

LINGUISTICS AND PHILOSOPHY

Course 24

Department Contact

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Description

Philosophy majors examine basic questions about such topics as the nature of existence and knowledge. They also study the history of philosophy, learn how to use logic and argue their ideas, and use philosophy to better understand other fields.

Linguistics deals with the structure of language (including syntax, phonetics, and grammar), the relationships between languages, and the way languages change over time.

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24-1	Philosophy	Undergraduates: 7
24-2	Linguistics and Philosophy	Undergraduates: 11

Introductory Classes

PHILOSOPHY

- 24.00 **Problems of Philosophy**
Introduction to the problems of philosophy - in particular, to problems in ethics, metaphysics, theory of knowledge, and philosophy of logic, language, and science. A systematic rather than historical approach. Readings from classical and contemporary sources, but emphasis is on examination and evaluation of proposed solutions to the problems.
- 24.01 **Classics of Western Philosophy**
Introduction to Western philosophical tradition through the study of selected major thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Lucretius, Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche and Marx. Emphasis on changes of intellectual outlook over time, and the complex interplay of scientific, religious and political concerns that influence the development of philosophical ideas.
- 24.013 **Philosophy and the Arts**
Explores philosophical questions about art in general, and about the particular arts, such as literature and music. Measures the answers philosophers have proposed to these questions against our own experiences with the arts. Readings include short works of literature. Includes a museum visit with no charge to students.

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- 24.02 **Moral Problems and the Good Life**
Introduction to important philosophical debates about moral issues and what constitutes a good life: What is right, what is wrong, and why? How important are personal happiness, longevity, and success if one is to live a good life? When is it good for you to get what you want? To what extent are we morally obliged to respect the rights and needs of others? What do we owe the poor, the discriminated against, our loved ones, animals and fetuses?
- 24.03 **Good Food: The Ethics and Politics of Food**
Explores the values (aesthetic, moral, cultural, religious, prudential, political) expressed in the choices of food people eat. Analyzes the decisions individuals make about what to eat, how society should manage food production and consumption collectively, and how reflection on food choices might help resolve conflicts between different values.
- 24.04[J] **Justice**
Provides an introduction to contemporary political thought centered around the ideal of justice and the realities of injustice. Examines what a just society might look like and how we should understand various forms of oppression and domination. Studies three theories of justice (utilitarianism, libertarianism, and egalitarian liberalism) and brings them into conversation with other traditions of political thought (critical theory, communitarianism, republicanism, and post- structuralism). Readings cover foundational debates about equality, freedom, recognition, and power.
- 24.05 **Philosophy and Religion**
Uses key questions in the philosophy of religion to introduce tools of contemporary philosophy. Explores what defines a god, the possibility of the existence of gods, the potential conflict between religion and science, whether morality requires a divine author, and religious tolerance.
- 24.06[J] **Bioethics**
Considers ethical questions that have arisen from the growth of biomedical research and the health-care industry since World War II. Should doctors be allowed to help patients end their lives? If so, when and how? Should embryos be cloned for research and/or reproduction? Should parents be given control over the genetic make-up of their children? What types of living things are appropriate to use as research subjects? How should we distribute scarce and expensive medical resources? Draws on philosophy, history, and anthropology to show how problems in bioethics can be approached from a variety of perspectives.
- 24.08[J] **Philosophical Issues in Brain Science**
An introduction to some central philosophical questions about the mind, specifically those intimately connected with contemporary psychology and neuroscience. Discussions focus on arguments over innate concepts; 'mental images' as pictures in

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the head; whether color is in the mind or in the world; and whether there can be a science of consciousness. Explains the relevant parts of psychology and neuroscience as the subject proceeds.

24.09 **Minds and Machines**

Introduction to philosophy of mind. Can computers think? Is the mind an immaterial thing? Alternatively, is the mind the brain? How can creatures like ourselves think thoughts that are about things? Can I know whether your experiences are the same as mine when we both look at raspberries, fire trucks, and stop lights? Can consciousness be given a scientific explanation?

LINGUISTICS

24.900 **Introduction to Linguistics**

Studies what is language and what does knowledge of a language consist of. It asks how do children learn languages and is language unique to humans; why are there many languages; how do languages change; is any language or dialect superior to another; and how are speech and writing related. Context for these and similar questions provided by basic examination of internal organization of sentences, words, and sound systems. Assumes no prior training in linguistics.

24.917 **ConLangs: How to Construct a Language**

Explores languages that have been deliberately constructed (ConLangs), including Esperanto, Klingon, and Tolkien's Elvish. Students construct their own languages while considering phenomena from a variety of languages of the world. Topics include writing systems, phonology (basic units of speech and how they combine), morphology (structure of words), syntax (how words are put together), and semantics (the expression of meaning, and what language leaves unexpressed). Through regular assignments, students describe their constructed language in light of the topics discussed. Final assignment is a grammatical description of the new language.

Course 24-Friendly UROP Areas

- Research Laboratory for Electronics (RLE)
- MIT Language Acquisition Lab

Get Involved with Course 24

- MIT Philosophy Club
- Hungry Wugs (Linguistics)

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Skills

- Strong interpersonal and communication skills
- Ability to conduct research
- Interpret and write technical papers

Possible Future Jobs

- **Editorial assistant:** The position of editorial assistant is both an editorial and an administrative position. For instance, editorial assistants oversee freelance writers to make sure that they'll be able to submit the commissioned articles on time. Occasionally, they are also asked to write articles and do basic proofreading on commissioned articles before submitting them to the editor.
- **Paralegal:** One of the most important roles of a paralegal is to assist their attorney in preparing for trials, hearings, and closings. A large part of this consists of conducting legal research and gathering relevant information to the case. A large part of a paralegal's day is spent drafting legal documents. This can include drafting correspondence and pleadings, such as complaints, subpoenas, interrogatories, deposition notices, pretrial orders, and legal briefs with various parties.
- **Public policy analyst:** Policy analysts work by trying to change, adjust, or implement new public policies, regulations, and laws. They often work either directly in government or for non-government organizations which extensively lobby for policy adjustments. Even some for-profit companies use policy analysts to help steer regulation and political action in favorable ways.

Career Industry Examples

Government

Marketing

Publishing

Law

Medical

Research

Management

Psychology

Technical Writing

Sample Employers

Amazon

FBI/CIA

McKinsey & Company

Blueprint Talent Group

Chartwell Consulting

Mission Essentials