

# Winter 2018 Philosophy Course Descriptions

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## Featured Undergraduate Courses

(For a full list of undergraduate course offerings, please see the Philosophy course schedule on my.emich.)

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**PHIL 100: Introduction to Philosophy**  
**Professor Brian Coffey**  
**TR 9:30-10:45 a.m.**  
**TR 12:30-1:45 p.m.**  
**TR 2:00-3:15 p.m.**

This course will introduce students to the study of Philosophy by exploring the tools and techniques of philosophical inquiry, and utilizing those tools to evaluate answers to the ‘big’ philosophical questions. Topics for discussion might include: What do we know, and how do we know it? Do we have free will? Does God exist? What is the relation of our minds and bodies? How ought we to live? What if anything, is ‘the meaning of life’? Our discussion of these issues will be inspired and informed by both classical and contemporary writings that we will read carefully and critically. We will not be passively learning about philosophy—we will be *doing philosophy*.

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

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**PHIL 212: Philosophy of Art**  
**Professor Jeremy Proulx**  
**TR 12:30-1:45 p.m.**

This course is an introduction both to the philosophical consideration of art and art works and to the philosophical discipline of aesthetics. While we will spend a good deal of time looking at and discussing works of art, this is a course neither in art criticism, nor art appreciation, nor the history of art. We will consider questions like the following. What makes something art? Can a machine be art? How about a great meal? What about a tranquil winter day? Can nature be considered art? Can art be considered a part of nature? Can art be ugly? Does art have to be beautiful? Do the intentions of the artist matter? What is the role of the artist? What constitutes aesthetic creativity? Does the viewer have a role to play in art? Are there collective art works? Do artists have moral responsibilities? Can we even evaluate art in moral terms? Can what we know about an artist or

about the artwork affect our judgment of the work itself? Is there any such thing as a ‘work of art, in itself? Does art have to be expressive of an idea or of anything at all? Is aesthetic experience a special kind of experience? Can we appreciate art rationally?

**PHIL 212 fulfills the General Education requirement for Knowledge of the Disciplines in the Humanities, as well as the Values requirement in the Philosophy Program.**

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**PHIL 216: Philosophy, Technology, and Digital Life**  
**Professor Jeremy Proulx**  
**TR 9:30-10:45 a.m.**

Human life is so embedded in technical culture that it’s hard to imagine life without the constant interface with technology. Think about what you’ve done today. Can you think of a single thing that did not involve interaction with the products of human artifice? If you’ve never thought about this before, it can be a surprising revelation that everything we do is mediated by some form of technological apparatus. And this is nothing new; it has always been this way—whether we’re using a microcomputer or a stone tool, the way we interact with our world has always been technological. So to raise the question ‘What is Technology?’ is to raise deep philosophical-anthropological questions about the nature of humankind itself.

Using concepts and methods from philosophy, this course covers issues in technology and technical culture. Readings include classics from the philosophic tradition (Plato, Aristotle, Xunzi, Bacon, Marx, Kierkegaard, Bergson, Heidegger, Anders, Gehlen, Foucault, and Habermas), as well as more recent work in the discipline of ‘philosophy of technology’ (Ellul, Ferré, Dusek, De Mul, Nye, Müller, Negroti, Dreyfus, Powers, Latour, and Allen, for example). Topics will be drawn from the following: the nature of tools and machines, the nature of technology and technological development, engineering design, the social and existential implications of human interaction with technology, human enhancement, robotics, social media, digital technology, and internet assurance. Students of engineering and technology will find much of interest in this course, but this course does not presuppose any knowledge of a particular discipline and the course will be structured in such a way as to allow students to find their own way through the material. Throughout, emphasis will be placed on using concepts from the philosophy of technology and examples from technical and digital culture to practice philosophical methods of writing and exercise analytical and critical skills.

**PHIL 216 fulfills the General Education requirement for Knowledge of the Disciplines in the Humanities, as well as the Values requirement in the Philosophy Program.**

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**PHIL 223: Medical Ethics**  
**Professor Brian Coffey**  
**(Two sections online)**

We trust doctors, nurses, medical scientists, and other healthcare providers to give us the best care possible when we are sick; in many cases we literally put our lives in their hands. Those working in healthcare thus need to be particularly aware and careful of the various ways they may treat their patients unethically. In this course, students will learn about the philosophical study of ethics, and how to use the tools and methods of philosophy to think critically about contentious moral issues. We will discuss various moral issues raised within the context of the practice of medicine, and rigorously evaluate the reasoning that people have given for the stances they have taken on these issues. Topics for discussion might include: abortion, euthanasia, cloning, stem cell research, genetic selection/eugenics, healthcare allocation when resources are scarce, research involving animal and/or human testing.

**PHIL 223 fulfills the General Education requirement for Knowledge of the Disciplines in the Humanities, as well as the Values requirement in the Philosophy Program.**

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**PHIL 223: Medical Ethics**  
**Professor Jeremy Proulx**  
**TR 8:00-9:30 a.m.**

Medicine has always had an ethical dimension. Ever since medical practitioners offered their services to people in need of their knowledge of healing and the human body, a basic moral code has governed these relationships. But in recent years advances in medical technology, the expense of distributing the benefits of these technologies to anyone who needs them, the relative scarcity of medical resources, and the increasingly difficult problems of public health in a globalized world have raised unprecedented issues in the administration of medicine and the moral governance of medical practice. We are still of course concerned with issues surrounding the physician-patient relationship, but a whole host of moral issues occupy professional medical ethicists today. Under what conditions, if any, can abortion be morally justified? What kinds of reproductive options should be available to women, couples, and families? What are the dangers involved in medical intervention in human genetics? Can euthanasia ever be a legitimate part of medical practice? What are the issues that surround research with human and animal subjects? What responsibilities do we have as members of a community in which our own medical choices affect others? In order to think through these difficult questions, we will study several approaches to moral theory and learn how to apply moral theory to practical issues in medicine. This class will of course appeal to students studying any aspect of medicine, but it will also appeal to students interested in social policy and ethics more generally. The class will focus largely on using the analytical tools of philosophical ethics to think through real-world case studies in medicine and health-care.

**PHIL 223 fulfills the General Education requirement for Knowledge of the Disciplines in the Humanities, as well as the Values requirement in the Philosophy Program.**

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**PHIL 224: Ethics and Food**  
**Professor Jill Dieterle**  
**TR 9:30-10:45 a.m.**



Issues related to food, its production and its distribution have garnered international attention in the last decade. This course is devoted to examining those issues from a philosophical/ethical perspective. We will discuss the industrialization of food production, the effect of agriculture on the environment, aquaculture, food safety, locavorism, food deserts, and the global distribution of food.

Every food choice we make has ethical implications. What should we eat? Why? What consequences do our food choices have for other humans, for animals, and for the environment?

**PHIL 224 fulfills the General Education requirement for Knowledge of the Disciplines in the Humanities, as well as the Values requirement in the Philosophy Program.**

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**PHIL 225: Philosophy & Society**  
**Professor Michael Doan**  
**MW 2-3:15 p.m.**

This course engages in critical analysis of our society's underlying values, norms, and institutions. Major works of social and political philosophy will be considered with a view to understanding and working to overcome various forms of exploitation and oppression.

**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.**

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**PHIL 229: Environmental Ethics**  
**Professor J. Michael Scoville**  
**TR 2-3:15 p.m.**

Environmental ethics focuses on the ethical aspects of the human relationship to nature. I assume any plausible environmental ethics needs to have an answer to at least two basic questions: What nature matters, and why? I assume, further, that “nature” is a contested concept, one that has multiple, often competing, meanings. Similarly, answers to the “why” question are multiple and contested. One of our basic tasks is to get clear on such complexities in order to make progress on articulating an environmental ethic that holds up to philosophical scrutiny.

In order to complete this task, we will consider a number of more specific questions.

- How does concern for nature relate to, and complicate, our obligations to present and future people? And *why* are we obligated with regard to each other—what is the basis of our obligations?
- Are nonhuman beings, objects, or processes valuable or morally considerable in their own right, that is, independently of their relation to human well-being or of obligations we have to each other? If so, *which* beings, objects, etc., matter? For example: All sentient beings? All living things? Species? Ecosystems? Biotic communities? *Natural* entities?
- In terms of how we should live, what are the practical implications of acknowledging that certain nonhuman beings, objects, etc., are or might be valuable or morally considerable?
- What does sustainability mean, and what are the most plausible conceptions of it?

In addition to exploring these questions, and various answers to them, we’ll study a number of normative ethical views, that is, views concerning what is good and bad, right and wrong, and why.

**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 (ENVI) Program.**

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**PHIL 260: Existentialism**  
**Professor Laura McMahan**  
**MW 12:30-1:45 p.m.**

“Existentialism” names a movement in 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-Century European philosophy that explores the fundamentally creative role that human beings have in shaping the terms in which their lives, on an individual and a cultural level, will be meaningful. In this course, we will study selections of writings from some major figures in this tradition, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Martin Heidegger, and Frantz Fanon, alongside works in literature and/or film that illuminate some of the forms that human experience takes and the unique demands that these forms of experience

make upon us as individuals and communities. We will explore such fundamental philosophical questions as:

- What are the unique parameters of human experience as it is lived?
- What are the unique demands of shaping our own identities?
- What is the nature of being embodied and situated in the world?
- What is the nature, and what are the demands, of human freedom?
- What is the nature of authentic and inauthentic existence?
- What is the nature of the experience of anxiety about the meaning of our lives?
- What are the fundamental roles played by others in our experience?
- What is the fundamental role played by creative expression in our experience?
- How are forms of oppression fundamental denials of the nature of human experience, meaning, and freedom?

**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.**

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**PHIL 292: Philosophy of Buddhism**  
**Professor Brian Bruya**  
**MW 3:30-4:45 p.m.**

Buddhism is one of the fastest growing ideologies in the West today, and yet many misconceptions remain. What is suffering? What does it mean to not have a self? What is the point of meditation? These are some of the foundational questions of Buddhism addressed in the earliest texts of the Indian tradition. Since then, philosophers in India, Tibet, China, Japan, and now in the West have debated the answers and their relevance to life and society. We will explore some of those answers, including how Buddhism is relevant to issues of social justice today.

**PHIL 292 fulfills the General Education requirement for Knowledge of the Disciplines in the Humanities, the Eastern/Global requirement in the Philosophy Program, the Restricted Elective requirement in the Religious Studies Program, and the Restricted Elective Requirement in the Asian Studies Program.**

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**PHIL 326W: Philosophy and Sexuality**  
**Professor Peter Higgins**  
**MW 2-3:15 p.m.**

This course brings philosophical methods to bear on ethical, ontological, and political questions related to sexuality (in the sense of sexual identity and preference). Questions to be considered in this course include:

- What are the arguments for the alleged moral wrongness of homosexuality? Are these arguments sound? Are there reasons for questioning the morality of heterosexuality?
- Should (same-sex) marriage be legal?
- Are there circumstances in which “outing” is morally justified?
- What is “heterosexism”? How is this different from homophobia?
- Is there a single social group the initials LGBT(etc.) identify? Who should (not) be included?
- What does “queer” mean? Who is “queer”?
- How is the oppression of sexual minorities related to gender oppression? How is feminism useful (or not) for the liberation of sexual minorities?

**PHIL 326W fulfills the Values requirement in the Philosophy Program and the Writing Intensive course requirement in the General Education Program.**

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**PHIL 330W: History of Philosophy: Ancient**  
**Professor J. Michael Scoville**  
**TR 11 a.m.-12:15 p.m.**

This course will focus on various works from Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. We will study a variety of philosophical topics and issues—epistemological, metaphysical, and ethical in nature—raised by these works. A central focus of the course will be exploring the idea of philosophy as “a way of life”—that is, philosophy understood as a set of practices and norms aimed at helping us to live intentional and examined lives. Toward this end, we will consider a number of contemporary writings that engage ancient philosophical views on such topics as love, virtue, friendship, self-improvement, and the elements of a good life.

**PHIL 330W fulfills the History of Philosophy requirement in the Philosophy Program and the Writing Intensive course requirement in the General Education Program.**

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**PHIL 375W: Metaphysics**  
**Professor Jill Dieterle**  
**TR 12:30-1:45 p.m.**

“A curious thing about the ontological problem is its simplicity. It can be put into three Anglo-Saxon monosyllables: ‘What is there?’ It can be answered, moreover, in a word—‘Everything’—and everyone will accept this answer as true.”

—Willard Van Orman Quine

Quine is, of course, right, but the devil is in the details. If one were to make a list of everything, what would such a list include? What kinds of things exist? And what are those things like? Further, what accounts for change over time? How can something be the *same* thing after it has undergone change?

Metaphysics is the study of questions concerning the basic structure and ultimate nature of reality. In PHIL 375W, we'll examine these questions and evaluate proposed answers to them.

Note: PHIL 375W is a course in *philosophical metaphysics*. We will not be discussing “popular” metaphysics (crystals, spirituality, etc.).

**PHIL 375W fulfills the Epistemology and Metaphysics requirement in the Philosophy Program, as well as the Writing Intensive course requirement in the General Education Program.**

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**PHIL 442W: Philosophy of Mind**  
**Professor Brian Bruya**  
**R 3:30-6:10 p.m.**

In this course, we will explore some of the perennial questions regarding the mind. For instance, how can brains cause minds and minds have causative effects on our bodies? What do our modes of perception tell us about the world and about our own minds? What is the will and how free is it? What is a human self? What does it mean to be an intentional being? What is the unconscious? What do different states of consciousness tell us about the mind?

As part of this inquiry, we will explore advanced work in understanding what brain injury tells us about the mind, how artificial intelligence informs our understanding of the mind, and how embodiment is involved in different aspects of mentality.

**PHIL 442 fulfills the Epistemology and Metaphysics requirement in the Philosophy Program, as well as the Writing Intensive course requirement in the General Education Program.**

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**PHIL 495W: Phenomenology**  
**Professor Laura McMahon**  
**MW 3:30-4:45 p.m.**

“Phenomenology” names a movement in twentieth-century European Philosophy inaugurated by Edmund Husserl and carried on by Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and a large number of contemporary thinkers. It also names a philosophical methodology: the rigorous description of experience as it is actually lived. In this course, we will approach the study of Phenomenology through a focus on the themes of *embodiment*, *art*, and *politics*. We will focus predominantly on writings by Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger, as well as by contemporary philosophers working in the phenomenological tradition. We will ask questions such as:

- How does our relationship to the world always take an embodied, situated, and perspectival form?

- How is embodied existence characterized by and expressive of individual and cultural habits?
- In what ways do our creative expressions and thinking emerge from our embodied, habitual existence?
- In what ways do artistic expressions reveal the world to us in creative ways, and in what ways might they transform our relationship to our situations, at the individual and the cultural levels?
- In what ways can social and political institutions be organized in ways that *deny* our fundamentally embodied and expressive character?
- As embodied, situated, and perspectival beings, what is the experience of encountering other habitual ways of perceiving and behaving, and what are the ethical and political demands that emerge from this experience?

**PHIL 495W fulfills the Epistemology and Metaphysics requirement in the Philosophy Program, as well as the Writing Intensive course requirement in the General Education Program.**