

Department of Philosophy

Professors: Louise Carroll Keeley, Nalin Ranasinghe; *Associate Professors:* J. Patrick Corrigan (Director, Rome Program 2017–19), Christian Göbel, Daniel P. Maher (Chairperson), Molly Brigid McGrath, Anthony D. Traylor; *Assistant Professors:* Veronica Roberts Ogle, Samuel A. Stoner.

MISSION STATEMENT

Philosophy is a reasoned quest for truths fundamental to all areas of inquiry. Animated by a love of ideas, philosophical inquiry attends to all that is of ultimate concern for human beings. Guided by the College's commitment to embody the complementarity of faith and reason and its broader mission, the Philosophy Department of Assumption College is founded on the ongoing engagement of its faculty and students with the Catholic intellectual tradition. We seek intellectual friendship among all who take seriously the life of the mind. Grappling with fundamental questions of human existence with an eye toward discerning the truth is an essential dimension of this tradition. Our mission is to engage students in the activity of philosophy strengthened by this tradition.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Reading texts closely and carefully in context
- Appreciating and evaluating positions in order to discern their fundamental principles
- Writing clearly, insightfully, and in a well-ordered manner
- Engaging respectfully and constructively in philosophical conversation
- Constructing and assessing arguments and evaluating their formal structures

MINOR IN PHILOSOPHY (6)

The minor in Philosophy is designed to strengthen any major, broaden the student's background, and enable the student to see his/her subject in perspective.

Required Courses (6)

- PHI 100 Socrates and the Search for Truth
- One intermediate course (from the following list)
 - PHI 151 Ethics and the Good Life
 - PHI 152 The Human Difference
 - PHI 153 The Book of Nature
 - PHI 154 God and the Philosophers
- Two courses in the history of philosophy (from two eras)
 - Ancient Philosophy (PHI 350–354)
 - Medieval Philosophy (PHI 355–359)
 - Modern Philosophy (PHI 360–369)
 - Contemporary Philosophy (PHI 370–389)
- Two further PHI courses

The minor program is planned in consultation with a member of the department, taking into consideration the student's major and interests, and subject to the approval of the Department Chairperson.

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

PHILOSOPHY (PHI)

PHI 100 SOCRATES AND THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

This course introduces students to the activity of philosophy, understood in the Socratic sense of living an examined life. Philosophy begins by questioning ordinary experience and the opinions one already holds, and it becomes a comprehensive, fundamental, and self-reflective search for the truth about the nature of human beings and the good life, the world, and God. Readings include Plato's *Apology of Socrates* and the Allegory of the Cave, as well as at least one medieval and one modern text. This course also introduces elementary principles of logical reasoning and basic distinctions of philosophic importance. It serves as the first half of a core seminar, and each section includes some direct link with the content pursued in each of the intermediate core courses in philosophy.

Staff/Three credits

PHI 151 ETHICS AND THE GOOD LIFE

Each person must confront the question, *How should I live?* In doing so, one may also wonder, Do the ends justify the means? Are intentions all that count? Is God the source of right and wrong? How important are my desires? Many things seem good that later prove to be evil or merely incomplete goods for the human being. This course uses classic texts to investigate common opinions about the human good in light of our need to distinguish apparent goods from true goods. Ultimately, what is it to live well? Texts include Aristotle's *Ethics* and readings from the utilitarian and the Kantian traditions. Prerequisite: PHI 100.

Staff/Three credits

PHI 152 THE HUMAN DIFFERENCE

Being human involves wondering what it means to be human. The human being has been understood variously to be a political animal, a rights-bearing individual, a pleasure-seeking ego, a self-conscious mind, a purely material being, and the image and likeness of God. Are we souls, bodies, selves, minds, persons, or something else? Do we share a common nature, or are we self-made individually? This course investigates contemporary views of what it means to be human in dialogue with Aristotle's interpretation of man as a rational animal at home in the cosmos and the Platonic/Augustinian view that human beings, loving and longing for something higher, are homeless and restless in the world. Prerequisite: PHI 100.

Staff/Three credits

PHI 153 THE BOOK OF NATURE

Is nature good, or is it indifferent to our well-being? Should we admire nature for its beauty and bounty, or should we master and transform it to serve our desires? Philosophy began with the discovery of nature, and modern natural science now enjoys unparalleled authority and power in the world. This course examines the modern understanding of nature as mathematical and lawful in relation to two older views it displaced: (1) Aristotle's natural kinds and their intrinsic causes; (2) nature as created by God. All living beings depend upon the order of nature, but only human beings try to understand it. Philosophical investigation of nature presupposes inquiry into human nature. Authors treated include Aristotle, Descartes, and Max Weber. Prerequisite: PHI 100.

Staff/Three credits

PHI 154 GOD AND THE PHILOSOPHERS

Is there a God? What could God be? What does God have to do with us? What is the role of reason in relation to faith? This course examines several ways that philosophers have thought about the divine: its existence and its relation to the world and to human beings. It considers classic arguments for the existence of God and various challenges to theism, such as those made in the name of science and the problem of evil. Included among the readings are the "Five Ways" of Thomas Aquinas, Anselm's "ontological argument," and Nietzsche's "Madman" parable. Prerequisite: PHI 100.

Staff/Three credits

PHI 210 LOGIC

This course examines the principles of formal and informal reasoning. Students examine validity, soundness, deduction, induction, and probabilistic reasoning, and the relation between logical form and truth. Topics may include classical syllogistic logic, propositional logic, predicate logic, modal logic, and fallacies. The course may also examine the relations between logic and ordinary language, science, mathematics, or metaphysics. This course is required for the LEX minor. Prerequisite: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154); may be taken concurrently with intermediate course.

Staff/Three credits

PHI 220 LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP

This course investigates the kinds of love, their causes and effects, as well as the necessity, nature, forms, and properties of friendship. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Corrigan, Maher, Ogle/*Three credits*

PHI 225 INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY

This course examines the relationship between the individual and the community and the tension which exists between the achievement of private desires and the cultivation of public spiritedness for the purpose of realizing a common good. Political, social, economic, and moral dimensions of the theme will be examined in the tradition of American individualism. The pairing of duties and responsibilities with rights and liberties will be emphasized. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Ranasinghe/*Three credits*

PHI 230 PHILOSOPHY AND LITERATURE

Philosophical ideas are most often presented in the form of abstract, systematic, argumentative treatises. However, philosophical insight is not restricted to conventional philosophical discourse. Literature, with its keen discernment of the human condition and its probing of our moral situation, often presents significant philosophical insight. This course will either study a philosophical issue through a mixture of systematic, argumentative texts and literary texts or study the thought of a single author as presented in his or her argumentative and literary works. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Ranasinghe, Traylor/*Three credits*

PHI 235 PHILOSOPHY AND FILM

This course examines the implications of cinematic representation for philosophy. How do moving images and sound change traditional conceptions of representation? How is knowledge transmitted through the medium of film? How is film related to culture, politics, and social life? Can film be a new mode of philosophical expression? Film theory will be read alongside works by such cinematic greats as Bergman, Truffaut, Lee, and others. Prerequisites: PHI100 and any intermediate PHI course (151-154).

Göbel, McGrath/*Three credits*

PHI 245 REASON ANCIENT AND MODERN

Human intelligence takes many forms: common sense, mathematics, poetry, philosophy, science, engineering, and moral activity, to name a few. What, then, is our reason? What is the nature and proper use of this power at the origin of all our cultivated pursuits? The most universally acclaimed achievements of human reason have come through modern science, but this science itself gives no guidance for the use of its power. Does the contemporary critique of the modern form of reason (in the name of the environment, deconstruction, or religion) apply to reason simply? This course examines ancient and modern interpretations of human reason in core philosophical texts. Prerequisite: PHI100 and any intermediate PHI (151-154)

Maier, Stoner/*Three credits*

PHI 260 BUSINESS ETHICS

This course is a review of the main theories of ethics and justice and the application of these theories to business. This will be done by examining case studies and legal decisions involving issues of the rights and responsibilities of business with regard to the employee, the consumer, and government. Business in modern society: social responsibility and environmental issues. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and PHI 151 or permission of instructor.

Staff/*Three credits*

PHI 262 BIOMEDICAL ETHICS

This course studies moral reasoning in relation to health by surveying a series of topics appropriate to biomedical ethics. Historical medical and legal cases provide the context for close examination of practical decisions and philosophical arguments in defense of those decisions. The emphasis in the course falls on the arguments that attempt to justify and to criticize various actions. The topics treated vary, and may include assisted suicide, fertility therapies, biotechnical enhancement, abortion and perinatal care, treatment of animal and human research subjects, genetic screening, and allocation of scarce resources. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and PHI 151 or permission of instructor.

Maier/*Three credits*

PHI 265 INTRODUCTION TO PEACE STUDIES

Regrettably, conflict and its violent resolution have marked human history. At the same time, however, human beings have consistently expressed their desire for peace and proposed strategies to eliminate or at least reduce violence. This interdisciplinary course is designed to acquaint students with a variety of reflections about the causes of and remedies for violent conflict. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Göbel/*Three credits*

PHI 267 PERSON, MIND, AND BRAIN

When I meet a human being, do I encounter a person who somehow transcends the body I can see, or do I encounter a neurochemical machine that can be understood completely through the operation of its physical parts? Is the person an immaterial mind or self? Is the mind rather an illusion, where the mental acts we experience as ours—memory, imagination, choice, and so on—are really nothing but operations of the brain? This course offers a philosophical examination of attempts to understand the human being in relation to neuroscience. We consider the phenomena of personal life and engage dialectically with diverse efforts to explain the phenomena by appeal to the neural conditions that make it possible.

Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154); PHI 152 or 153 recommended.

Maher/*Three credits*

PHI 270 PHILOSOPHY OF LAW

A discussion of the classical and contemporary writings on the source of, authority, the nature and kinds of law, the interpretation of law, and theories of punishment. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Maher/*Three Credits*

PHI 290 PROPERTY AND CIVIC LIFE

What is wealth, and what is it for? Are human beings essentially greedy? We are all economic actors, but only because we are also human beings seeking the good life and citizens benefitting from and co-responsible for the shape of our communities. This course investigates what property, wealth, and business are and seeks a deeper understanding of ourselves as human beings involved in the production, exchange, distribution, and use of economic goods within our communities. Classical readings from Aristotle and Aquinas will be read in conjunction with texts from modern and contemporary thinkers (e.g., Locke, Smith, Marx, Hayek, Sen). Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

McGrath/*Three credits*

PHI 340 METAPHYSICS

The course examines the aim and subject of that wisdom which is the goal of all philosophical activity. It examines the kind of experience necessary for pursuing this wisdom. Topics include: the search for first causes, the before and after of what is, how the human being is towards truth and the principle for finding the road to follow in science. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Maher, McGrath, Traylor/*Three credits*

PHI 345 SPECIAL TOPICS IN PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES

This course offers a study at an advanced level of a philosophical issue not covered by other thematic courses. Topic changes according to the interest of the professor and needs of students. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Staff/*Three credits*

PHI 350 PLATO

This course undertakes a detailed reading and discussion of several major dialogues of Plato with numerous references to selected parts in other dialogues. Plato's positions on the nature and purpose of philosophy, as well as his tentative answers to the central questions of philosophy, will be contrasted with those of some other philosophers. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Corrigan, Ranasinghe/*Three credits*

PHI 351 PLATO'S REPUBLIC

What is justice? Treating others justly is good for them, but is it good for the just person? Would it be better to be unjust, provided one can get away with it? Plato's *Republic* begins with these vital questions and leads readers to examining, e.g., the nature of the

soul, the city, the divine, knowledge, ethics, happiness, politics, poetry, and metaphysics in their interrelations. While some understand this book to depict an ideal city, others see it as a defense of despotism, and still others regard it as ironic or anti-political. This course helps students learn to read this inexhaustibly fertile text, to ponder the questions it raises, and to appreciate the power of a great book to enliven enduring questions. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI (151-154).

Ranasinghe, Stoner/*Three credits*

PHI 354 SPECIAL TOPICS IN ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

This course studies a figure or school of philosophy not treated by other history of philosophy courses covering the Ancient period. It fulfills the Area 1 History of Philosophy Requirement for Philosophy Majors and Minors. "Focus in the History of Philosophy" courses are foundational to the Philosophy major. Texts, issues and positions of the past are studied for more than merely their antiquarian interest. Philosophizing well requires coming to grips with the ideas and continued significance of major thinkers in the tradition. These courses are not "survey" courses; they focus upon key figures or philosophical issues characteristic of the period. With the help of the professor, students cultivate the art of independent philosophical research and writing, leading to the completion of a substantive essay characterized by a style appropriate to professional philosophical writing and argumentation. In keeping with the tradition of the Department, each year senior majors present a paper from one of their history of philosophy courses to their peers and the faculty in the Philosophy Department. Fall Semester. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Staff/*Three credits*

PHI 355 AUGUSTINE AND AQUINAS

The new intellectual environment of philosophy in medieval times will be investigated through a study of the writings of two of the greatest thinkers of the West. Of particular interest will be the union of and tension between the wisdom of the philosophers and the wisdom of the Scriptures present in each author's work. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Göbel, McGrath/*Three credits*

PHI 356 SEEK AND FIND: AUGUSTINE SEMINAR

The course offers an introduction to the life and thought of Augustine, whose philosophy resides at the heart of an Assumptionist education. Augustine was a constant seeker: his personal quest for truth and truthfulness did not end when he found God. The course offers a close reading of Augustine's own account of this spiritual journey in the *Confessions*, one of the most influential books in Western intellectual history. We will further explore important topics addressed in the *Confessions*—Augustine's analysis of the human condition (our "restless heart" and 'metaphysical nature'), self, freedom, evil, happiness, truth, love, God, faith and reason, education, social engagement, a Christian existence, etc.—through the study of other works by Augustine and authors in the 'Augustinian tradition'. We want to draw inspiration from these readings and find models of the philosophical quest for truth and a good life that we can relate to in our personal, professional, social, and spiritual development. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Göbel, Ogle/*Three credits*

PHI 359 SPECIAL TOPICS IN MEDIEVAL PHILOSOPHY

This course studies a figure or school of philosophy not treated by other history of philosophy courses covering the Medieval period. It fulfills the Area 2 History of Philosophy Requirement for Philosophy Majors and Minors. Content and pedagogical objectives of the course are similar to those described in PHI 354 above. Spring Semester. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Staff/*Three credits*

PHI 360 EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY

This course undertakes a study of the European thinkers, from Descartes and Hobbes to David Hume, who contributed to and wrestled with modern science and its revolutionary impact on Western civilization. Examination will focus on the respective roles of reason and experience in our understanding of ourselves and the universe, which culminates in the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Corrigan, Maher, Stoner/*Three credits*

PHI 365 LATE MODERN PHILOSOPHY

The course undertakes an investigation of the philosophical movement known as German Idealism, in its beginnings with Immanuel Kant, its maturity in thinkers such as Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, and its self-overcoming in thinkers such as Feuerbach, Marx, and Schopenhauer. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Ranasinghe, Stoner, Traylor/*Three credits*

PHI 369 SPECIAL TOPICS IN MODERN PHILOSOPHY

This course studies a figure or school of philosophy not treated by other history of philosophy courses covering the Modern period. It fulfills the Area 3 History of Philosophy Requirement for Philosophy Majors and Minors. Content and pedagogical objectives of the course are similar to those described in PHI 354 above. Fall Semester. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Staff/*Three credits*

PHI 370 EXISTENTIALIST THOUGHT

This course is an examination of that human experience and philosophy which is perhaps most clearly representative of the contemporary West. The roots of existentialist thought in the writings of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and then a consideration of similarities and differences in the work of several existentialist writers. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Traylor/*Three credits*

PHI 380 20TH-CENTURY CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY

An examination of the French and German philosophical movements of the 20th century, topics in this course may include the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the ontological analyses of Martin Heidegger, the neo-Marxism of the Frankfurt School, the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, and the postmodernism of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

McGrath, Traylor/*Three credits*

PHI 389 SPECIAL TOPICS IN CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

This course studies a figure or school of philosophy not treated by other history of philosophy courses covering the Contemporary period. It fulfills the Area 4 History of Philosophy Requirement for Philosophy Majors and Minors. Content and pedagogical objectives of the course are similar to those described in PHI 354 above. Spring Semester. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Staff/*Three credits*

PHI 405 INDEPENDENT STUDY

Individually supervised study of a particular area of Philosophy. Offered only to highly qualified Juniors and Seniors. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154). Permission of the Chairperson is required in all cases.

Staff/*Three credits*

PHI 444 HONORS THESIS IN PHILOSOPHY

In this course the student will conduct the research project that was proposed and approved during the Honors Seminar (HON 300). The research project will be an original research thesis or creative work under the supervision of a faculty mentor. A summary of the capstone work will be presented at the Honors Colloquium at the end of the semester. This course will count as an elective in the Philosophy major. Prerequisites: PHI 100 and any intermediate PHI course (151–154).

Staff/*Three credits*

RECOMMENDED FOUR-YEAR PLAN FOR THE MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

The following plan describes one way to complete the Major in Philosophy. Students who double major or who have one or more minors may well follow a different path.

First Year

Fall	Spring
PHI 100 Socrates and the Search for Truth	Any intermediate PHI course (151–154)

	PHI 151 Ethics and the Good Life PHI 152 The Human Difference PHI 153 The Book of Nature PHI 154 God and the Philosophers
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Sophomore Year

Fall	Spring
Philosophy Elective	Philosophy Elective

Junior Year

Fall	Spring
Course in Ancient Philosophy (350–354)	Course in Medieval Philosophy (355–359)
Philosophy Elective (200 or higher)	PHI 340 Metaphysics

Senior Year

Fall	Spring
Course in Modern Philosophy (360–369)	Course in Contemporary Philosophy (370–389)
Philosophy Elective (200 or higher)	

DOUBLE COUNTS IN THE CORE FOR PHILOSOPHY MAJORS

PHI 100 and one course from PHI 151–154 count as core seminars.
Any PHI course 200 or higher counts in The Great Conversation segment of the core.

ADVISING TIPS FOR THE MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY

- Although 11 courses are required for the major, students may take up to 14 philosophy courses.
- The heart of the major is found in the four “history” courses, Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary. There are several courses offered in each historical period, and majors must take one course from each period. Typically, courses in ancient and modern philosophy are offered in the fall semesters, and medieval and contemporary courses are offered in the spring. Although desirable, it is not always possible to offer all four courses each year, and so students must plan carefully and take appropriate courses when they are available. Students who plan to study abroad at some point should take particular care. Consult with the chairperson of the department to learn the anticipated schedule.
- It is possible to take more than one course from the same historical period as an elective within the major.
- Metaphysics may not be offered every year, and so students must plan carefully to take this course when it is available. Consult with the chairperson of the department to learn the anticipated schedule.
- A maximum of three intermediate courses (151–154) count within the major.
- Generally speaking, courses numbered under 250 are general interest PHI courses, presupposing no more than PHI 100 and one intermediate course (151–154). Courses numbered above 250 are like those below 250, except they involve a somewhat specialized or narrowed interest. There is no hard and fast distinction here, and both sets of courses will include students completing their core curriculum requirements. Courses numbered above 300 usually do not have extensive prerequisites, which means they could be taken at any time after the first two philosophy courses. Nevertheless, those courses are appropriate for majors, minors, and anyone with serious interest in the course.
- Any student interested in graduate studies in philosophy should take PHI 210 Logic and should pursue at least one modern language (French or German) and at least one classical language (Greek or Latin).
- PHI 210 Logic may be taken concurrently with the second core seminar.
- Students may combine the Philosophy Major with another major or with any of several minors, such as Core Texts & Enduring Questions, LEX, or the Honors Program.
- Students are encouraged to join the student-run Philosophy Club and Phi Sigma Tau, the international honor society for students of philosophy. For more information, contact Prof. Samuel Stoner.
- To maintain the academic integrity of the major, transfer courses are approved under strict conditions. Students

should consult with the department chair before registering for courses outside the day school of Assumption College.

TO WHAT CAREERS DOES A MAJOR IN PHILOSOPHY LEAD?

Philosophy leads to everything. In addition to obvious choices like law, medicine, publishing, teaching, and government, people who major in philosophy go on to careers in every imaginable field:

<https://www.apaonline.org/page/whostudiesphilosophy>

See our department website for more information on the wide range of careers that have been and can be successfully pursued with a philosophy degree:

<https://www.assumption.edu/academics/programs/philosophy>

For a guide to careers outside of academia appropriate for people with degrees in philosophy, see:

<https://www.apaonline.org/page/beyondacademia?>

For an array of resources suitable for undergraduates, see:

https://www.apaonline.org/page/undergrad_resources

Learn about the American Philosophical Association:

www.apaonline.org

Learn about the American Catholic Philosophical Association:

www.acpaweb.org