Department of Philosophy’s Course Descriptions

for Spring 2017 Graduate Level* Courses

*University Honors students seeking to add a graduate level PHIL class should see the professor regarding a force add.

(If marked with **, this is the instructor’s revised description of the course content; all others are the general descriptions provided from the Graduate catalog and may be updated with the instructor’s description at a later time.)

PHIL 5214G Intermediate Metaphysics
CRN: 16691 – MW 4:00p-5:15p  Instructor: Kelly Trogdon

Examination of some of the central problems of metaphysics. Topics may include: existence, necessary truth, the problem of universals, causation, the identity of the self through time, free will. Attention will be given both to the historical development of these problems and to contemporary philosophical responses to them.

PHIL 5224G Intermediate Epistemology
CRN: 16692 – MWF 12:20p-1:10p  Instructor: Nathan Rockwood

**This course aims to answer the questions “What is knowledge?” and “How do we know things?” The course will cover both historical and contemporary approaches to these questions. The historical section of the course will include discussions of Plato on the definition of knowledge, Aristotle on the foundation of knowledge, and Descartes and Hume on skeptical doubts. The contemporary section of the course will include discussions of the Gettier Problem and attempted solutions, as well as the internalism-externalism about whether knowledge and/or justified belief requires having evidence. The goal of the course is to see the historical trajectory and motivations that led to the prominent theories in contemporary epistemology and to evaluate the major views concerning the nature of knowledge.

PHIL 5324 Metaethics
CRN: 19168 – R 5:00p-7:30p  Instructor: Daniel Wodak

**We all hold beliefs about what morality forbids, requires, and permits. The moral realist holds, roughly, that some of these beliefs are true, independently of our attitudes. If we grant this to the moral realist, there are serious challenges for any explanation of how these beliefs could be justified, or amount to knowledge. In this course we will consider three of these challenges. The first concerns testimony. The second concerns the evolutionary origins of our beliefs. And the third concerns moral disagreement.

PHIL 5604G Intermediate Philosophy of Biology
CRN: 18767 – TR 12:30p-1:45p  Instructor: Benjamin Jantzen

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.
PHIL 5904  Project and Report  
CRN: 16694  
Instructor: Lydia Patton

PHIL 5974  Independent Study  
CRN: (16696, 16698, 16697, 16695) will be assigned when form is completed and turned in to Mrs. Zapata; form may be found at  
http://www.phil.vt.edu/ma/independentstudy.pdf

PHIL 5994  Research and Thesis  
CRN 16699  
Instructor: Lydia Patton

PHIL 6014  Special Topics in Philosophy  
Title: Wittgenstein  
CRN: 18764 – TR 3:30p-4:45p  
Instructor: James Klagge

**Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) is widely considered to be the most important philosopher of the 20th Century. He produced two influential yet very different philosophies in his lifetime, and he was thought by most everyone who knew him to be a genius. Though his work is often alluded to by philosophers as well as other intellectuals, it is not easily read and understood. In this course we will carefully read and study his two most significant works, the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (1921), and the Philosophical Investigations (1953), as well as a recent biography. Among the philosophical topics we will discuss are: the nature of language, the relationship between language and reality, the nature of philosophy and its relationship to science, the place of value, and the nature of thought and the mind. The aim is to give students an understanding of his main philosophical ideas, the place of his ideas in the history of philosophy, and the relationship between his life and his work.**

PHIL 6224  Distributive Justice  
CRN: 18697 – T 7:00p-9:45p  
Instructor: Michael Moehler

Influential contemporary theories of distributive justice. Social, political, ethical, and cultural dimensions of distributive questions. Utilitarianism, liberalism, libertarianism, pluralism, multiculturalism, autonomy, rights, needs, (global) egalitarianism, and (global) poverty.

**Note**: Topics courses may be repeated for credit. See the course descriptions in the graduate catalog for details, including maximum number of hours allowed.