Philosophy tackles central questions in human life, such as the following: What counts as human knowledge? How should I live? What is truth? How is the mind related to the body? What is a just society? These difficult but fundamental questions are rigorously explored in philosophy and worked through by drawing on the historical tradition and utilizing careful reasoning. Because philosophers have shaped many of the central ideas on which Western civilization is based, the study of philosophy plays a vital role in a well-rounded liberal arts education.

Philosophy courses at Washington University provide opportunities to gain deeper knowledge of the history of philosophy, from the work of the ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle through key thinkers such as Descartes and Kant to the present. Students can study the interface between philosophy and other disciplines (e.g., psychology; environmental studies; women, gender, and sexuality studies; law; political science). They can also examine the methods of inquiry and the underlying conceptual frameworks of scientific work itself. Courses in logic equip students to think and argue clearly and rigorously while courses in analytic philosophy allow for the exploration of fundamental questions about knowledge and metaphysics. The department offers a variety of courses in ethics where students can consider different theoretical approaches to current political, social, medical and environmental problems.

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