

PHILOSOPHY

Overview and Contact Information

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.

See Also

- Logic (<http://catalog.mtholyoke.edu/areas-study/logic>)

Contact Information

James Harold, Chair

Natalina Tulik, Academic Department Coordinator

205 Skinner Hall

413-538-2249

<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/philosophy>

Faculty

This area of study is administered by the Department of Philosophy:

James Harold, Professor of Philosophy

Samuel Mitchell, Associate Professor of Philosophy

Katia Vavova, Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Teaching Spring Only

Jo-Jo Koo, Mount Holyoke Fellow; Visiting Lecturer in Philosophy

Arden Ali, Visiting Instructor in Philosophy

Requirements for the Major

A minimum of 36 credits:

Two courses in the History of Philosophy, such as:

PHIL-201	Philosophical Foundations of Western Thought: 'Ancient History of Philosophy'	8
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PHIL-202	Philosophical Foundations of Western Thought: The Modern Period	
PHIL-255	Existentialism	
One course in Ethics and Value Theory, such as:		4
PHIL-205	Ethics	
PHIL-238	Ethics of Career Choice	
PHIL-242	Social and Political Philosophy	
PHIL-248	Philosophical Issues in Race and Racism	
PHIL-249	Women and Philosophy	
PHIL-260ME	Topics in Applied Philosophy: 'Medical Ethics'	
PHIL-273	Philosophy of the Arts	
PHIL-275		
One course in Theoretical Philosophy, such as:		4
PHIL-209	Theories of Probability and Causation	
	or PHIL-264 Philosophy of Mind	
One course in Logic, such as:		4
PHIL-210	Logical Thought	
	or PHIL-225 Symbolic Logic	
At least 12 credits in philosophy at the 300 level		12
4 additional credits in philosophy		4
Total Credits		36

Other Requirements

- Program plan. Majors will be asked to fill out a form that specifies which courses they will use to satisfy these requirements.

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.

Requirements for the Minor

A minimum of 20 credits:

16 credits in philosophy at the 200 or 300 level	16
4 additional credits in philosophy at the 300 level	4
Total Credits	20

Course Advice

Beginning the Study of Philosophy

Students who are completely new to philosophy can take PHIL-101 or PHIL-103, which offer a broad introduction 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 PHIL-201 (The Greek Period), PHIL-202 (Descartes to Kant), PHIL-205 (Ethics), PHIL-209 (Probability and Causation), or PHIL-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. PHIL-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.

Course Offerings

PHIL-101 Introduction to Philosophy

Fall. Credits: 4

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

PHIL-103 Comparative Introduction to Philosophy

Spring. Credits: 4

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 how to do philosophy by engaging with philosophical thinkers throughout the globe. We read some philosophers from the Western tradition (such as Plato and Sartre) alongside philosophers from other historical traditions, such as the Daoist thinker Zhuangzi and the Sufi mystic al-Ghazali, and we also read some contemporary thinkers from a variety of cultural traditions (such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jorge Gracia). This course is equivalent to Philosophy 101.

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities; Multicultural Perspectives

J. Harold

PHIL-201 Philosophical Foundations of Western Thought: 'Ancient History of Philosophy'

Fall. Credits: 4

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 truth, 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

PHIL-202 Philosophical Foundations of Western Thought: The Modern Period

Spring. Credits: 4

This course examines the development of Western philosophy from the 17th through the 19th centuries by examining selected writings of Descartes, Elizabeth of Bohemia, Hobbes, Margaret Cavendish, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, Mary Wollstonecraft, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche. Topics include the emerging modern scientific background against which modern Western philosophy developed; the nature, extent, and limits of human knowledge (epistemology); the existence and nature of God, fundamental reality, and the mind (metaphysics and philosophy of mind); and debates concerning who gets the right and opportunity to exercise reason and freedom in the context of our sociocultural environment (practical philosophy).

Crosslisted as: GRMST-231WT

Applies to requirement(s): Humanities

J. Koo

PHIL-205 Ethics

Fall. Credits: 4

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

A. Arden

PHIL-209 Theories of Probability and Causation

Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4

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. Credits: 4

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

A. Arden

PHIL-225 Symbolic Logic*Spring. Credits: 4*

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. Credits: 4*

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***PHIL-242 Social and Political Philosophy***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

This course focuses upon three central areas of political philosophy: Foundational Concepts; The Government, the Economy, and Morality; and Applied Political Philosophy. Within these areas we will consider issues such as: obedience to authority, rights, justice, freedom, equality, as well as more applied and pressing issues such as immigration rights.

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**The department***PHIL-248 Philosophical Issues in Race and Racism***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

This course examines the nature of race and racism primarily (but not exclusively) from a philosophical perspective. What kind of entity or category is 'race'? Is it something real at all? If so, how is it real exactly? If not, what consequences (should) follow from its lack of reality? Do we have to be a member of a 'race' in order to (have the right to) know and speak for it? How is race and race-thinking relevant for our personal and group identities? What is the nature of racism? How do race, ethnicity, gender, and class intersect? How legitimate are race-based social policies that aim to bring about social justice or diversity? Readings will come from philosophy and a variety of interdisciplinary texts (e.g., film and other media).

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities; Multicultural Perspectives**J. Koo***PHIL-249 Women and Philosophy***Spring. Credits: 4*

The goal of this course is to see how careful philosophical thought can help us with pressing issues that women face. We approach this topic through a distinctly feminist lens, as opposed to a traditional philosophical, queer theoretic, or gender studies lens. We will draw on a variety of philosophical resources, ranging from liberal and feminist political theory, to speech act theory. Possible questions we will consider include: What is objectification? What is consent? Is pornography degrading? How does sexism and bias lead to bad science?

*Crosslisted as: GNDST-210PH**Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**H. Webster***PHIL-250 Topics in Philosophy****PHIL-250AP Topics in Philosophy: 'History of Analytic Philosophy'***Spring. Credits: 4*

This class is about how philosophy tried to be a science, and rejected most of its history as metaphysical nonsense. It's about how and why this failed, and returned to metaphysics. There were three phases: Logical Positivism, which argued that most of the history of philosophy was meaningless babble, and should be replaced by a much more scientific approach to the issues. Quine, who replaced the positivists with a pragmatic view of the subject. And Kripke/Lewis who returned Metaphysics to the center of concern using possible worlds. This last approach brings us to the present day. We'll read the most influential figures: Frege, Russell, Schlick, Carnap, Quine, Lewis Kripke. These developments provide the background for nearly all Contemporary Philosophy.

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**S. Mitchell**Prereq: 8 credits in the department including logic (PHIL-210 or PHIL-225).***PHIL-255 Existentialism***Fall. Credits: 4*

Does human life have meaning (purpose)? Can religion or spirituality provide it? If not, is human life 'absurd'? How can we attain or create meaning in the face of the 'absurdity' of human life? What is genuine human freedom? Are other people in the world obstacles to, or also sources for, our attempt to attain or create meaning in our lives? What is existential commitment and 'authenticity'? Is existentialist ethics possible at all? We will examine the central themes of existentialism in readings from Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus, de Beauvoir, and Fanon (among others). We will also end the course by considering some significant criticisms of existentialism.

*Crosslisted as: CST-258**Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**J. Koo***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-260EB Topics in Applied Philosophy: 'Ethics in Entrepreneurship and Business'*Spring. Credits: 4*

What are the special challenges of obligation and responsibility that individuals, businesses and other organizations face in a complex global environment? We explore these questions using applied philosophical ethics from the traditional approaches to moral philosophy (studying the ethical character of both actions themselves and the results of those actions) and the more recent ethics of care. We apply these ethical considerations in different cases and contexts of individual decision-making and the choices and dilemmas that businesses and other organizations face.

*Crosslisted as: EOS-249EB**Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**T. White***PHIL-260ET Topics in Applied Philosophy: 'Environmental Ethics'***Fall. Credits: 4*

A fundamental problem we face as humans is how we should relate to the natural world. Why not turn Yosemite into a parking lot? Should we control nature by applying scientific and technological expertise? Or should we strive for noninterference and preservation of the wild? How do we balance the pressing needs of people for food, energy, and other resources with the needs of other species or whole ecosystems?

*Crosslisted as: ENVST-233ET**Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**A. Arden***PHIL-260GE Topics in Applied Philosophy: 'Problems in Global Ethics: Climate Change, War, and Poverty'***Spring. Credits: 4*

Living in today's world presents distinctive and pressing moral problems. What are the responsibilities of individuals, particularly individuals living in relatively affluent societies, to prevent climate change, or to alleviate the harms caused by it? How should we act to prevent war, and should we ever initiate wars in order to prevent greater evils (such as terrorism)? What responsibilities do citizens of relatively affluent nations have to prevent and ameliorate poverty and global inequality? In order to reason clearly about these questions, we will need to think deeply about the notion of global citizenship (or "cosmopolitanism") and the nature of individual moral responsibility.

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**J. Harold***PHIL-260ME Topics in Applied Philosophy: 'Medical Ethics'***Spring. Credits: 4*

Over the last century, advancements in medical practice have introduced new ethical questions and made old problems more pressing. Given the possibility of painless death, is it wrong for physicians to assist terminally-ill patients who wish to end their life? Should parents exercise control over the genetic makeup of their children? How should we distribute scarce medical resources? This course gives students the tools needed to think critically about these questions and arrive at better and more thoughtful answers to them.

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**A. Ali***PHIL-264 Philosophy of Mind***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

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.***PHIL-270 Epistemology***Spring. Credits: 4*

As the study of knowledge and related concepts like justification, rationality, and evidence, epistemology is of central importance, and not just to philosophy. This course provides an introduction to epistemology through a number of epistemological problems or puzzles about skepticism, dogmatism, and humility.

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**E. Vavova**Prereq: 4 credits in Philosophy.***PHIL-273 Philosophy of the Arts***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

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.

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**J. Harold***PHIL-295 Independent Study***Fall and Spring. Credits: 1 - 4**The department**Instructor permission required.***PHIL-321 Seminar in Philosophy of Language***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

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.***PHIL-327 Advanced Logic***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

This course uses the predicate calculus to present a careful development of formal elementary number theory, 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: MATH-327**Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**S. Mitchell**Prereq: PHIL-225.*

PHIL-328 Non-Classical Logic*Fall. Credits: 4*

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**S. Mitchell**Prereq: 4 credits from Philosophy, Mathematics, or Computer Science department.**Advisory: One course in Logic, Mathematics, Computer Science or Philosophy 209***PHIL-334 Topics in Ethics****PHIL-334EP Topics in Ethics: 'Moral Epistemology'***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

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 PHIL-205.***PHIL-334ME Topics in Ethics: 'Meta-Ethics'***Fall. Credits: 4*

Meta-ethics is the study of the concepts and methods used in ethical discourse and debate. It is not the study, for example, of which actions are right or wrong, but rather of what the terms "right" and "wrong" mean. Possible questions to be discussed in this seminar include: Can moral judgments be true or false? Are moral judgments expressions of feelings? Are they objective or subjective? Are we rationally required to be moral? Are there moral facts? How are moral and aesthetic judgments different?

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**The department**Prereq: 8 credits in Philosophy.**Advisory: This course presupposes a strong background in philosophy. Prior coursework in ethics and logic is recommended.***PHIL-350 Topics in Philosophy****PHIL-350FR Topics in Philosophy: 'Freedom and Responsibility'***Spring. Credits: 4*

Is free will possible if all our actions are causally determined? Might we be justified in blaming, praising, rewarding, or punishing people even if their actions are not free? Abstract metaphysical questions about freedom intersect in important ways with everyday problems in our relationships with others and our attitudes about moral ignorance, addiction, and madness. This course will examine these issues side by side in the hope of improving our understanding of freedom and responsibility.

*Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**E. Vavova**Prereq: 8 credits from the Philosophy department.***PHIL-350MA Topics in Philosophy: 'Mind and Action'***Spring. Credits: 4*

Our minds can direct and control our bodies. See for yourself: if you decide to lift your arm, and try to do it, your arm will probably go up! This course is about the relationship between our minds, bodies, and behavior. What is the mind? How did it make your arm go up? How is lifting your arm different from an involuntary muscle spasm? The answers are not as straightforward as you might think. We confront powerful arguments that the mind is not reducible to the brain or any part of the body. We explore how philosophers and neuroscientists think about the difference between intentional behaviors, like lifting your arm, and unintentional movements, like tics, twitches, and yawns.

*Crosslisted as: NEURO-309MA**Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**A. Ali**Prereq: 8 credits in Philosophy, or 4 credits in Philosophy and 4 credits in Neuroscience and Behavior.***PHIL-351 Systematic Study of One Philosopher****PHIL-351KA Systematic Study of One Philosopher: 'Kant'***Not Scheduled for This Year. Credits: 4*

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**The department**Prereq: PHIL-202 and one additional Philosophy course.***PHIL-353 Topics in Social Philosophy****PHIL-353RC Topics in Social Philosophy: 'The Philosophy of Recognition'***Fall. Credits: 4*

Since the 1960s, many social movements for justice, equality, and inclusion in our world have taken the form of struggles for recognition (e.g., antiracism, feminism, multiculturalism, LGBT activism, etc.). What is recognition in this sense and conversely misrecognition, i.e., the sort of harm or injustice done to someone or certain populations of people by failing or choosing not to recognize them? How can (mis)recognition show up and be theorized both as a matter of how people are socially constituted and how they should treat one another? We will discuss readings (among others) from Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Hannah Arendt, Iris Young, Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth, Nancy Fraser, and Patchen Markell.

*Crosslisted as: CST-349RC, GNDST-333RC**Applies to requirement(s): Humanities**J. Koo**Restrictions: Course limited to sophomores, juniors and seniors**Prereq: One prior course at the 200 level in philosophy, politics, sociology, critical social thought, or gender studies.***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-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. Credits: 4

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. When, if ever, are movies immoral? Should certain movies be censored? Should we withhold praise from morally objectionable movies?

Crosslisted as: FLMST-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

PHIL-395 Independent Study

Fall and Spring. Credits: 1 - 8

The department

Instructor permission required.