify them. Thinkers who can be clearly classified as existentialists begin to appear in the middle of the

19th century, but existentialist themes have played a role in philosophy since the beginning, and it was not until the twentieth century that it occurred to anyone to apply the name ‘existentialism’ to her own thinking. Existentialism is thus less a name for a philosophical school than it is a very broad and diverse way of understanding the world and the human place within it. Existentialist thinkers are generally interested in the role of human ideas and actions in the constitution of the world as meaningful. More specifically, existentialist thinkers provide us with valuable conceptual tools for thinking about problems concerning the nature of moral responsibility, political organization, art, faith, God, technology, human learning and development, and psychology. Students interested in just about any aspect of human life and activity will find something of interest in this course. The course is structured in such a way to provide students with the freedom to pursue their own interests in the context of the course material. Assignments consist largely in essays, but we will also analyze films using the existentialist conceptual tools we learn in the course.

PHIL 260 fulfills the General Education requirement for Knowledge of the Disciplines in the Humanities, as well as the Values requirement in the Philosophy Program.

PHIL 281: Symbolic Logic
Professor Jill Dieterle
TR 11:00 a.m.-12:15 p.m.

In PHIL 281, we’ll take a more rigorous and more philosophical approach to logic than one does in Introduction to Logic. We’ll take an in-depth look at what logic is and for what it can be used. The catalog description says: “An introduction to the notation and proof procedures of symbolic logic with emphasis on the clarification and development of the notion of a formal language.” That’s about right, but this course shouldn’t be as boring as the description makes it sound.

Some highlights of the course: Standard First-Order logic makes a number of assumptions. For example, it is assumed that every declarative sentence has a determinate truth value and that logical operators work much like English connectives. We’ll question those assumptions. Standard First-Order logic also has some rather counterintuitive results. For example, it turns out to be logically true that there is at least one thing in the world. Of course, no one will deny that there is at least one thing in the world, but (speaking philosophically), should that be a *logical* truth? We’ll look at logical systems that don’t have that result. Over the course of the semester, we’ll also spend some time talking about expressive completeness, the differences between semantic consequence and deductive consequence, decision procedures, and lots of other fun and interesting topics!!

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If you plan to do graduate work in philosophy, I strongly recommend that you take this class.

PHIL 281 fulfills the Logic and Reasoning requirement in the Philosophy Program.

PHIL 291: Introduction to Asian Philosophy
Professor Brian Bruya
MW 3:30-4:45 p.m.

Philosophy 291 is an introduction to major aspects of South and East Asian philosophical traditions. The course is divided evenly into four units. The first unit explores the major texts of philosophical Daoism. The core concepts of Daoism, such as spontaneity, responsiveness, reversion, and simplicity, pervade Chinese philosophy and culture (from ethics to art to medicine) and are explored in depth through the writings of Laozi and Zhuangzi.

The second unit is an introduction to Buddhism. We begin with the core texts of the early Indian tradition, such as *Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth* and *The Foundations of Mindfulness*. Through these texts, we learn the key concepts and methods of the tradition, such as emptiness, meditation, dependent origination, and nirvana. From the early Indian tradition we move on to the Chinese and Japanese Chan/Zen tradition, exploring its developments not only from the Indian tradition but also out of its Daoist precursor.

In the third unit, we focus on two core texts of the Indian tradition, the *Yoga Sutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Here we learn the key metaphysical and ethical ideas of the vast Indian tradition, from non-violence and Truth to fate and self-realization.

The fourth unit grows out of the third by exploring the contemporary global issue of non-violent revolution through the life, work, and philosophy of Mohandas Gandhi. Gandhi's philosophy is a direct descendant of his Hindu precursors but with important pragmatic adjustments. We explore these and their implications for social justice movements throughout the world.

Texts in this course include a broad range of genres, such as early religious tracts, dialogue, colorful episodes, analytic arguments, and cutting edge interpretation. Because of the vastness of the subject matter, course material will be considered a base from which students go on to explore more refined topics in projects of their own interest.

PHIL 291 fulfills the General Education requirement for Global Awareness, as well as the Eastern/Global requirement in the Philosophy Program.

PHIL 332: Nineteenth-Century Philosophy
Professor Laura McMahan
MW 11 a.m.-12:15 p.m.

Emerging from the framework of the "Enlightenment" in modern philosophy, science, and politics, the Nineteenth Century saw exhilarating developments in all fields of European philosophy. This course will focus on the development of Social and Political Philosophy in Nineteenth-Century Europe through in depth studies of works from Immanuel Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, and Karl Marx. We will ask questions such as:

- In what ways are our identities inseparable from our relationships with others?
- What interpersonal and political structures enable modern individual experience to take the forms that it does?
- How do historical, social, economic, and political institutions structure our understandings of what it is to be a self?
- In what ways are we typically unaware of the structures and relationships that inform our experience? As so unaware, in what ways do we live in manners that contradict the conditions of our own experience?
- How do the comforts of certain forms of modern living rely on typically unacknowledged forms of economic exploitation?

While this is a class in the History of Philosophy, we shall see that the philosophers we study offer profound insights that are of ongoing relevance for our understandings of the nature of self, interpersonal relationships, society, and political institutions.

PHIL 332W fulfills the History of Philosophy requirement in the Philosophy Program and the Writing Intensive course requirement in the General Education Program.

PHIL 420W: Ethical Theory
Professor J. Michael Scoville
TR 2-3:15 p.m.

One useful role philosophy can play is to help us think clearly about categories of value and ethical experience whose import and structure are unclear or contested, even if familiar. In this course, we will explore various issues relating to value and ethical experience by engaging work in ethical theory and value theory. Topics to be discussed will likely include:

- The meaning and structure of virtues and vices, and their significance for ethical life.
- The respects in which being virtuous is a complex achievement that requires habits of self-transformation and self-formation.
- The respects in which being virtuous is constituted, and sometimes inhibited, by social practices and others.
- The nature and importance of various moral emotions or attitudes—notably, shame, humility, guilt, regret, anger, and ambivalence—with attention both to their inward-looking aspects and their socially constituted structure.
- The relative priority of, and possibility of integrating into a coherent view, impersonal or agent-neutral moral reasons (i.e., reasons any agent has in virtue of being a moral agent) and personal moral reasons (i.e., reasons grounded in various forms of partiality, attachment, or affiliation).
- The existence of plural, possibly incommensurable, values and the implications for ethical theorizing and decision.

- The distinction of morality as a type of concern compared to other types of concern, such as concern for one's happiness or for living a meaningful or significant life.

The class will explore both essay and book-length arguments that aim to deepen and complicate our understanding of these topics.

PHIL 420W fulfills the Values requirement in the Philosophy Program and the Writing Intensive course requirement in the General Education Program.

PHIL 424W: Food Justice
Professor Jill Dieterle
TR 12:30-1:45 p.m.

The phrase “food justice” is often invoked to highlight a range of ethical issues concerning food, including but not limited to: food production and the rights of agricultural laborers, inequities in food distribution within nations and between them, increased obesity rates among the poor and lack of access to healthy nutritious foods as the primary cause of such increases, the corporatization of the food system, the unsustainable nature of our current methods of food production, and the lack of democratic control over how food is grown, harvested, and distributed. As such, “food justice” has emerged as an important organizing concept for those interested in the complex forms of inequality and injustice that permeate and sustain food systems across the globe.

Food injustices tend to track other injustices. Traditionally oppressed groups, such as communities of color and those living in poverty, are disproportionately affected by food insecurity. Structural racial inequalities are prominent in every facet of contemporary food systems, from employment, to land ownership, to food access. Food insecurity is more common in households affected by disability, and it also tends to be more severe. Further, there are issues of power and control for those who require assistance or accommodation in eating.

In PHIL 424W/524 Food Justice, we will explore and analyze inequities such as those discussed above.

PHIL 424W fulfills the Values requirement in the Philosophy Program and the Writing Intensive course requirement in the General Education Program.

PHIL 427: Social Epistemology
Professor Michael Doan
MW 12:30-1:45 p.m.

This course examines the social dimensions of knowledge production. Our focus will be on the dynamics of testimony, trust and trustworthiness within and among diverse communities of

knowers; on the social production of ignorance and inaction; and on the relational dimensions of cognitive activities, such as perceiving, remembering and judging.

**PHIL 427 fulfills the Epistemology and Metaphysics requirement
in the Philosophy Program.**

PHIL 479: Topics in Chinese Philosophy: Daoism
Professor Brian Bruya
R 3:30-6:10 p.m.

Daoism is known as one of the three main streams of the long and complex Chinese philosophical tradition. In this course, we will focus on the two core texts of Daoism, the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. There will be two main emphases in the course. The first will be to understand the core ideas of Daoism and how they were a challenge to mainstream philosophical ideas of early China. The second emphasis will be to bring some of these ideas into the present and understand how they can enrich the philosophical projects of today. Demystifying terminology and making sense of vague, indirect language by understanding ideas in their textual and intellectual historical context will constitute our main underlying methodology.

Philosophical topics in Daoism are especially intriguing for crossing over traditional philosophical boundaries of metaphysics, epistemology, logic, ethics, and aesthetics. In this way, they challenge us to rethink our own philosophical categories and approaches to issues in philosophy.

Prior exposure to Chinese philosophy is not required.

**Please see the full Philosophy course schedule on my.emich
for additional undergraduate course offerings.**

Graduate Courses

PHIL 520: Ethical Theory
Professor J. Michael Scoville
TR 2-3:15 p.m.

One useful role philosophy can play is to help us think clearly about categories of value and ethical experience whose import and structure are unclear or contested, even if familiar. In this course, we will explore various issues relating to value and ethical experience by engaging work in ethical theory and value theory. Topics to be discussed will likely include:

- The meaning and structure of virtues and vices, and their significance for ethical life.

- The respects in which being virtuous is a complex achievement that requires habits of self-transformation and self-formation.
- The respects in which being virtuous is constituted, and sometimes inhibited, by social practices and others.
- The nature and importance of various moral emotions or attitudes—notably, shame, humility, guilt, regret, anger, and ambivalence—with attention both to their inward-looking aspects and their socially constituted structure.
- The relative priority of, and possibility of integrating into a coherent view, impersonal or agent-neutral moral reasons (i.e., reasons any agent has in virtue of being a moral agent) and personal moral reasons (i.e., reasons grounded in various forms of partiality, attachment, or affiliation).
- The existence of plural, possibly incommensurable, values and the implications for ethical theorizing and decision.
- The distinction of morality as a type of concern compared to other types of concern, such as concern for one’s happiness or for living a meaningful or significant life.

The class will explore both essay and book-length arguments that aim to deepen and complicate our understanding of these topics.

PHIL 524: Food Justice
Professor Jill Dieterle
TR 12:30-1:45 p.m.

The phrase “food justice” is often invoked to highlight a range of ethical issues concerning food, including but not limited to: food production and the rights of agricultural laborers, inequities in food distribution within nations and between them, increased obesity rates among the poor and lack of access to healthy nutritious foods as the primary cause of such increases, the corporatization of the food system, the unsustainable nature of our current methods of food production, and the lack of democratic control over how food is grown, harvested, and distributed. As such “food justice” has emerged as an important organizing concept for those interested in the complex forms of inequality and injustice that permeate and sustain food systems across the globe.

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In PHIL 424W/524 Food Justice, we will explore and analyze inequities such as those discussed above.

PHIL 527: Social Epistemology
Professor Michael Doan
MW 12:30-1:45 p.m.

This course examines the social dimensions of knowledge production. Our focus will be on the dynamics of testimony, trust and trustworthiness within and among diverse communities of knowers; on the social production of ignorance and inaction; and on the relational dimensions of cognitive activities, such as perceiving, remembering and judging.

PHIL 594: Topics in Chinese Philosophy: Daoism
Professor Brian Bruya
R 3:30-6:10 p.m.

Daoism is known as one of the three main streams of the long and complex Chinese philosophical tradition. In this course, we will focus on the two core texts of Daoism, the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*. There will be two main emphases in the course. The first will be to understand the core ideas of Daoism and how they were a challenge to mainstream philosophical ideas of early China. The second emphasis will be to bring some of these ideas into the present and understand how they can enrich the philosophical projects of today. Demystifying terminology and making sense of vague, indirect language by understanding ideas in their textual and intellectual historical context will constitute our main underlying methodology.

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Prior exposure to Chinese philosophy is not required.