Philosophy

The major and minor in philosophy are administered by the Department of Philosophy: Professors Harold, Pasquerella, Wartenberg; Associate Professor Mitchell; Assistant Professor Vavova (on leave Spring 2016); Visiting Lecturers Koo, Yelle.

Overview

We take many things for granted—that things exist besides ourselves; that some art is good, some art is bad, and some "art" is not really art at all; that other people feel pain, have emotions, dreams, and desires; that there are right ways to behave, and wrong ways too. However, even casual reflection reveals that these assumptions are just that—things we take for granted without much thought. In order to illuminate our lives and appreciate our existence, we ought to investigate these assumptions; as Socrates says, the unexamined life is not worth living.

Philosophy is a discipline that encourages the examination of life in its myriad dimensions. Our fundamental assumptions about right and wrong, beauty, truth, the mind, language, and meaning are exposed to careful scrutiny in philosophy classes. We encourage you, as a student of philosophy, not only to strive to understand what philosophers have written, but also to be a philosopher yourself—thinking with depth and clarity about issues that are fundamental to our condition as human beings. Whether you take a course on philosophy of film, ethics, feminist philosophy, logic, or philosophy of science, philosophy will leave you seeing the world anew.

A major in philosophy will provide you with a broad understanding of the background of both historical and contemporary philosophical thought, with the tools for critical reasoning necessary for philosophical inquiry, with a good understanding of some important philosophical themes, and with the enthusiasm for inquiry necessary for the productive pursuit of your own philosophical speculations. The critical approach you will learn will be valuable for whatever you choose to do after graduation.

Beginning the Study of Philosophy

Students who are completely new to philosophy can take Philosophy 101 or 103, which offer a broad introductions to the subject. If you've done some philosophy and enjoyed it though, we encourage you to take a 200-level course with a number lower than 220, such as 201 (The Greek Period), 202 (Descartes to Kant), 205 (Ethics), 209 (Probability and Causation), or 210 (Logical Thought). Courses at this level require no previous knowledge, but offer more useful background for other philosophy courses, and can be used to satisfy a possible minor.

We also offer courses without prerequisites that are designed to supplement other topics and serve broader interests. These courses include Medical Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy, Women and Philosophy, and Philosophical Issues in Race and Racism. Philosophy 225, Symbolic Logic is of interest to mathematicians and computer scientists, as well as being very useful to philosophy majors.

More advanced courses draw upon the writing skills and content of these courses. We offer, on a regular basis, topics in the systematic study of one philosopher, advanced logic, meta and normative ethics, and the philosophy of art. We also offer a course on philosophy for children, in which students introduce and teach philosophical topics to schoolchildren.

Contact Info

James Harold, chair
Sue Rusiecki, senior administrative assistant

Requirements for the Major

Credits

- A minimum of 36 credits (nine courses) in philosophy
- At least 12 credits at the 300 level

Courses

Specific courses in the following areas of philosophy are required:

- Two courses in the History of Philosophy, such as:
  - Philosophy 201, Philosophical Foundations of Western Thought: The Greek Period
  - 202, Philosophical Foundations of Western Thought: The Modern Period
  - 255, Existentialism

- One course in Ethics and Value Theory, such as:
  - 205, Ethics
  - 238 Ethics of Career Choice
  - 242, Social and Political Philosophy
  - 248, Philosophical Issues in Race and Racism
  - 249, Women and Philosophy
  - 260ME, Topics in Applied Philosophy: ‘Medical Ethics’
  - 273, Philosophy of the Arts
  - 275, Philosophy and Film Theory

- One course in Theoretical Philosophy, such as:
  - 209, Probability and Causation
  - 264, Philosophy of Mind

- One course in Theoretical Philosophy, such as:
  - 210, Logical Thought
  - 225, Symbolic Logic

Majors will be asked to fill out a form that specifies which courses they will use to satisfy these requirements. In rare cases, the department may allow appropriate courses from other departments to satisfy requirements for a student’s major.

Requirements for the Minor

Like the major, the minor is intended to provide an understanding of some of the structure and content of current philosophical thinking, with upper-level work in some area of special interest and with enough philosophical breadth to imbue a generous mixture of knowledge and enthusiasm.

Credits

- A minimum of 16 credits above the 100 level and
- At least 4 credits at the 300 level

Course Offerings

PHIL-101 Introduction to Philosophy

Fall

This course will explore topics that philosophers have grappled with for thousands of years, and that still undergird (or sometimes threaten to undermine) our understanding of the world, our knowledge, ourselves, and each other. In historical and modern texts of the Western intellectual tradition, we will discuss questions such as: Are we all selfish? What makes right actions right, if anything? Do you know anything at all about the future? Are you really free if
your actions are caused? This class is for first and second year students who know nothing about philosophy, and want to know whether they will be interested in it. Students with some exposure to, and interest in, the field should take other classes.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
S. Mitchell
Credits: 4

PHIL-103 Comparative Introduction to Philosophy
Spring
What kind of life should a person live? What can we know about the world? Do we have souls that are separate from our bodies? The aim of the course is to learn something about the ways that thinkers throughout the globe have discussed important philosophical questions. We read some European philosophers (such as Plato, Descartes, and Kant) alongside philosophers from other traditions, such as the Chinese and Indian traditions (e.g., Zhuangzi and Santideva), and we also read some contemporary writers from other cultural traditions (such as James Baldwin and Gloria Anzaldúa). This course is equivalent to Philosophy 101.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities; Multicultural Perspectives
J. Harold
Credits: 4

PHIL-201 Philosophical Foundations of Western Thought: The Greek Period
Fall
An introduction to ancient Greek philosophy, focusing mainly but not exclusively on the works and ideas of three Athenian philosophers who worked and taught in the period between the Persian Wars and the rule of Alexander the Great, more than 2,300 years ago: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Topics to be discussed include: What is the nature of the self? What is reality, and how can it be known? What kind of life should we live? We will work to understand each philosopher’s responses to these questions, but we will also learn to develop our own answers. We will take care to place these figures and their works in their historical and cultural context.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
J. Harold
Credits: 4

PHIL-202 Philosophical Foundations of Western Thought: The Modern Period
Spring
Investigates the development of Western philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the writings of Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Hume, and Kant. Focus on the apparent conflict between modern natural science and traditional religion as sources of knowledge and belief. Topics include the nature and extent of human knowledge, the nature of the mind, the existence of God, and the possibility of human freedom.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
J. Koo
Credits: 4

PHIL-205 Ethics
Fall
This course will focus on classic and contemporary work on central topics in ethics. The goal will be to see whether there is anything to be said in a principled way about what to do and how to live. The core of the course will be an examination of the central traditions in moral philosophy in the West, typified by Aristotle, Kant, and Mill. We will also examine vexing contemporary moral issues with an eye to whether moral theories can give us practical guidance. Finally, we will step back and ask whether any of the moral theorizing we have been engaging in is really capable of uncovering objective moral truths.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
E. Vavova

PHIL-209 Theories of Probability and Causation
Spring
In this course we will look at theories of causation, probability, and their interaction. We will look first at Hume on causation, and then move on to some very basic probability theory. We will briefly explore the standard statistical approaches and go on to Bayesian reasoning and confirmation theory. Finally, we’ll examine recent developments in the Bayesian Net theory of causation. As a whole, the class is an investigation of recent mathematical and philosophical theories about how science works, what justifies the hypotheses we ought to believe, and how observations could justify hypotheses about unobserved entities and regions.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
S. Mitchell
Prereq: One course in Philosophy or Mathematics.

PHIL-210 Logical Thought
Fall
This course cultivates sound reasoning. Students will learn to see the structure of claims and arguments and to use those structures in developing strong arguments and exposing shoddy ones. We will learn to evaluate arguments on the strength of the reasoning rather than on the force of their associations and buzzwords.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
B. Yelle
Credits: 4

PHIL-225 Symbolic Logic
Spring
This course develops a symbolic system that can be used as the basis for inference in all fields. It will provide syntax and semantics for the language of this system and investigate its adequacy. It provides the basis for all further work in logic or in the philosophical foundations of mathematics. Much of the course has a mathematical flavor, but no knowledge of mathematics is necessary.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
S. Mitchell

PHIL-238 Ethics of Career Choice
Not Scheduled for This Year
Mary Lyon said ’When you choose your fields of labor, go where no one else will go.’ For most students attending a college like Mount Holyoke, one of the most important questions is: what career should I prepare to pursue after graduation? When most of us think about this question, we tend to think about self-centered considerations: what will make us happy, or express our talents, or provide financial independence. This class examines the ethical aspects of choosing a career. Do we have moral responsibilities to others, to ourselves, or to future generations, in choosing our careers? For example, are we obligated to work against social injustice? How should such moral considerations affect this most important of choices?

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
J. Harold
Credits: 4

PHIL-242 Social and Political Philosophy
Spring
We will examine the place of liberty and equality in a just society by looking at classic and contemporary topics in social and political philosophy. We will consider questions such as the following: What is liberty? Why is liberty important? Are some liberties more important than others? What is equality?
Why is equality important? What sort of equality should a just society ensure? Can a society ensure both liberty and equality? Or are these conflicting values? And if they are, how should we handle this conflict?

**PHIL-244 Philosophy and Literature**

*Not Scheduled for This Year*

This course examines philosophical themes in literature and philosophical questions about literature. Can literature yield knowledge about the world? What is the meaning of a work of literature, and how can we know it? Are the author's intentions relevant to how a work is to be interpreted? Can works of literature be immoral? How is the identity of the reader relevant to the understanding of a literary work? What is a work of literature? Can a work of literature also be a work of philosophy?

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities*

*The department*

*Credits: 4*

**PHIL-248 Philosophical Issues in Race and Racism**

*Fall*

An introduction to discussions of 'race' within philosophy and related discussions in science, the law, and the arts. Topics to be discussed include: Is 'race' real, subjective, or produced by society? How is race relevant to our identities? How does the popular media represent 'race'? Does science construct 'race'? What is the connection between 'race', gender, and class? Class readings from philosophy and a variety of interdisciplinary texts, including film and literature.

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities; Multicultural Perspectives*

*J. Harold*

*Credits: 4*

**PHIL-249 Women and Philosophy**

*Not Scheduled for This Year*

This course will focus on topics to which feminist thinking has made important philosophical contributions, such as: pornography, objectification, and consent. We will draw on a variety of philosophical resources, ranging from liberal and feminist political theory, to speech act theory. We will consider questions such as: Is pornography morally problematic? Can sexism or other biases lead to bad science? Is it wrong to choose to be a stay-at-home parent? The goal will be to see how careful philosophical thought can help us with pressing issues of sex and gender.

*Crosstlisted as: Gender Studies 210PH*

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities*

*E. Vavova*

*Credits: 4*

**PHIL-250 Topics in Philosophy**

*Not Scheduled for This Year*

This course explores long-standing questions about the nature of consciousness; the relationship between mind and body; the relationship between mind and language; and the role that science has (if any) in negotiating these questions. The course will emphasize the philosophical understanding and implications of current work in neuroscience.

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities*

*The department*

*Credits: 4*

**PHIL-255 Existentialism**

*Not Scheduled for This Year*

Is life absurd? Do human beings really want to be free? Or do we prefer to sacrifice our freedom for comfort and amusement? Is God dead? Is it possible to live without religious belief? These are among the central questions about human life raised by existentialist thinkers. We will discuss these issues, and many others, through careful reading works of literature and philosophy by such important existentialists as Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Franz Fanon, and Samuel Beckett. In addition, we will consider how the existentialists' ideas are reflected in films.

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities*

*The department*

*Credits: 4*

**PHIL-260 Topics in Applied Philosophy**

These courses ask questions about the ethical and/or conceptual problems pertaining to a practice, such as law, medicine, or caring for the natural environment. Such courses are suitable for philosophy majors as well as for students who are new to philosophy but who are interested in the relevant practice.

**PHIL-260ME Topics in Applied Philosophy: ‘Medical Ethics’**

*Spring*

Modern medicine has raised new and difficult moral and philosophical problems. Topics discussed include: What is the distinction between health and illness? How should limited health care resources be distributed? How are medical problems related to larger social problems (e.g., gender inequality)? What are the responsibilities of medical researchers toward their research subjects? What moral reasons do we have to be concerned about the growth of technology in medicine? Are the basic institutions of medicine and medical education just?

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities*

*The department*

*Credits: 4*

**PHIL-264 Philosophy of Mind**

*Not Scheduled for This Year*

This course explores long-standing questions about the nature of consciousness; the relationship between mind and body; the relationship between mind and language; and the role that science has (if any) in negotiating these questions. The course will emphasize the philosophical understanding and implications of current work in neuroscience.

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities*

*The department*

*Prereq: 4 credits in Philosophy.*

*Credits: 4*

**PHIL-273 Philosophy of the Arts**

*Spring*

The purpose of this course is to explore philosophical problems concerning the arts and aesthetic experience. Some questions to be explored include: What is the difference between beauty and moral goodness? Can artistic taste be objective? What does it mean for a work of music to be ‘sad’? Are the intentions of artists relevant to appreciation? What is the purpose of art criticism? How do pictures represent their objects? Readings will be drawn from both historical and contemporary philosophical writings.
PHIL-275 Philosophy and Film Theory
Not Scheduled for This Year
An exploration of philosophical and theoretical issues encountered in the study of film such as: Why do we need a theory of film? What is a film anyway? Do films have 'authors'? How do films engage our emotions? Can films be socially critical? What can we learn from films? There will be weekly required film screenings.
Crosslisted as: Film Studies 290PT
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
T. Wartenberg
Prereq: 4 credits in Philosophy or Film Studies.
Notes: 2 meetings (75 minutes), 1 screening (1.5 hours)
Credits: 4

PHIL-280 Philosophy for Children
Fall
When you act bravely, can you be scared? How do you know that you are not dreaming now? If everyone told you you weren't a person, would you believe them? These questions are raised by children's books, such as Frog and Toad Together and The Bear That Wasn't. In this course, you will learn how to conduct discussions of philosophical questions like these among elementary school children using picture books. The first half of the course will concentrate on developing the necessary skills; the second on teaching philosophy to the children. Along the way, we'll delve into a range of philosophical issues, as we prepare to teach an introductory philosophy course for second graders.
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
Other Attribute(s): Community-Based Learning; Speaking-Intensive
T. Wartenberg
Credits: 4

PHIL-295 Independent Study
Fall and Spring
The department
Instructor permission required.
Credits: 1-4
Course can be repeated for credit.

PHIL-312 Seminar in Philosophy of Language
Not Scheduled for This Year
How do words come to mean things? Frege introduced two aspects of meaning: reference, that is, whatever expressions pick out in the world, and sense, a publicly accessible means by which expressions pick out their references, which must be grasped by all speakers. This course is an extended examination of the concept of sense, the uses to which it has been put, and the criticisms that have been lodged against it. We'll look at Frege's work, the complaints made by Quine and Kripke, Davidson's theory of meaning, and Dummett's defense of sense.
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
S. Mitchell
Prereq: 8 credits from the philosophy department.
Credits: 4

PHIL-327 Advanced Logic
Fall
This course presents a careful development of formal elementary number theory using predicate logic, and elementary recursion theory, culminating in a proof of Gödel's incompleteness results. It includes some discussion of the philosophical significance of these results for the foundations of mathematics.
Crosslisted as: Mathematics 327

PHIL-328 Non-Classical Logic
Not Scheduled for This Year
This course looks at the recent flowering of non-classical logics. The most prominent are modal logics concerning necessity and possibility, which have come to dominate work in metaphysics and epistemology. Conditional logics, intuitionist logics, and relevance logics have also become important. These logics are particularly useful in graduate-level classes in philosophy but also are interesting in their own right.
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
The department
Prereq: 4 credits from Philosophy, Mathematics, or Computer Science department.
Advisory: One course in Logic, Mathematics, Computer Science or Philosophy 209
Credits: 4

PHIL-334 Topics in Ethics
PHIL-334EP Topics in Ethics: 'Moral Epistemology'
Not Scheduled for This Year
This course will focus on a handful of epistemic challenges to morality. We will consider questions such as: How is moral knowledge possible? Can we gain moral knowledge from testimony? What are the implications of the prevalence of moral disagreement? Do our evolutionary origins pose a challenge to our moral beliefs?
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
E. Vavova
Prereq: 8 credits from the Philosophy department including Philosophy 205.
Credits: 4

PHIL-334MR Topics in Ethics: 'Moral Relativism'
Fall
Moral relativism describes a family of views that deny the universality of moral claims. So, for example, some philosophers have claimed that statements like 'Torture is morally wrong' can only be assessed as 'true' or 'false' relative to some social agreement about moral norms. In this course, we will survey some contemporary attempts to develop and defend moral relativism, as well as some criticisms of these relativist approaches. Our goal will be to assess arguments for and against moral relativism. Prior coursework in ethics and logic is recommended.
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
J. Harold
Prereq: 8 credits from the Philosophy department including Philosophy 205.
Credits: 4

PHIL-350 Topics in Philosophy
PHIL-350SO Topics in Philosophy: 'Socrates Against the Sophists'
Not Scheduled for This Year
In a number of Plato's dialogues we find the character Socrates debating various sophists--itinerant teachers-for-hire whose views were often diametrically opposed to Socrates' own. This seminar is structured around a close, careful reading of three such dialogues: the Euthydemus, the Protagoras, and the Gorgias. These dialogues will offer a general introduction to Socratic philosophy, but we will also focus on a few issues in much greater detail. Chief among these special topics will be questions about the nature and value of moral knowledge, the possibility of moral education, and the efficacy of the Socratic method of inquiry.
Crosslisted as: Classics 349

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
S. Mitchell
Prereq: Philosophy 225.
Credits: 4

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Crosslisted as: Classics 349

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
S. Mitchell
Prereq: Philosophy 225.
Credits: 4

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Prereq: Philosophy 225.
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Crosslisted as: Classics 349

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
S. Mitchell
Prereq: Philosophy 225.
PHIL-351 Systematic Study of One Philosopher

PHIL-351KA Systematic Study of One Philosopher: 'Kant'
Spring
Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is one of the few works in the Western philosophic tradition that fundamentally transformed our understanding of the place of human beings in the world. This seminar involves a careful, critical reading of the text in order to assess the nature and significance of the epistemological and metaphysical views it expounds. There will be frequent, short papers.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
T. Wartenberg
Prereq: Philosophy 202 and one additional Philosophy course.
Credits: 4

PHIL-373 Philosophy of Art
This class examines philosophical issues concerning the interpretation, creation, and experience of art. Topics vary from year to year.

PHIL-373ST Philosophy of Art: 'Illustration'
Not Scheduled for This Year
Illustrations surround us, occurring in picture books, scientific texts, fine art editions of books, magazines, and in the pockets of airline seats. Yet there is little philosophical reflection about illustrations and their functions. In this seminar, we will investigate the topic of illustration theoretically and practically. There will be readings, viewings, and studio sessions. Participants will be expected to take part in this approach, producing both written and studio work. Our approach will be eclectic, hoping to educate our eyes, minds, and bodies about this important use of images.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
T. Wartenberg
Prereq: 8 credits from the department.
Credits: 4

PHIL-375 Philosophy of Film
An examination of different theoretical issues concerning the nature of film and film viewing. Topics vary yearly.

PHIL-375PF Philosophy of Film: 'Dangerous Movies'
Not Scheduled for This Year
Many critics considered Kathryn Bigelow's *Zero Dark Thirty* to be the best film of 2012, but it was also widely criticized for seeming to promote torture. Movies can be morally dangerous, seemingly endorsing or even promoting immoral or discriminatory ideals, or romanticizing immoral characters and behavior, as in Hannibal Lecter from *Silence of the Lambs* (Thomas Harris, 1991). In this course, we evaluate the arguments given for treating certain movies as immoral, and we examine whether and how our moral evaluations of movies should affect us.

Crosslisted as: Film Studies 320PF
Applies to requirement(s): Humanities
J. Harold
Prereq: 8 credits from Philosophy or Film Studies.
Notes: There will be film screenings in addition to the regular class meeting times
Credits: 4

See Also
- Logic