

Philosophy

Website: Philosophy (<https://new.sewanee.edu/programs-of-study/philosophy/>)

The Department of philosophy offers students an approach to philosophical thinking that is both historical and critical and that allows students to become acquainted with the fundamental ideas and arguments of philosophers that have importantly shaped and challenged Western and non-Western civilizations. Studying philosophy at Sewanee introduces students to the ways that the intellectual movements and changes in the history of philosophy arise out of perceived dilemmas and crises within the established social, scientific, and religious traditions and presupposes that various reflective traditions have important things to say about the basic concerns of all human beings. At the same time, courses are designed to help students think critically for themselves, to defend their own beliefs, to appreciate the value of alternative beliefs, and to acquaint our students with diverse points of view.

Faculty

Professors: Conn, Moser, Peters

Associate Professor: Hopwood (Chair)

Assistant Professors: Averitt, Coates

Major

Requirements for the Major in Philosophy

The major requires successful completion of the following:

Code	Title	Semester Hours
Course Requirements		
PHIL 203	Ancient Philosophy from Homer to Augustine	4
PHIL 303	Modern Philosophy: Moral, Political, and Economic Philosophy	4
or PHIL 304	Modern Philosophy: Metaphysics and Epistemology	
PHIL 190	Informal Logic and Critical Thinking	4
or PHIL 312	Modern Logic	
Select at least three seminars from the following: ¹		12
PHIL 306	Epistemology	
PHIL 307	Political Philosophy	
PHIL 308	Metaphysics	
PHIL 309	Ethics	
Select four additional courses in philosophy (PHIL)		16
Total Semester Hours		40

Code	Title	Semester Hours
Additional Requirements		
A comprehensive examination ²		

¹

Complete during junior and senior years; any two of these seminars satisfy the writing-intensive requirement in the major. Although they remain open to non-majors, the seminars are designed for majors, and the prerequisite for these courses is at least one 200-level course in philosophy (PHIL).

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Students must complete a comprehensive examination with written and oral components.

Honors

The normal minimum requirements for honors in philosophy are: a) either an A- average in all work in the department or a pass with distinction on the comprehensive examination; or, b) an A- on the senior research paper.

Student Learning Outcomes

A student majoring in Philosophy will

1. Describe, discuss, and appraise the history of philosophy through the close reading of primary texts.
2. Accurately and charitably reconstruct the philosophical theories and arguments which are present in philosophical texts.
3. Evaluate and criticize philosophical theories and arguments in a nuanced, incisive and charitable manner.
4. Identify and appraise their own philosophical commitments; and more generally, forge these commitments into a coherent and defensible worldview.
5. Conduct independent research on an advanced topic which culminates in a public presentation and defense of their central argument.

Minor

Requirements for the Minor in Philosophy

The minor requires successful completion of the following:

Code	Title	Semester Hours
Course Requirements		
Select four courses in philosophy (PHIL)		16
Select one additional course in philosophy (PHIL) numbered 300 or above		4
Total Semester Hours		20

Courses

Philosophy Courses

PHIL 101 Topics in Philosophy (4)

Topics and themes in philosophy related to central questions of philosophy: Is there a meaning to human life? What can we know? What is the nature of reality? And how should we live? These questions are addressed through a rigorous examination of philosophical texts, works of literature, films, and contemporary issues.

PHIL 190 Informal Logic and Critical Thinking (4)

An introductory study of classical logic, symbolic logic, and informal reasoning.

PHIL 203 Ancient Philosophy from Homer to Augustine (4)

An examination of ancient thought from Homer to Augustine, involving the study of major works of ancient philosophy in the context of their historical, cultural and religious setting. Special attention is given to how ancient thinkers understood human happiness, the place of human life in the order of the universe, the nature of reality, and the limits of human knowledge and reason. Primary emphasis is on the evaluation of these thinkers' views.

PHIL 205 Freedom, Justice, and Commerce (4)

An examination, through classical and contemporary texts, of the ways in which our economic actions and interests are shaped by our political values and institutions, and also by more general considerations of justice and fairness. Special attention is given to the following questions: Do the political values cherished most highly presuppose a market economy? Or would they be better served by a socialist economy? Can a market economy flourish in the absence of these values? Which sort of economic structure is most conducive to the common good? Can a just society tolerate economic inequality?

PHIL 210 Philosophical Issues in Christianity (4)

An examination of recent philosophical work on a number of doctrines that are central to traditional Christian theology. Topics include, among others, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Resurrection, as well as the nature of God's goodness and its compatibility with the traditional doctrine of Hell, and the ethics of love.

PHIL 215 Chinese Philosophy (4)

An examination of philosophical texts of classical Confucianism and Taoism. Emphasis will be given to the cultural context of these texts and to the evaluation of the worldview they articulate.

PHIL 216 Indian Philosophy (4)

A survey of Indian philosophy from the Vedic period to the present day. Special focus is given to the dialogic relationship between Indian and European philosophy, and to the way in which colonialism in India shaped both traditions. Students are challenged to reflect critically on Western perspectives of philosophy and to consider how Indian thinkers can enrich our understanding of the discipline.

PHIL 220 The Self (4)

An analysis of the major turning points in the development of the concept of the self in Western philosophical thought. The point of the analysis is to elucidate our contemporary conception and the problems with it in order to point to a solution to these problems. In so doing, possible answers to the questions of the nature of rationality, knowledge, faith, and the meaning of life will be proposed.

PHIL 223 Philosophy of Art (4)

An investigation of artistic judgment, creation, and the work of art itself. Based on readings of works by such authors as Kant, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida, students consider art in its various manifestations, including painting, sculpture, architecture, music, dance, literature, and film.

PHIL 224 Philosophy of Film (4)

An examination of film as a philosophical mode of expression. While sometimes treated as merely a popular medium, film requires the same attentive "close reading" as that devoted to written texts. This course examines how film "works" -- that is, how its technological specificity affects how we understand and interpret its meaning philosophically. To address this issue, the course examines a combination of films, theoretical texts, and critical articles concerned with technique, genre, or individual films. Thematically, the course explores questions that bear on ethics, identity, and community.

PHIL 226 Philosophical Issues in Daoism (4)

An introduction to the classical texts of philosophical Daoism, *Zhuangzi*, and *Daodejing*, and to the classical and contemporary philosophical debates and controversies these texts have generated.

PHIL 230 Environmental Ethics (4)

Examines a wide range of controversial issues concerning the moral responsibilities of human beings toward the natural environment with special attention to competing philosophical theories on the moral status of non-human species and natural ecosystems.

PHIL 231 Nature and Reality (4)

An introductory survey of philosophical conceptions of nature, reality, and scientific inquiry from the ancient world to the present day. This course is available only to students participating in the Tahoe Semester program. *Prerequisite: Open only to students admitted to the Lake Tahoe Semester program.*

PHIL 232 Business Ethics (4)

An examination of the moral dimensions of business activity, especially within the context of a democratic society. Topics may include social and economic justice, the nature of corporations, corporate accountability, social responsibility, the morality of hiring and firing, employee rights and duties, advertising, product safety, obligations to the environment, and international business.

PHIL 235 Bioethics (4)

This course explores ethical questions arising in health care and the biological sciences, focusing on the moral dimensions of decision-making within these domains. Topics may include allocation of healthcare resources, responsibilities of doctors to patients, the distinction between killing and allowing to die, medically-assisted suicide, abortion, and the use of technologies for genetic screening and manipulation.

PHIL 251 Philosophy of Religion (4)

An examination of philosophical problems and issues which commonly attend western religious belief and practice. Major topics of inquiry include the theistic conception of God, classical and contemporary arguments for and against the existence of God, the epistemic significance of religious experience, the relationship between faith and reason, and the extent to which religious belief is undermined by the findings of modern science.

PHIL 302 Medieval Philosophy (4)

An examination of some of the major philosophical texts of the medieval period from Augustine to Aquinas, including representative works from the medieval Christian, Jewish, and Islamic traditions. This course ends with a reading of Alasdair MacIntyre's work, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, to raise the question of the validity of these medieval philosophical traditions in the pluralistic, post-modern world. Instructor permission required for first-year students. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 303 Modern Philosophy: Moral, Political, and Economic Philosophy (4)

A philosophical examination of the moral, political, and economic developments which attended the birth of modernity. Special attention is given to the following topics: the nature and source of our moral obligations; the necessity and scope of political authority; the nature and extent of our individual rights and liberties; the moral and social implications of the market economy. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 304 Modern Philosophy: Metaphysics and Epistemology (4)

An examination of the philosophical revolution that accompanied the rise of modern science and its distinctive set of philosophical problems. The following problems will be emphasized: the nature of knowledge and perception, the existence and nature of God, the existence of the material world, the nature of linguistic meaning, the mind-body relationship, and the nature of personal identity. Not open for credit to students who have already received credit for PHIL 204. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 305 Public Philosophy (4)

From philosophical discussion groups in maximum security prisons to “Ask a Philosopher” booths at subway stations, contemporary public philosophers aim to take philosophical inquiry outside of the traditional classroom setting. Students in this course consider fundamental questions about the value of philosophy and its role in public life whilst gaining hands-on experience of public philosophy projects here in our local community. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 200-level or above.*

PHIL 306 Epistemology (4)

An analysis of the philosophical problem of the nature of knowledge with specific emphasis on the problem of skepticism and solutions to that problem. *Open only to students pursuing majors in philosophy. Prerequisite: One course in philosophy numbered 200 or above.*

PHIL 307 Political Philosophy (4)

A consideration of the nature and justification of political institutions through an examination of historically classic as well as contemporary sources. Special attention is given to debates concerning the proper expression of distributive justice, and to the nature and scope of political rights and liberties. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy numbered 200 or above.*

PHIL 308 Metaphysics (4)

This historically oriented program of reading and discussion focuses on the basic issues and fundamental problems of metaphysics. Particular attention is paid to the place of metaphysics in traditional philosophical thought and to its contemporary status and significance. *Open only to students pursuing majors in philosophy. Prerequisite: One course in philosophy numbered 200 or above.*

PHIL 309 Ethics (4)

This course focuses on such approaches as Virtue Theory, Deontology, and Consequentialism, their source in classical texts, their treatment of such issues as the nature of value, the justification of action, and the psychology of moral choice, as well as on critiques of these approaches. Not open for credit to students who have previously taken PHIL 202. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy numbered 200 or above.*

PHIL 310 Faith in Philosophy and Literature (4)

A critical reading of selected philosophical and literary works which explore the nature and significance of religious faith. This course will consider how literary narrative and philosophical analysis function distinctively in the dialogue of faith and reason. Major figures will include Pascal, Hume, Kierkegaard, Walker Percy, Flannery O'Connor, and C.S. Lewis. The class will be conducted as a seminar with in-class presentations and a semester-long project.

PHIL 312 Modern Logic (4)

The aim of this course is to provide students with a working knowledge of modern logic through an examination of three increasingly powerful methods of representing the logical structure of ordinary language arguments. Emphasis on developing strategies for proving validity and invalidity.

PHIL 315 Reason, Desire, and the Good (4)

This course investigates the nature of moral reasoning through work of some of the central figures in contemporary moral philosophy. Special attention is given to the relation between reason and moral obligation, the problem of moral skepticism, and the ethical significance of love. Readings are focused on debates between contemporary philosophers including Bernard Williams, Phillipa Foot, Christina Korsgaard, and Iris Murdoch, with attention to the historical origins of these debates in the works of Plato, Aristotle, Hume, and Kant. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 321 Philosophy of Law (4)

An examination of philosophical issues surrounding the nature of law and legal reasoning. Topics to include the following: the conditions of legal validity and the viability of natural law theory; the nature of legal normativity and its relation to other public manifestations of normativity (such as morality, religion, and etiquette); the limits and conditions of human liberty; the Constitutional status of rights to privacy; and the moral and legal justification of punishment. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 322 Twentieth-Century Continental Philosophy (4)

A survey of some of the main figures and texts in twentieth-century European thought. The class is based on questions concerning the relationship between self and other, and includes readings by such figures as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Primo Levi, Emmanuel Levinas, Simone Weil, and Jacques Derrida. Novels and plays are read alongside philosophical texts, with attention given to the way in which similar themes are articulated in these different styles of writing. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 323 Contemporary Problems in Philosophical Theology (4)

A critical examination of selected writings of contemporary philosophers on key issues in philosophical theology. Special emphasis will be given to current philosophical discussion of doctrines and problems of traditional Christian thought. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 325 Plato (4)

A study of selected Platonic dialogue—especially the early and middle dialogues—together with the ethics of Socrates and the theories of knowledge, reality, and value developed by Plato. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 333 Philosophy of Disability (4)

By examining philosophical questions related to the nature of physical and cognitive disability and the challenge disability presents to many conventional views in philosophy, this course assesses: different medical, social, and philosophical models of disability; epistemological questions as related to the testimony of people with disabilities; ethical questions concerning causing and preventing disability and the relation between disability and moral standing; and metaphysical questions about the relation of cognitive disability to concepts of agency. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 337 Philosophy of Science (4)

A philosophical examination of the goals and methods of the natural sciences. Special attention is given to contemporary debates surrounding the following questions: How do we distinguish between science and non-science? What is the nature of scientific inference? How are scientific theories related to observational data? Are all natural sciences reducible to physics? What is the ontological status of unobservable, theoretical entities? How should we understand the relation between science and religion?. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy numbered 200 or above.*

PHIL 338 Philosophy of Language (4)

An examination of central issues in the philosophy of language, such as the nature of meaning and truth, and their bearing on broader philosophical controversies. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 340 Kierkegaard (4)

An examination of the philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard through a close reading of such primary texts as *Either/Or*, *The Sickness Unto Death*, *Philosophical Fragments*, *Concluding Unscientific PostScript*, and *The Concept of Anxiety*. Prominent themes may include, among other things, Kierkegaard's conception of the self and the various types of despair that constitute a misrelation of the self; his conception of the differing aesthetic, ethical and religious spheres of existence; his critiques of modern philosophy and the modern church; and his understanding of the significance of various philosophical and religious beliefs and activities for living well. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 350 Aristotle (4)

An in-depth study of selected works by Aristotle. Students will analyze central Aristotelian concepts and arguments in order to appreciate their enduring importance for the discipline of philosophy as a whole. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 411 Wittgenstein (4)

An examination and evaluation of Wittgenstein's philosophical views through a close reading of various writings from *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* to *Philosophical Investigations*. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 415 Nietzsche (4)

Examines selected writings from *The Birth of Tragedy* to *The Will to Power*. Emphasis is given to close reading of texts and critical evaluation of their main ideas. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 426 Topics in Contemporary Philosophy (4)

An examination of contemporary debate on a selected topic such as ethical relativism, the relation of mind to body, or the nature of free will. *Prerequisite: One course in philosophy at the 100- or 200-level.*

PHIL 444 Independent Study (2 or 4)

An opportunity for advanced students to pursue topics of special interest. *Prerequisite: Instructor prerequisite override required.*