

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY
PHILOSOPHY
Course Brochure
Summer 2020, Fall 2020, and Winter 2021



The Oakland University philosophy department offers a wide range of courses that are of interest not only to philosophy majors, but also to any student who is studying at the University.

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

PHILOSOPHY

Introductory Courses

PHL 1000: Introduction to Logic

Schedule: Many sections

General Education: Formal Reasoning

Course Description:

The relationship between conclusions and statements given in support of them. In addition to elementary deductive and inductive logic, topics may include analysis of ordinary arguments, argument by analogy and informal fallacies.

PHL 1070: Introduction to Symbolic Logic

Schedule: Many sections

General Education: Formal Reasoning

Course Description:

Formal or symbolic logic is a study of what makes deductive arguments valid, employing symbols to represent sentences, words, phrases, etc. in order to reveal the formal structure of the arguments.

PHL 1100: Introduction to Philosophy

Schedule: Many sections

General Education: Western Civilization

Course Description:

Study of the main types and problems of Western philosophy. Readings are chosen to illustrate the development of Western thought from the ancient Greeks to the present.

PHL 1300: Introduction to Ethics

Schedule: Many sections

General Education: Western Civilization

Course Description:

Major ethical analyses of right and wrong, good and evil, from the ancient Greeks to the present. Appeals to custom, theology, happiness, reason, and human nature will be examined as offering viable criteria for judgments on contemporary issues of moral concern.

PHL 1310: Introduction to Ethics in Science and Engineering

Schedule: Many sections

General Education: Western Civilization

Course Description:

Survey of canonical works in the history of Western ethical theory providing students a critical understanding of a plurality of viable ideas, principles, and criteria by which to evaluate and judge contemporary issues of ethical concern in the practice of science and engineering.

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

PHILOSOPHY

Intermediate Courses

PHL 2200: Ancient Greek Philosophy

General Education: Writing Intensive in the Major, Writing Intensive in General Education,
Knowledge Applications

Course Description:

Development of philosophical thought in Greece, from its beginning around 600 B.C.E. to the Hellenistic period. Emphasis on Plato and Aristotle.

PHL 2200: Medieval Philosophy

General Education: Writing Intensive in the Major, Writing Intensive in General Education,
Knowledge Applications

Course Description:

Survey of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic medieval philosophy.

PHL 2220: Early Modern Philosophy

General Education: Writing Intensive in the Major, Writing Intensive in General Education,
Knowledge Applications

Course Description:

Development of philosophical thought in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. Emphasis on Descartes, Locke, Hume and Kant.

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

PHILOSOPHY

Upper-Level Courses Summer 2020

PHL 3610: Philosophy of International Relations: Law, War, and Peace

Instructor: Mark Rigstad

Course Description:

Considers competing theories of global ethics, diplomacy, international law, just warfare, nationalism, military duty, disarmament, pacifism, non-violent resistance, civil strife, and terrorism.

Upper-Level Courses Fall 2020

PHL 3000: Advanced Symbolic Logic

Instructor: Sharon Berry

Course Description:

Predicate logic is a crucial tool for many branches of philosophy, including metaphysics, ontology (the study of what there is), and philosophy of language, and it provides necessary background for postgraduate study of philosophy. In this class we'll study first order logic, including proofs and basic model theory, and modal logic (the logic of possibility and necessity). Depending on interest, the first half of class may also include some MCAT/LSAT logic question prep. Students who did well in PHL 1000 or PHL 1070 (and those with a taste for mathematics or puzzle solving) will likely enjoy this class.

PHL 3120: Philosophy of Law

Instructor: Mark Navin

Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to some of the central philosophical problems and questions in law. We will first look at some questions about legal reasoning: What do judges do – or what should they do – when they reason about the law? What are the roles of particular cases, statutes, precedents, and other rules in judicial reasoning? How and when does legal reasoning need to rely on worked-out philosophical ideas? We will also explore some general philosophical questions about the status of law: How does law relate to morality? Are unjust laws valid laws? We will then examine some theoretical issues about particular areas of the law: Which ideas about intent or consent are appropriate to the law of contract? How does the law create and respond to property rights? What is the role of morality and responsibility in the criminal law? What are the appropriate conceptions of responsibility and negligence for the law of torts? We will finish the course by reading a monograph that addresses many of the topics we have covered throughout the semester.

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

PHILOSOPHY

Upper-Level Courses Fall 2020 (continued)

PHL 3150: Philosophy of Religion

Instructor: Daniel Propson

Course Description:

For as long as there have been human beings, there has been discussion of the divine. Religious stories myths address certain central aspects in the human condition: our helplessness, our “thrownness”, our ignorance, our imagination, and our sense of justice. In this course, we seek to understand the religious impulse from a philosophical perspective, asking questions like, “What role does religion play in helping us understand the world or ourselves?” and “How does one attach a stable purpose or meaning to one’s own life?” We will address these questions from a (for lack of a better word) existential perspective, but we will also address a number of standard analytic questions about philosophy of religion. Is there a God? What is the nature of religious knowledge? How can divine entities be good, if our world is full of such suffering and evil? In this class, we will work together to try to get a handle on what religion is and why (or whether) it matters.

PHL 3155: Philosophies and Religions of Asia

Instructor: Joshua Blanchard

Course Description:

This course introduces students to some of the primary texts and major themes of classical Chinese and Indian philosophical thought. The work will be both historical and topical, as students will need to both interpret difficult historical texts in multiple genres and engage in first-order philosophical reflection on perennial topics, including the philosophy of human nature, the limits of human knowledge, the foundations of logic, and much else. In the last part of the course, we will discuss current debates surrounding the nature of comparative philosophy and the special problems and opportunities that attend bridging the (alleged) divides between the Anglophone and Asian traditions.

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

PHILOSOPHY

Upper-Level Courses Fall 2020 (continued)

PHL 3210: Twentieth Century British and American Philosophy

Instructor: John Halpin

Course Description:

Philosophers from this century's Anglo-American tradition have often seen the study of language as fundamental to the main concerns of philosophy. So, for example, Bertrand Russell argued that a study of logic would lead us to a metaphysics of nature: "logical atomism" (~1920). Others like Carnap and Wittgenstein thought that metaphysics (= the study of ultimate reality) was a muddle; philosophy, they thought, needed to be "brought down to Earth" (1930-50). But later 20th c. philosophy was metaphysically more permissive. We will see that some of this may have led to the foundation of the metaphysics of necessity, essential properties, and mind. Still, there is concern about how so much knowledge can be had by philosophy. Philosophy, from the armchair, tells us what's real?

Central to all these philosophers' thought is the theory of reference and meaning. All readings in this course are related to this topic. But we will always try to get clear on how this study of language bears on traditional philosophical concerns. (Just to take one example, realism presupposes reference and meaning. If words failed to be significant, then the realist could not truthfully say that tables, humanity, stars, gods, numbers, or electrons are real. Yet a number of philosophers do claim that reference and meaning are nonsense: deconstructionists, postmodernists, positivists to name a few! So, theory of language significance is clearly relevant to philosophical realism.)

We will begin this course by reading from a pair of precursors to the 20th century Anglo-American tradition: John Stuart Mill and Gottlob Frege. We will go on to read from some of this century's best known British and American philosophers including Russell, Wittgenstein, Strawson, Quine, Kripke, Putnam, and Jackson. We will end with concerns of the "philosophy of philosophy", in part the study of how philosophy is possible.

TEXTS

Wittgenstein, *Blue & Brown Books*, 1958 edition, 9780061312113

Kripke, *Naming & Necessity*, 1981 edition, 9780631128014

Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules & Private Language*, 1982 edition, 9780674954014

Jackson, *From Metaphysics to Ethics*, 1998 edition, 9780198250616

Halpin (of all people!) *The Logic Café Review*

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

PHILOSOPHY

Upper-Level Courses Fall 2020 (continued)

PHL 3310: Ethics, Language, and Reality

Instructor: Fritz McDonald

General Education: Writing Intensive in the Major, Writing Intensive in General Education,
Knowledge Applications

Course Description:

Metaethics is the study of the fundamental nature of morality. Unlike normative ethical theory, metaethics is not focused on consideration of what exactly types of action are right or wrong, or what kinds of things or persons are good. This is not a course concerning specific moral issues like abortion or euthanasia, or general accounts of what makes an action moral, like virtue ethics, utilitarianism, or Kantian deontological ethics. It instead concerns a number of related topics, including: what kind of moral reality, if any, exists; how moral language functions; and what kind of moral truth and knowledge, if any, is possible. We will begin the course by reviewing metaethical themes in canonical figures in ethics such as Plato, Kant, and Nietzsche. The bulk of the course will concern metaethics in the 20th and 21st centuries. We will apply ideas from metaphysics, epistemology, and the philosophy of language to understand the status of morality. Specific topics include metaethical relativism, realism, naturalism, expressivism, and the error theory.

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

PHILOSOPHY

Upper-Level Courses Fall 2020 (continued)

PHL 3810: Consciousness and Persons

Instructor: Eric LaRock

Course Description:

This course explores central philosophical and scientific questions about the nature of consciousness and persons. What is consciousness? How does consciousness relate to the physical world? Do all characteristics of consciousness reduce to structures and functions? What is the unity of consciousness? Does consciousness reside at a specific level of neural organization? Are attention and working memory necessary for consciousness? Are some recent theories of consciousness better than others, and why? Can we learn something about the neural correlates of consciousness by discovering the neural correlates of anesthetic-induced unconsciousness? What is the difference between a philosophical zombie and an inverse zombie? Are philosophical and inverse zombies possible? What are persons? How do persons relate to their bodies? Are persons constituted by their bodies? Are persons generated by (and reducible to) their brains? Do persons persist over time? What strategies can persons deploy to enhance subjective well-being? Can persons survive biological death?

PHL 3910: Ethics Bowl

Instructors: Lisa Campbell and Mark Rigstad

Course Description:

Students selected through competitive try-outs to be members of Oakland University's Ethics Bowl teams prepare for and participate in intercollegiate competition in philosophically informed debate over controversial issues. New cases are examined each year. Instructors guide students in independent theoretical research and in the art of public speaking.

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

PHILOSOPHY

Upper-Level Courses Winter 2021

PHL 3000: Advanced Symbolic Logic

Instructor: Paul Graves

Course Description:

Advanced Symbolic Logic is of interest for its own sake: The systematic development of symbolic logic is arguably the greatest achievement of 20th Century philosophy. Symbolic logic is vital for students wishing to pursue advanced degrees in philosophy. It has applications in metaphysics, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics, computer science and even ethics and political theory. This class begins by developing predicate logic, then moves on to explore modal logic, the logic of necessity and possibility, and concludes by proving the soundness and completeness theorems for truth-functional derivations. Students who complete the course will have a solid foundation in logical theory to build upon in more advanced studies.

PHL 3110: Freedom, Agency, and Responsibility

Instructor: Joshua Blanchard

General Education: Writing Intensive in the Major, Writing Intensive in General Education

Course Description:

If a branch falls from a tree, we might "blame" the wind in the sense of attributing what philosophers call causal responsibility to the wind - the wind caused the branch to fall. But we don't morally blame it, we don't hold the wind responsible. For one thing, we don't think that the wind had any choice or agency in the matter. In this course, students will read, think, and write about how both philosophers and scientists have thought about questions of moral responsibility and freedom of the will. Questions include: what is free will anyway, and who has it? What are the conditions under which a person is appropriately held morally responsible for what happens? And is free will a necessary condition for moral responsibility? In pursuing these and related questions, students will engage with a variety of historical and contemporary sources.

PHL 3500: Bioethics

Instructor: Timothy Kirschenheiter

General Education: Western Civilization

Course Description:

Central ethical issues in modern health care and research. Included are the distribution and allocation of health resources, abortion, euthanasia, informed consent, eugenics, and much more

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

PHILOSOPHY

Upper-Level Courses Winter 2021 (continued)

PHL 3600: Political Philosophy

Instructor: Mark Navin

Course Description:

This course is an introduction to some of the major ideas of political philosophy: political authority, obedience, justice, equality, property, and democracy. We will read some historical texts, though much of our attention will be focused on 20th and early 21st century work. The course is organized around five themes: (1) Democracy and its Critics; (2) Liberty; (3) Obedience and Resistance; (4) Markets and their Limits; (5) Privacy. Each unit will explore both historical and contemporary texts to illuminate ongoing debates about core ideas in politics.

PHL 3800: Philosophy of Mind

Instructor: Eric LaRock

Course Description:

This course explores key areas in the philosophy of mind, including the mind-body problem, theories of mind, artificial intelligence, the nature of consciousness, supervenience and mental causation, emotion, and the nature of persons.

PHL 4970: Capstone—Authority

Instructor: Mark Rigstad

Course Description:

One philosophical topic or problem at an advanced level of difficulty, normally requiring considerable background in philosophy.