

PHIL 101 Introduction to Philosophy

UBC, 2025, Summer Term 2

Time: Tuesday, Thursday 1-4pm

Location: Online

Teachers

Jas Heaton - Instructor
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they/them

Avontay Williams - TA
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he/him

Ritu Sharma - TA
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she/her

Office Hours: Weds 12.30-1.30

On Zoom (link on canvas)

Course Description

This course will address classic and contemporary problems in epistemology and the metaphysics of identity. Epistemology is the philosophical study of knowledge. We will look at skepticism and the question of whether knowledge is even possible, and consider some answers from philosophy. We will then address knowledge in its social context, think about the slogan “knowledge is power”, and look at why ignorance is a problem for democracy. Metaphysics is the philosophical study of what exists, and identity is who we are. We will think about what makes us who we are and ask the question of whether we are the same person over time, e.g. whether am I *now* the same person I was when I was a baby. We will explore whether we have any choice in our identities, and analyze the influence society has on our identities.

Learning Activities

In this course you will:

- Read course materials and attend online lectures
- Participate in group discussions and complete group exercises
- Write short and long essays

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course you will be able to

- Analyze an author’s writing and identify their argument
- Construct and motivate your own arguments, and articulate your thoughts in a clear philosophical manner
- Identify objections to your views and respond to those objections
- Write a philosophical essay
- Provide feedback to others
- Understand the philosophical problem of skepticism and responses to it
- Understand the problem of ignorance and its connection to democracy
- Understand the philosophical problem of identity
- Understand the relationship between identity and society

Discussion Focused

Please note that this course is heavily focused around in-class interaction and group discussion.

Philosophy is best learned by doing it and doing it with others, and I want this course to provide you with as much opportunity to do philosophy as possible.

Topics, Readings, and Schedule

All readings for this course are available online or through the UBC library.
It is important to keep on top of the readings to be able to participate in these discussions.

Week	Topic	Readings
Module 1 - Epistemology		
Week 1 July 3	Skepticism and the Problem of Knowledge	Jennifer Nagel, Wireless Philosophy: the Problem of Skepticism (YouTube video) Rene Descartes, Meditations 1 and 2 David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding , read section 4 and part 1 of section 5
Week 2 July 8	Responding to Skepticism In-Class Assignment: Discussion	Kieth DeRose, How Can We Know that We're Not Brains in Vats?
July 10	Responding to Skepticism continued In-Class Assignment: 4-Sentence Essay	Alvin Goldman, What is Justified Belief?
Week 3 July 15	Expertise and Ignorance In-Class Assignment: Discussion	Alvin Goldman, Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust? Thi Nguyễn, Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles, Link here
July 17	Trust, Tolerance, and Democracy In-Class Assignment: Discussion	Julia Serano, Refusing to Tolerate Intolerance, Link here Neil Levy, Why No-Platforming is Sometimes a Justifiable Position, Link here Amandine Catala, Democracy, Trust, and Epistemic Justice, Link here
Module 2 - Identity		
Week 4 July 22	Personal Identity	John Locke, Of Identity and Diversity , read from section 7, page 6, to end of section 22, page 20 The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Personal Identity and Ethics: the Narrative View
July 24	Personal Identity Continued In-Class Assignment: 4-Sentence Essay	Locke and SEP continued

Week 5

July 29 Identity and Ideology

Louis Althusser, [Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses](#), read from section “On Ideology”
Marilyn Frye, [To Be and Be Seen](#)

In-Class Assignment: Discussion

July 31 Identity and Interpretation

William Wilkerson, [Sexual Orientation as Interpretation](#)

Week 6

August 5 In-class essay writing

No readings

August 7 In-class essay writing

Assignments

NOTE - Assignments will be completed in class

— with the exception of a quiz at the end of week 5

Graded Group Discussion Activities, 20% of Final Grade

Answers to discussion questions submitted with discussion group

See schedule for which classes will include graded group discussions

Quiz, 20% of Final Grade

Available from July 31st to August 4th

Completed through **lockdown browser**

NOTE you will need to install lockdown browser on your device. Details for how to do so are [here](#)

- Short questions asking you to define concepts, longer questions asking you to reconstruct arguments

4 Sentence Essays, 20% of Final Grade (10% each)

A philosophical essay that defends a thesis against an objection in four sentences

Written in class, with discussion group

- Essay 1, in class July 10
- Essay 2, in class July 24

Final Essay, 40% of Final Grade

A philosophical essay that defends a thesis against an objection

- Approx. 1,000 words
- Select from pre-set topics, TBA

The research and writing of this essay will be completed in class August 5th and 7th.

Course Policies

Policy on Late Work

If **FOR ANY REASON** you are not able to submit your work on time **please contact either the instructor or the TA** to request an extension.

Content Warning and Classroom Policy

In this course we will cover a number of topics, issues, and real world events that may have affected the personal lives of students taking this course and the teachers teaching it. While it is important that we be able to freely pursue academic inquiry into these issues, it is equally important we be attentive and sensitive to the different ways people might be affected by these issues and by our study of them. As a student it is your right to bring your personal and lived experiences to your studies in this course. It is also your duty to be respectful of other people's experiences, no matter how different they are from your own. At its best the study of philosophy is collaborative, constructive, and respectful of individuality. I hope that throughout this course we will all do our best to embody these norms.

University Policies and Support

UBC provides resources to support student learning and to maintain healthy lifestyles but recognizes that sometimes crises arise and so there are additional resources to access including those for survivors of sexual violence. UBC values respect for the person and ideas of all members of the academic community. Harassment and discrimination are not tolerated nor is suppression of academic freedom. UBC provides appropriate accommodation for students with disabilities and for religious observances. UBC values academic honesty and students are expected to acknowledge the ideas generated by others and to uphold the highest academic standards in all of their actions. Details of the policies and how to access support are available on [the UBC Senate website](#).

Plagiarism

Plagiarism, which is intellectual theft, occurs where an individual submits or presents the oral or written work of another person as his or her own. Scholarship quite properly rests upon examining and referring to the thoughts and writings of others. However, when another person's words (i.e. phrases, sentences, or paragraphs), ideas, or entire works are used, the author must be acknowledged in the text, in footnotes, in endnotes, or in another accepted form of academic citation. Where direct quotations are made, they must be clearly delineated (for example, within quotation marks or separately indented). Failure to provide proper attribution is plagiarism because it represents someone else's work as one's own. Plagiarism should not occur in submitted drafts or final works. A student who seeks assistance from a tutor or other scholastic aids must ensure that the work submitted is the student's own. Students are responsible for ensuring that any work submitted does not constitute plagiarism. Students who are in any doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism should consult their instructor before handing in any assignments.

Policy on A.I.

You are expected to complete all work yourself without the use of generative A.I. (e.g. ChatGPT). Use of AI will result in a "0" for the assignment. Repeated use will result in a "0" for the course.