

PHILOSOPHY

Our Website (<https://liberalarts.vt.edu/departments-and-schools/departments-and-schools/department-of-philosophy.html>)

Overview

Courses in philosophy aim at critical understanding and rigorous evaluation of the concepts underlying our views concerning the nature of reality, what sorts of things there are, what can be known, what is of value, and what people ought to do and to aim at. The department offers both B.A. and M.A. degrees. Philosophy majors receive a strong liberal arts education and are prepared for careers that require a broad perspective and independent judgment. They are prepared for graduate work in a variety of scholarly and professional fields. An undergraduate philosophy major is especially appropriate for the student considering law school, medical school, or other professional schools. In addition, philosophy may be chosen as a minor.

Philosophy majors must complete the college core and the Curriculum for Liberal Education or Pathways. Students entering fall 2018 must complete Pathways and successfully complete at least 36 hours in philosophy, including two courses in the History of Philosophy, PHIL 3505 Modern Logic and Its Development (Symbolic Logic), two Core Analytic Philosophy courses, two Value Theory courses, and an additional 15 credit hours of philosophy courses currently offered by the Department of Philosophy. Students must take at least six Philosophy courses at the 3000-4000 level for fulfillment of the "Philosophy Major Requirements". The department has recently added a new Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) major in Philosophy. See Philosophy Department website for specific details. A double major is possible with any of several other curricula.

Philosophy minors must complete at least 18 hours of philosophy, including one of PHIL 1504 Critical Thinking or PHIL 3505 Modern Logic and Its Development, two courses at the 3000-4000 level, an additional course from either the 3000-4000 level or in the history sequence (PHIL 2115 Ancient Through Medieval Philosophy, PHIL 2116 Ancient Through Medieval Philosophy, PHIL 2125 History of Modern Philosophy, PHIL 2126 History of Modern Philosophy), and two elective courses in Philosophy (at any level).

Satisfactory Progress

University policy requires that students who are making satisfactory progress toward a degree meet minimum criteria toward the General Education (Curriculum for Liberal Education) (see "Academics (<https://catalog.vt.edu/undergraduate/academic-policies/>)") and toward the degree in philosophy.

- Philosophy Major (<https://catalog.vt.edu/undergraduate/liberal-arts-human-sciences/philosophy/philosophy-ba/>)
- Philosophy Major with Pre-Medical Professions Option (<https://catalog.vt.edu/undergraduate/liberal-arts-human-sciences/philosophy/philosophy-ba-pre-medical-professions/>)
- Philosophy, Politics, and Economics Major (<https://catalog.vt.edu/undergraduate/liberal-arts-human-sciences/philosophy/philosophy-politics-economics-ba/>)

Head: K. Trogdon

Professors: J. C. Klagge, D. Lind, L. Patton, W. Parker

Associate Professors: B. Jantzen, and K. Trogdon

Assistant Professors: M. Corredor, G. Hersch, D. Hoek, J. MacKenzie, R. Sud, and P. Yaure

Collegiate Assistant Professors: J. Horn, G. Novak

Full-time Instructor: H. Wildman Short²

Emeritus: R. Burian, J. Pitt, H. B. Miller, and D. Mayo

Undergraduate Course Descriptions (PHIL)

PHIL 1204 - Knowledge and Reality (3 credits)

Examines historical and contemporary approaches to such issues as: the nature of reality and the self, the relationship between mind and body, the existence of God, the nature of knowledge and illusion. Application to ethical questions about the fear of death, and the meaning of life.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 1304 - Morality and Justice (3 credits)

A critical survey of theories concerning human nature, the meaningful life, and the moral evaluation of actions, persons, and institutions. Theories will be applied to such issues as abortion, justice, and moral problems faced by professionals.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 1404 - The Skeptic's Guide to AI (3 credits)

Provides a non-technical introduction to the nature and limits of artificial intelligence and the major aspects of natural intelligence emulated by AI. Informs a fundamental understanding of artificial intelligence relevant to policymaking, regulation and governance, issues related to fairness in human and AI systems, ethical use of AI, and building ethical behavior into AI. Investigates questions about the nature of artificial intelligence and how artificial intelligence systems achieve it.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 1504 - Critical Thinking (3 credits)

Introduction to critical thinking, the examination of the reasons (grounds, evidence) for claims on any subject matter. Mastery of central concepts of critical thinking: argument, claim, validity and invalidity, strength and weakness, deduction and induction, fallacy, objection and response. Techniques for critical reconstruction and evaluation of arguments, including ethical ones. Formal logic techniques for evaluation of truth-functional and categorical arguments, akin to mechanical computation or derivation. Application of techniques to arguments appearing in ordinary language passages.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 5F Quant & Comp Thnk Found., 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 1604 - How Science Works (3 credits)

Introduction to scientific methods and reasoning. Foundation for interpreting scientific information and conducting research across a range of fields, especially natural sciences. Topics: use of theories, experiments and models; hypothesis testing and confirmation; deductive, inductive and abductive reasoning; descriptive and inferential statistics; causation; influence of societal values on science; diversity and objectivity in science. Examples from physics, astronomy, geology, environmental science and other fields.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 4 Reasoning in Natural Sci., 5F Quant & Comp Thnk Found., 11 Intercultural&Global Aware.

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 1984 - Special Study (1-19 credits)

Instructional Contact Hours: Variable credit course

PHIL 1984B - Special Study (1-19 credits)

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities

Instructional Contact Hours: Variable credit course

PHIL 2115 - Ancient Through Medieval Philosophy (3 credits)

A critical survey and analysis of the history of Western philosophical thought from its beginnings through the Medieval Period. Addresses and assesses historical theories about issues involving the nature of justice, virtue, ethics, knowledge, and reality. Key concepts analyzed include that of the soul, human flourishing, form and matter, the human function and God. 2115: Presocratics, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics; 2116: late Greek and Roman philosophy, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and William of Ockham.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 2116 - Ancient Through Medieval Philosophy (3 credits)

A critical survey and analysis of the history of Western philosophical thought from its beginnings through the Medieval Period. Addresses and assesses historical theories about issues involving the nature of justice, virtue, ethics, knowledge, and reality. Key concepts analyzed include that of the soul, human flourishing, form and matter, the human function and God. 2115: Presocratics, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics; 2116: late Greek and Roman philosophy, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and William of Ockham.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 2125 - History of Modern Philosophy (3 credits)

Philosophical thought from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, integrating intercultural analysis and comparisons. 2125: Global traditions in 17th and 18th century natural philosophy, including theories of mind, value, and knowledge. 2126: Global traditions in 18th and 19th century philosophy, including theories of science, knowledge, and value.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 11 Intercultural&Global Aware.

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 2126 - History of Modern Philosophy (3 credits)

Philosophical thought from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, integrating intercultural analysis and comparisons. 2125: Global traditions in 17th and 18th century natural philosophy, including theories of mind, value, and knowledge. 2126: Global traditions in 18th and 19th century philosophy, including theories of science, knowledge, and value.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 11 Intercultural&Global Aware.

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 2304 - Global Ethics (3 credits)

Ethical issues in international context. Application of the principles of moral theory to such issues as the obligations of richer nations toward poorer ones, cultural and other forms of relativism, emigration and immigration, nationalism, war, deterrence, intervention, environmental degradation, preservation of natural diversity, and responsibilities toward future generations.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 2314 - Philosophy of Sex, Gender, and Race (3 credits)

Critical survey of contemporary themes in the philosophy of race and feminist philosophy in the United States. Topics in metaphysics (what is race? what is sex? what is gender?), ethics and political philosophy (oppression, solidarity, and social justice), and epistemology (narrative, standpoint, and white ignorance). Emphasis on situating contemporary philosophical views in social and historical contexts.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 7 Identity & Equity in U.S., 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 2504 - Logic and Language (3 credits)

Introduction to logic, the systematic analysis of expressions and reasoning in natural languages (like English) by means of simplified, formal languages. Foundational to philosophy, linguistics, law and computer science; useful in any discipline in the sciences or humanities where sustained reasoning and argumentation are central. Core semantic concepts: truth and meaning, synonymy, ambiguity, consistency, entailment, truth conditions. Core syntactic concepts: expression, sentence, connective, scope, predicate, term, quantifier. Core deductive reasoning concepts: argument, validity, soundness, proof. Formal languages for propositional logic and predicate logic. Translation between these formal languages and natural language sentences and arguments. Application of formal logic to evaluate natural language argumentation. Moral language and ethical reasoning.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 5F Quant & Comp Thnk Found., 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 2964 - Field Study (1-19 credits)

Instructional Contact Hours: Variable credit course

PHIL 2974 - Independent Study (1-19 credits)

Instructional Contact Hours: Variable credit course

PHIL 2974H - Independent Study (1-19 credits)

Instructional Contact Hours: Variable credit course

PHIL 2984 - Special Study (1-19 credits)

Instructional Contact Hours: Variable credit course

PHIL 3015 - Political Theory (3 credits)

Analysis of the fundamental ideas in the history of political theory. 3015: The thought and ethical implications of philosophers from the ancient Greeks to early modern times. Analysis of writings from Plato through medieval theorists to those of the Seventeenth Century. 3016: The thought and ethical implications of philosophers from the late Seventeenth Century to the present. Analysis of key concepts in the thought of theorists from the early modern period until the present.

Prerequisite(s): PSCI 2014

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

Course Crosslist: PSCI 3015

PHIL 3016 - Political Theory (3 credits)

Analysis of the fundamental ideas in the history of political theory. 3015: The thought and ethical implications of philosophers from the ancient Greeks to early modern times. Analysis of writings from Plato through medieval theorists to those of the Seventeenth Century. 3016: The thought and ethical implications of philosophers from the late Seventeenth Century to the present. Analysis of key concepts in the thought of theorists from the early modern period until the present.

Prerequisite(s): PSCI 2014

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

Course Crosslist: PPE 3016, PSCI 3016

PHIL 3024 - Topics in Philosophical Movements (3 credits)

Focus on the assumptions, methods and ethical dimensions of one or more contemporary or historically important philosophical movement, such as Pragmatism, Feminism, Existentialism, Islamic Philosophy, Philosophy and African-American Thought, or Philosophy and Literature. May be repeated 2 times with different content for a maximum of 9 credits.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

Repeatability: up to 9 credit hours

PHIL 3314 - Ethical Theory (3 credits)

Careful examination of some important historical or contemporary ethical theories. Includes coverage of such topics as the assessment of character and action, the foundations of ethical theories, their justification, their relationship to scientific theories, and their objective or subjective status. 3 Philosophy credits required.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

Course Crosslist: PPE 3314

PHIL 3324 - Biomedical Ethics (3 credits)

Philosophical analysis of ethical issues in medicine and biotechnology, such as problems arising in connection with the relations between physicians and patients, the challenges of cultural diversity, practices surrounding human and animal research, decisions about end of life care, embryonic stem cell research, genetic engineering, biotechnological human enhancement, and social justice in relation to health-care policy.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 3334 - Ethical Perspectives on Artificial Intelligence (3 credits)

Critical examination of ethical concepts and theories, such as utilitarianism, deontology and virtue theory, applied to issues that arise in artificial intelligence, including applications in smart design & construction, energy, ubiquitous mobility, and robotics & autonomous systems. Addresses questions such as: How much should privacy be protected in the digital future? How can energy be equitably transported and consumed in relation to poor regions and future generations? Who should autonomous vehicles be programmed to protect or sacrifice in emergency situations? How should we evaluate the effects on family and society of smart technology? Should we fear that robots will take over?

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 3414 - Aesthetics (3 credits)

Critical survey and analysis of key concepts in aesthetics and the philosophy of art. Historical and contemporary theories concerning natural beauty, aesthetic experience and properties, the nature and interpretation of artworks, their representational and expressive features, the relationship between artistic value, the value that attaches to nature, and moral value.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 3454 - Philosophy of Religion (3 credits)

A consideration of religious belief and its justification with attention to such philosophical issues as the nature and existence of the Judeo-Christian-Muslim God, proofs for the existence of God, the problem of evil, a religious basis for ethics, the nature of faith, and the variety of religious beliefs.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

Course Crosslist: RLCL 3454

PHIL 3505 - Modern Logic and Its Development (3 credits)

Logic and logical theory and the history of its development. 3505: Validity of arguments. Syllogistic logic from Aristotle to modern times. Deductive methods in truth functional and quantificational logic through the theory of identity. Translation from English into symbolic form. 3506: Metalogic and the history and philosophy of modern logical theory. Decidability and undecidability, completeness and incompleteness of formal systems. Developments from Cantor to Goedel. Must have 3505 to take 3506.

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 3614 - Philosophy of the Environment (3 credits)

Philosophical issues in environmental science and policy. Foundational concepts in the environmental sciences, epistemic challenges of environmental research and decision-making, and ethical questions about conservation policy and climate justice. Topics include: the wilderness ideal; biodiversity; effectiveness of different ecosystem restoration techniques; environmental modeling; decision-making under scientific uncertainty; indigenous environmental justice; ethics of de-extinction; values in environmental science; climate change; ethics of geoengineering; and public participation in conservation.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 7 Identity & Equity in U.S., 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 3884 - Topics in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (3 credits)

Topics-based course in philosophy, politics, and economics (PPE). Discussion of important topics and thinkers in PPE with historical and practical relevance. Focus on interdisciplinary analysis and methods. Topics include: limits of markets; well-being theory, science, and policy; socioeconomic justice; economic and political institutions; and global poverty. May be repeated 1 time with different content for a maximum of six credits hours. Pre: 3 credit hours in PPE, PHIL, PSCI, or ECON.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 3 Reasoning in Social Sciences, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

Repeatability: up to 6 credit hours

Course Crosslist: ECON 3884, PPE 3884, PSCI 3884

PHIL 4014 - Special Topics in Philosophy (3 credits)

Critical examination of special issues or figures of current philosophical interest at an advanced level. Sample topics: Philosophy and Race; Ludwig Wittgenstein; Origins of Analytic Philosophy; and Animals, Minds and Morality. May be repeated 2 times with different content for a maximum of 9 credits. Pre: 3 Philosophy credits required.

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

Repeatability: up to 9 credit hours

PHIL 4204 - Philosophy of Mind (3 credits)

Current issues in the philosophy of mind such as relation of mind and body, status of the mental, knowledge of ones own and other minds, personal identity, consciousness, mentality of animals and machines, topics in the philosophy of psychology. 3 Philosophy credits required.

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 4214 - Metaphysics (3 credits)

Critical survey and analysis of key concepts in metaphysics, the study of what kinds of entities exist and what their most fundamental and general features are like. Historical and contemporary theories concerning existence, abstract entities, material objects, time, persistence, possibility and necessity, causation, free will and determinism, and social ontology. Pre: Requires the completion of 3 credits Philosophy course.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 4224 - Epistemology (3 credits)

Theory of knowledge. Is all knowledge based on experience? Does knowledge have a foundation? Can knowledge of the present and the nearby give us reasons for beliefs about the future, the past, or about events far away? 3 Philosophy credits required.

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 4304 - Political Philosophy (3 credits)

Study of fundamental topics in political philosophy, such as distributive justice, equality, individual rights, constitutional government, and the justification of political authority. 3 Philosophy credits required.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

Course Crosslist: PPE 4304

PHIL 4334 - Jurisprudence (3 credits)

An examination of the nature of law and legal systems with attention to traditional theories of law and to such topics as judicial decision and discretion, law and morality, the justification of legal coercion. 3 Philosophy credits required.

Pathway Concept Area(s): 2 Critical Thinking Humanities, 10 Ethical Reasoning

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 4604 - Philosophy of Biology (3 credits)

This course is designed primarily for students of biology or philosophy students with a strong interest in biology. Topics vary from year to year, but include the changing character of biology as a science, the special character of biological explanations and methods, and the place and value of reduction (e.g., of Mendelian to molecular genetics) in biology.

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 4614 - Philosophy of Science (3 credits)

An examination of the structure and methodology of science as well as key concepts such as explanation, confirmation, realism, and instrumentalism. One year of science and 3 philosophy credits required.

Instructional Contact Hours: (3 Lec, 3 Crd)

PHIL 4964 - Field Study (1-19 credits)

Instructional Contact Hours: Variable credit course

PHIL 4974 - Independent Study (1-19 credits)

Instructional Contact Hours: Variable credit course

PHIL 4974H - Independent Study (1-19 credits)

Instructional Contact Hours: Variable credit course

PHIL 4984 - Special Study (1-19 credits)

Instructional Contact Hours: Variable credit course

PHIL 4994 - Undergraduate Research (1-19 credits)

Instructional Contact Hours: Variable credit course

PHIL 4994H - Undergraduate Research (1-19 credits)

Instructional Contact Hours: Variable credit course