

Course Descriptions

Spring 2017



Boston University College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
Department of Philosophy

Updated: 1/9/17 10:22 AM

Undergraduate Courses

CAS PH 100 A1

Introduction to Philosophy

Professor Michaela McSweeney

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 12:20PM-1:10PM

This course is centered around questions about people (or 'persons'): what is it to be a person, and how should people, and do people, interact with the rest of the world? We will examine questions that arise about persons in many different areas of philosophy.

We'll ask epistemological questions—questions about knowledge. How can we know, for example, that other people, or the external world, exists? How can we know anything at all?

We'll also ask metaphysical questions: what is it to be a person, and to persist as the same person over time? What is it to be authentic to ourselves?

We'll also ask moral questions about persons: What is it to be mentally ill? How should we treat mental illness and the mentally ill? When, if ever, is punishment justified? When are we morally responsible for our actions?

We'll also ask political questions about persons: questions about how we should organize ourselves, our societies, and our governments.

Carries humanities divisional credit in CAS.

CAS PH 100 B1

Introduction to Philosophy

Walter Hopp

Tuesday, Thursday 12:30PM-1:45PM

This class will cover three major philosophical topics. The first is wellbeing. What does it take for a human life to go well? How is wellbeing connected with pleasure? With moral virtues? Is a person's wellbeing determined entirely by the totality of his or her experiences? Are the criteria of human wellbeing objective? The second topic is knowledge. What are the limits of our knowledge? How is knowledge acquired? Do we have any direct access to a mind-independent world? The third is the existence, or not, of God. What reasons are there for supposing that God exists? Can the existence of God be reconciled with the widespread presence of natural and moral evil in the world? What connections might there be between God's existence or nonexistence and human wellbeing?

CAS PH 150 A1**Introduction to Ethics**

Professor Benjamin Crowe

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1:25PM-2:15PM

How ought I to live? What is the good life? What are the qualities that make a person good? Are all people self-interested, or is altruism possible? How can we evaluate moral judgments? Ethics is the enterprise of disciplined reflection on questions like these. In the first half of this course, we begin by examining both classic and contemporary philosophical approaches to these topics. In the second half of the course, we will investigate skeptical and feminist criticisms of these approaches, as well a prominent non-European (i.e., Confucian) stream of moral philosophy.

CAS PH 150 B1**Introduction to Ethics**

Professor Susanne Sreedhar

Tuesday, Thursday 11:00AM-12:15PM

What is morality? What does morality require of us in our daily lives? We look both at theories that specify what morality requires of us and at specific moral issues to which these theories apply. Carries humanities divisional credit in CAS.

CAS PH 150 C1**Introduction to Ethics**

Professor Derek Anderson

Tuesday, Thursday 9:30AM-10:45AM

Why should a person care about morality? Is there an objective fact about what is right or wrong, or is morality subjective? What is it for something to be good? How must a person act in order to be moral? We will investigate several theoretical approaches to these questions and discuss the reasons for and against embracing them. We will also put these theories to work in our discussions of some of the ethical problems we face in our actual society. The second half of the course will focus on applied ethics—we will engage with topics such as drug criminalization, policing, mass incarceration, reparations for slavery, decolonization, and racism in the United States.

CAS PH 160 A1

Reason and Argumentation

Professor Tian Yu Cao

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9:05AM-9:55AM

The course is designed to introduce students to the *principles* of reasoning and argumentation, and to formal *models* for eliciting underlying patterns and structures of reasoning and argumentation, which can be used to develop *skills* in actual reasoning and argumentation in different fields of inquiry and in different walks of life. These skills, including argument analysis, argument pattern recognition, argument construction, argument evaluation and the writing of argumentative essays, are crucial for success in everyday life and in all academic disciplines. Particular attention will be paid to how to avoid mistakes (“fallacies”) and how to make good arguments, that is how to reason more reflectively and effectively, with careful analysis of examples taken from everyday life and from various academic disciplines

CAS PH 160 B1

Reason and Argumentation

Professor Derek Anderson

Tuesday, Thursday 11:00AM-12:15PM

Understanding reasoning and argumentation is important for the sake of one’s own personal intellectual life, but it is also central to the process of social change. In order to achieve a more just society, we need to reason together and argue with one another in ways that facilitate change of belief in the direction of knowledge and social justice. In this course, we will study reasoning and argumentation from a socially engaged, intersectional perspective. We will establish a basic theoretical framework for thinking about logic and valid arguments. We will then engage with arguments that arise in public discourse over social, political, and ethical issues, focusing on the logic of testimony, presupposition, and what is logically required for changes of belief.

CAS PH 247 A1

Introduction to Chinese Philosophy

Professor Benjamin Crowe

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 2:30PM-3:20PM

The classical period in China’s ancient philosophical tradition is sometimes known as the *baijia*, or “Hundred Schools” era, a name that vividly conveys the richness, vitality, and plurality of the philosophical scene. In this course, we will explore some of the principal texts and figures of the time, including Kongzi (Confucius) (c. 551-479 BCE), Mozi (c. 480-390 BCE), Mengzi (Mencius) (4th century BCE), Zhuangzi (late 4th century BCE), and Xunzi (late 4th-early 3rd century BCE). Ancient Chinese thinkers engaged in profound investigations and lively debates centered on the “Way” (*dao*), i.e., the pattern of a life well lived. Topics discussed will range across the nature of moral virtues, political and social order, music, religious ritual, moral education, the ethics of war, and the fundamental character of human nature itself. Carries humanities divisional credit in CAS.

CAS PH 248 A1**Existentialism**

Professor Paul Katsafanas

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 3:35PM-4:25PM

The existentialists grappled with some of the most difficult and problematic aspects of the human condition. Is it possible to lead a meaningful life? Might life be unavoidably absurd? What is it to be an authentic individual? Can you be alienated from yourself? Can the way in which we are seen by others limit our freedom? Does modernity foster nihilism? Do certain emotional experiences reveal otherwise hidden features of life? In this course, we will explore the ways in which Fyodor Dostoevsky, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Frantz Fanon, and Albert Camus responded to these questions.

CAS PH 251 A1**Medical Ethics**

Professor Russell Powell

Tuesday, Thursday 2:00PM-3:15PM

Explores moral philosophical issues that arise in connection with medicine and emerging biotechnologies. Examines topics such as the right to healthcare, research ethics, euthanasia, abortion, concepts of death and disease, and assisted reproductive technologies. Carries humanities divisional credit in CAS.

CAS PH 256 A1**Philosophy of Gender and Sexuality**

Professor Susanne Sreedhar

Tuesday, Thursday 2:00PM-3:15PM

This course explores philosophical questions that arise about gender and sexuality. What is sexism? What is oppression? What is the correct response to sexism and oppression? How many sexes are there? How many genders? What is sexual orientation? What is sexual perversion? What are sexual ethics, including questions about the value and status of monogamy, polyamory, promiscuity, and adultery? What are the moral status of practices such as sex work and pornography?

Assignments include answering study questions for each class and four essay exams.

Carries humanities divisional credit in CAS. Also offered as CAS PO 396 and CAS WS 396.

CAS PH 261 A1**Puzzles and Paradoxes**

Professor Judson Webb

Tuesday, Thursday 12:30-1:45PM

Our basic beliefs, when scrutinized, can yield absurd conclusions. For example, using seemingly uncontroversial beliefs, we can conclude that motion is impossible and that everyone is bald. This course examines many puzzles and paradoxes. Carries humanities divisional credit in CAS.

CAS PH 266 A1**Mind, Brain, and Self**

Professor Walter Hopp

Tuesday, Thursday 9:30AM-10:45AM

This course is devoted to considering some of the philosophical problems that arise when we consider the nature of consciousness. What is consciousness? What are some of the key or defining features of consciousness? Can all of those features be explained in physical terms? In what ways might consciousness depend (or not) on our being embodied in an environment? In this class, we will carefully examine what some of philosophy's best and brightest historical and contemporary figures have to say about these issues.

CAS PH 272 A1**Science, Technology, and Values**

Professor Alisa Bokulich

Tuesday, Thursday 11:00AM-12:15PM

The goal of this course is to come to a deeper and more reflective understanding of the nature of science and technology, their ethical implications, and their impact on society. As citizens, business people, and policy makers we cannot afford to be ignorant of the developments in science and technology. As scientists, engineers, or healthcare professionals—or even simply as consumers—we cannot afford to be ignorant of the ethical, social and political implications of our practices. In this course we shall examine some of the important ways in which science, technology, society, and values are interconnected. The course will include case studies of particular technologies such as nuclear technology, prescription drugs, GM crops, nanotechnology, smartphones, and surveillance technologies.

CAS PH 300 A1**History of Ancient Philosophy**

Professor Marc Gasser-Wingate

Tuesday, Thursday 12:30PM-1:45PM

A survey of ancient Greek philosophy, with an emphasis on Plato and Aristotle. Topics will include: the fundamental nature of reality, how we know anything about it, wisdom, virtue, and human happiness.

CAS PH 300 B1**History of Ancient Philosophy**

Professor Marc Gasser-Wingate

Tuesday, Thursday 9:30AM-10:45AM

A survey of ancient Greek philosophy, with an emphasis on Plato and Aristotle. Topics will include: the fundamental nature of reality, how we know anything about it, wisdom, virtue, and human happiness.

CAS PH 310 A1**History of Modern Philosophy**

Professor Charles Griswold

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 1:25PM-2:15PM

This course offers an examination of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy, with emphasis on the nature and extent of knowledge (including our knowledge of the existence of the external world), the nature of personal identity, the problem of free will, and the theological problem of evil. The complicated and surprising dialectic between empiricist, rationalist, and idealist views will be a topic throughout, as will the relation between science, religion, and philosophy. Readings from Descartes, Locke, Leibniz, Berkeley, and Hume, among others. Time permitting, we will also read some contemporary articles that pick up on some of the themes we have discussed.

CAS PH 310 B1

History of Modern Philosophy

Professor Daniel Dahlstrom

Tuesday, Thursday 12:30PM-1:45PM

What, if anything, makes it appropriate to designate a certain kind of thinking “modern”? With this question in mind, this course begins by tracing the rise of modernity in Europe in terms of five rubrics: *art* (e.g., Flemish primitives, the Italian Renaissance), *religion* (e.g., the Reformation), *science and technology* (e.g., Galileo’s telescope), *economics* (e.g., Marco Polo, trading companies, the banking system, the concentration of capital, and the development of colonialism), and *politics* (e.g., the distinction of public and private in the work of Machiavelli, Montaigne, and Hobbes).

Following the sketch of this historical backdrop, the course pursues its main purpose of introducing students to European philosophical thinking from 1600 to 1900 and its ongoing legacies in the present. To that end, the course focuses on the following representative studies in modern philosophy:

Descartes’ *meditations on first philosophy*, with its accounts of radical doubt, the proofs for the existence of God, the difference between imagining and thinking, and the real distinction of body and soul;

Hume’s *enquiry concerning human understanding*, with its account of impressions and ideas, belief and causation, the verbal dispute over liberty and necessity, and the advantages of a mitigated skepticism;

Kant’s *prolegomena to any future metaphysics*, with its account of pure intuitions and concepts, analytic and synthetic as well as a priori and a posteriori judgments, and what makes mathematics and physics possible; and

Nietzsche’s *genealogy of morals*, with its account of the origins of “good,” “bad,” and “evil,” the role of resentment in traditional morality, and the link between conscience, guilt, and cruelty.

CAS PH 340 A1

Metaphysics and Epistemology

Professor Michaela McSweeney

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 2:30PM-3:20PM

Metaphysical questions are questions about the nature of reality: what is reality really like? What exists? How do the different things that exist relate to each other? Epistemological questions are questions about knowledge: what is it to know something? How can we know things? This course is about both metaphysics and epistemology, and, importantly, their intersection: how can we know anything about what reality is really like? Can we know anything about reality beyond what we can observe? Can we even directly observe reality?

CAS PH 350 A1**History of Ethics**

Professor Benjamin Crowe

Monday, Wednesday, Friday 10:10AM-11:00AM

In this course we will examine major fault lines in the history of moral philosophy. From the ancient period, we will focus on the centuries-long battle between Epicureans and Stoics regarding the highest good, moral psychology, and other key issues. From the modern era, we will explore the moral philosophies of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill, whose central ideas are still contested by loyal partisans to this day. Finally, we will look at the moral perfectionism and social ethics of two major thinkers in the British Idealist tradition, T.H. Green and F.H. Bradley, who criticized both the Kantian and utilitarian positions, and whose work set the stage for the subsequent development of moral theorizing in much of the English-speaking world.

CAS PH 360 A1 (Cross GRS PH 633)**Symbolic Logic**

Professor Juliet Floyd

Tuesday, Thursday 12:30PM-1:45PM

An introductory survey of the concepts and principles of symbolic logic: valid and invalid arguments, logical relations of statements and their basis in structural features of statements, analysis of the logical structure of complex statements of ordinary discourse, and the use of a symbolic language to display logical structure and to facilitate methods for assessing the logical structure of arguments. We will cover the analysis of reasoning with truth-functions (“and”, “or”, “not”, “if ... then”) and with quantifiers (“all”, “some”), attending to formal languages and axiomatic systems for logical deduction. Throughout, we aim to clearly and systematically display both the theory underlying the norms of valid reasoning and their applications to particular problems of argumentation. The course is an introduction to first-order quantificational logic, a key tool underlying work in foundations of mathematics, philosophy of language and mind, philosophy of science and parts of syntax and semantics. It is largely mathematical and formal in character, but lectures will situate these structures within the context of questions raised in contemporary philosophy of language and mind.

CAS PH 408 A1**History of Medieval Philosophy**

Professor Diana Lobel

Tuesday, Thursday 2:00PM-3:15PM

Topic TBA; Also meets with RN338 and RN638

CAS PH 413 A1 (Cross PH 613)**Kant**

Professor Judson Webb

Tuesday, Thursday 3:30PM-4:45PM

A study of Kant's critical philosophy, focusing on one or more of his works

CAS PH 424 A1 (Cross PH 624)**Wittgenstein**

Professor Juliet Floyd

Thursday 3:30PM-6:15PM

An intensive study of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, with contemporary philosophical problems in mind and some attention to Wittgenstein's overall development. Themes covered include the nature of concept-possession, normativity, rule-following, occasion sensitivity, the structure of as-phrases, relativism, conventionalism, and the scope and character of logic. Faculty visitors to the Boston Early Analytic Philosophy Workshop will present works in progress.

CAS PH 443 A1 (Cross PH 643)**Philosophy of Mind**

Professor Tian Yu Cao

Wednesday 2:30-5:15PM

The aim of the course is to provide a comprehensive philosophical background as well as a neuro-scientific perspective in the understanding of mind. Various positions on the nature of mind, such as dualism, materialism, functionalism, will be reviewed; debates on the mental content and mental causation will be critically examined; the nature of consciousness, qualia and subjectivity, as well as the explanatory gap, will be explored from a neuro-scientific perspective.

CAS PH 452 A1 (Cross PH 652)**Ethics of Health Care**

Professor Russell Powell

Tuesday, Thursday 11:00AM-12:15PM

Medicine and health care offer a unique opportunity to explore the nature of humanity and the world and to ask fundamental questions concerning the nature of birth, life, and death, and what it is to be a person. Readings from both classical and contemporary writings in ethics, medicine, law, and public health policy.

CAS PH 454 A1**Community, Liberty, and Morality**

Professor Charles Griswold

Monday, Wednesday 4:30PM-6:15PM

Does a free community require shared values? Does political liberty require a shared conception of virtue? Furthermore, must political liberty be sustained by a communal religious outlook—and if so, which one? Alternatively, if multiple religious views are permitted in a free society, how is a regime of mutual toleration to be established and how is religious liberty to be defined? Is the cause of civic virtue and liberty better served by a sort of free market of religions rather than a state-enforced civic religion? And finally, how can rival religious and secular claims about the foundations of political authority be negotiated in a free community? This seminar focuses on these and related questions concerning the role that religion should play in a free and peaceful society. Readings are drawn from a variety of classical and contemporary thinkers. The seminar emphasizes class discussion and participation.

This seminar is open only to undergraduate students. Prerequisites: two prior philosophy courses or the permission of the instructor.

CAS PH 462 A1 (Cross PH 662)**Foundations of Mathematics**

Professor Akihiro Kanamori

Tuesday, Thursday 11:00AM-12:15PM

Axiomatic set theory as a foundation for, and field of, mathematics: Axiom of Choice, the Continuum Hypothesis, and consistency results. Also offered as CAS MA 532.

CAS PH 480 A1 (Cross PH 680)**Topics in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy**

Professor David Roochnik

Tuesday 6:30PM-9:15PM

Philosophy v. Rhetoric

The “old quarrel” between philosophy and rhetoric, which originated in Plato’s attack on the sophists, is a battle between two fundamentally opposing worldviews. One maintains that there is a single, objective truth that is independent of mind, language, and perspective; the other that human beings are inextricably situated in particular and contingent contexts that we neither can nor should attempt to transcend. Are we, then, creatures of *doxa* (“opinion, belief, appearance”) or should we aspire to knowledge of what really is? As Stanley Fish rightly says, “the history of Western thought could be written as the history of this quarrel.” Indeed, a great deal of 20th century thought, notably the works of Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty, represents the resurgence of the rhetorical view of human existence in our time.

This course will examine the old quarrel by examining its origins. We will begin with the writings of the 5th century Greek Sophists, Protagoras and Gorgias. Next, we will examine the Platonic response to their thinking in the two dialogues he named after them. Our third chapter will examine the 4th century rebuttal offered by the rhetorical side; in particular, the work of Isocrates. Finally, we will ask whether this dispute can be resolved or, as Fish thinks, will it invariably take the form of a “tug-of-war between two views of human life and its possibilities, no one of which can ever gain complete and lasting ascendancy because in the very moment of its triumphant articulation each turns back in the direction of the other?”

CAS PH 487 A1 (Cross PH 687)**Topics in the Philosophy of Science**

Professor Alisa Bokulich

Tuesday, Thursday 2:00PM-3:15PM

This course is a discussion-based introduction to core issues in the philosophy of science, focusing on the topics of scientific realism, theory change, reductionism, explanation, models, and natural kinds. Questions we’ll explore include the following: Could all of the scientific theories we are taught today turn out to be false? How does a scientific theory come to be rejected and a new theory take its place? Why, for example, did astronomers decide that Pluto is not a planet? Could all of human behavior be ultimately explained by the laws of physics? What distinguishes a good scientific explanation from a bad one? How can idealized scientific models that make all sort of false assumptions nonetheless make true predictions? Has our scientific understanding of the world forced us to revise our philosophical conception of natural kinds?

Related Courses

Professor Judith Swanson

Tuesday, Thursday 3:30PM-4:45PM

How should we organize our collective lives? This course considers that fundamental political question with the help of insights put forth by political philosophers, from Plato to those writing today. Themes include freedom, equality, justice, rights, religion, economy, and ecology. Carries social science divisional credit in CAS. This course cannot be taken for credit in addition to the course by the same title that was previously numbered CAS PO 291.

Graduate Courses

CAS PH 613 A1 (Cross PH 413)

Kant

Professor Judson Webb

Tuesday, Thursday 3:30PM-4:45PM

A study of Kant's critical philosophy, focusing on one or more of his works

CAS PH 624 A1 (Cross PH 424)

Wittgenstein

Professor Juliet Floyd

Thursday 3:30PM-6:15PM

An intensive study of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, with contemporary philosophical problems in mind and some attention to Wittgenstein's overall development. Themes covered include the nature of concept-possession, normativity, rule-following, occasion sensitivity, the structure of as-phrases, relativism, conventionalism, and the scope and character of logic. Faculty visitors to the Boston Early Analytic Philosophy Workshop will present works in progress.

CAS PH 633 A1 (Cross PH 360)

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Professor Tian Yu Cao

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CAS PH 652 A1 (Cross PH 452)**Ethics of Health Care**

Professor Russell Powell

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Medicine and health care offer a unique opportunity to explore the nature of humanity and the world and to ask fundamental questions concerning the nature of birth, life, and death, and what it is to be a person. Readings from both classical and contemporary writings in ethics, medicine, law, and public health policy.

CAS PH 662 A1 (Cross PH 462)**Foundations of Mathematics**

Professor Akihiro Kanamori

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Axiomatic set theory as a foundation for, and field of, mathematics: Axiom of Choice, the Continuum Hypothesis, and consistency results. Also offered as CAS MA 532.

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Professor David Roochnik

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Philosophy v. Rhetoric

The “old quarrel” between philosophy and rhetoric, which originated in Plato’s attack on the sophists, is a battle between two fundamentally opposing worldviews. One maintains that there is a single, objective truth that is independent of mind, language, and perspective; the other that human beings are inextricably situated in particular and contingent contexts that we neither can nor should attempt to transcend. Are we, then, creatures of *doxa* (“opinion, belief, appearance”) or should we aspire to knowledge of what really is? As Stanley Fish rightly says, “the history of Western thought could be written as the history of this quarrel.” Indeed, a great deal of 20th century thought, notably the works of Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty, represents the resurgence of the rhetorical view of human existence in our time.

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CAS PH 687 A1 (Cross PH 487)**Topics in the Philosophy of Science**

Professor Alisa Bokulich

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GRS PH 819 A1**Ethics**

Professor Paul Katsafanas

Friday 11:15AM-2:00PM

This course will examine moral psychology with a particular focus on the moral psychology of fanaticism. The first part of the course will provide a foundation in central topics in moral psychology, including the action/behavior distinction, the nature of motivation, and the nature of deliberative and self-conscious agency. The second part will focus on two connected topics in moral psychology: fanaticism and sacred values. Fanaticism is typically defined as excessively enthusiastic and uncritical devotion to some ideal. We'll ask whether that's an adequate account. We'll also investigate philosophical puzzles that arise in attempting to account for fanaticism and its connection to non-fanatical moral judgment. Sacred values are values that the agent treats as inviolable and which generate a characteristic set of powerful emotions (dread, reverence, etc.). We'll ask how sacred values differ from ordinary values and how they connect to debates about moral overridingness. In general, we'll explore the ways in which these underappreciated topics in moral psychology bear on moral philosophy more generally. Most of the readings will be from contemporary sources, though we'll also read a bit of Hume, Kant, Durkheim, and some early modern writings on enthusiasm.

GRS PH 820 A1**Contemporary Philosophy**

Professor Daniel Dahlstrom

Monday 2:30PM-5:15PM

This course examines Heidegger's readings of Nietzsche before and after the war (in *European Nihilism* and *What is called 'thinking'?* respectively), as well as major objections to his thinking raised by some of his most prominent critics (including Levinas, Adorno, Derrida, and Rorty).

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GRS PH 994 A1**Placement Proseminar**

Professor Paul Katsafanas

Wednesday 6:30PM-9:15PM

A continuation of GRS PH 993. A workshop seminar offering advanced graduate students the opportunity to present and discuss work-in-progress (dissertation chapters, papers for job applications, journal submissions). A serious commitment to regular and continuing attendance is expected.