

PHIL 490 A02: Advanced Topics in Philosophy  
PHIL 500 A02: Topics in Philosophy  
Believing and Reasoning

CRN# 22483/22485

Th 2:30-5:20, CLE B315

**Instructor:** Dr. Thomas Land

**Office:** CLE B 331

**Office Hours:** Tue 1:00-2:30 and by appointment

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**Course Description**

A significant portion of the items that populate our minds are what philosophers call beliefs: You believe that you are currently a student, that zebras are animals, that ‘snow is white’ is true iff snow is white, that  $2+2=4$ , and a great many other things. Moreover, having beliefs is essential to many characteristically human activities: If you did not have beliefs, you would not be able to think, know, or act intentionally; you would not be able to find the classroom, buy coffee, or be politically active. But what exactly is it to believe something; what are the characteristic features of this mental state? For instance, how does believing that  $p$  differ from merely supposing, imagining, fearing, or hoping that  $p$ ? One important difference is, arguably, that beliefs manifest our agency; that, unlike our fears or daydreams, our beliefs do not just befall us. But what kind of agency is this, given that it can’t be ordinary agency (since I cannot just decide to believe that the earth is flat, the way I can typically just decide to get coffee)? Another central characteristic is that beliefs bear an especially close relation to truth. Thus, it is often said that belief aims at truth. But how do we cash out the image of “aiming” – how exactly does truth govern belief? And is it *just* truth that is at issue here, or is it rather knowledge, or relevant knowledge, or something else yet? Finally, our beliefs are, at least sometimes, characteristic manifestations of our nature as “rational animals”: When we believe that  $p$  because we believe that  $q$ , then at least sometimes this counts as reasoning; as drawing an inference. Thinking about reasoning therefore promises to shed additional light on the nature of belief.

In this course, we will study some recent debates, along with a few classics of the field, about the nature of the mental state (or activity) of believing. More specifically, we will consider the metaphysics of belief (Is it a state or an activity? What kind of state or activity?), the aim of belief (Is truth normative for belief? If so, in what sense?) and the relation of belief to consciousness (In what sense can beliefs be conscious or unconscious? To be able to have beliefs, do you have to understand that beliefs aim at truth?). In addition, we will study a recent debate over the so-called ‘taking condition’ on inference and consider what implications it has for belief. The course thus focuses on a central topic in the philosophy of mind with connections to epistemology and philosophical logic.

**Learning Outcomes**

This course has four main objectives. By successfully completing this course you will

- (i) acquire detailed knowledge of important current debates in the philosophy of mind;
- (ii) come to appreciate strengths and weaknesses of the positions staked out in these debates;
- (iii) deepen your understanding of a topic central to philosophical accounts of human mindedness beyond the level typically aimed at in lower-level courses; and
- (iv) hone crucial analytical skills. These include reading and analyzing difficult philosophical texts; understanding, assessing, and discussing complex and highly abstract philosophical arguments;

constructing philosophical arguments of your own; articulating and communicating complex ideas; and composing academic papers.

### Course Website

This course has an associated website on UVic's *Brightspace* tool. This will be used for assignments, communication, and to make available course materials. To access your customized *Brightspace* page, sign in to UVic and click on *Online Tools*. You should see *Brightspace* as an option. If you are unable to access *Brightspace*, please contact me.

### Texts

All texts will be available in electronic form via Brightspace or Course Reserves.

### Course Format

The class will be taught as a seminar, with a focus on discussion and student-led formats. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned material *in detail*. I will occasionally give short lectures, but these will be kept to a minimum. Think of honing the skills involved in preparing for, and conducting, in-class discussion of dense philosophical material (and thus learning more actively than often required in a standard lecture course) as one important learning outcome in an upper-level seminar such as this one.

### Evaluation

#### a. Requirements

There are four requirements for this course, which are as follows:

<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Due Date</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Class Participation	N/A	10%
Class summary (or presentation)	TBD	20%
UG: Midterm Exam Grad: Midterm Paper	Exam: Feb 13 Paper: due Feb 19	30%
Final Paper	Due Apr 10	40%

#### *Participation*

Participation comes in two main forms: contributing to in-person class discussion and posting to the discussion forum on Brightspace. Ideally, you participate regularly in both of these ways. Asking a question is a valid (indeed, important) form of participation. Quantity and quality of contributions are considered in assessing participation.

The discussion forum is intended to supplement, not replace, in-class discussion. While in-class participation is a required component of this course, I recognize that there are different learning styles. If you find it difficult to participate in discussion, please talk to me, so we can work out a viable strategy for facilitating your participation.

#### *Class summary*

In a group of two, prepare a summary of the main points of class discussion. Class summaries are due on the Tuesday after class (11:00pm). The function of the summaries is to produce a shared record of our

discussion. They will be distributed to all course participants, and everyone is expected to read the pervious class's summary as part of preparing for class. We will begin each class by asking whether everyone agrees with the summary; this will often present opportunities for clarifying points and/or continuing discussion of a particular issue.

### *Midterm*

Undergraduate students: A three-hour midterm exam, administered via Brightspace, focused largely on exposition, but also involving a brief critical discussion component. Date: February 13, 2:30-5:20.

Graduate students: A paper of 1500 words. I will provide suggested topics, but you are very welcome to craft your own topic. If you choose the latter, you must discuss your topic with me no later than February 11.

### *Final Paper*

Undergraduate students: A paper of 1500-2000 words involving both exposition and discussion components, on an assigned topic or a topic of your own design. If you choose the latter option, you must discuss your proposed topic with me by April 1.

Graduate students: A paper of 3000-3500 words involving both exposition and discussion components. You are encouraged to design your own paper topic. you must discuss your proposed topic with me by April 1.

### b. Late Penalties

*Papers*: 20 percentage points per day (weekends count as one day).

### c. N Grades

Students who have completed the two tests and the final exam will be considered to have completed the course. Failure to complete any one of these three requirements will result in a grade of "N" regardless of the cumulative percentage on other elements of the course. N is a failing grade and factors into GPA as a value of 0.

### **Academic Concessions**

UVic recognizes its responsibility to offer academic concessions to students whose ability to complete course requirements is interrupted by 1) unexpected and unavoidable circumstances or 2) conflicting responsibilities. In general, academic concessions take two forms:

1. during the term when all course requirements can be completed by the student before the instructor must submit the final grades (these are often informally called "extensions"); and
2. after the term has ended or when course requirements cannot be completed before final grades are submitted (including deferrals, extended deferrals, aegrotats, withdrawals under extenuating circumstances and backdated drops).

For additional details, please see the [regulations](#) and [guidelines](#) on academic concessions.

If you foresee or experience circumstances that prevent you from completing course requirements, please be proactive and contact me right away. The sooner you do, the easier it typically is to address the situation.

### **Course Schedule (may be adjusted as we go along)**

Wk.	Date	Reading
1	Jan 9	<i>Introduction</i> Donald Davidson, "Rational Animals" Lewis Carrol, "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles"

2	Jan 16	<i>Belief, Consciousness, and Will</i> Tim Crane, “The Unity of Consciousness” Eric Marcus, <i>Belief, Inference, and the Self-Conscious Mind</i> , ch. 1 Bernard Williams, “Deciding to Believe”
3	Jan 23	<i>The Aim of Belief I</i> Nishi Shah and David Velleman, “Doxastic Deliberation” Kathrin Glüer and Åsa Wikforss, “Against Belief Normativity”
4	Jan 30	<i>The Aim of Belief II</i> Pascal Engel, “In Defense of Normativism About the Aim of Belief” Kristen Bykvist and Anandi Hattiangadi, “Belief, Truth, and Blindspots”
5	Feb 6	<i>Belief and Self-Consciousness</i> Eric Marcus, <i>Belief, Inference, and the Self-Conscious Mind</i> , chs. 2&3
6	Feb 13	Midterm Exam (no class meeting)
Reading Break – no class on Feb 20		
7	Feb 27	<i>Doxastic Agency For and Against I</i> Matthew Boyle, “‘Making Up Your Mind’ and the Activity of Reason” Brie Gertler, “Self-Knowledge and Rational Agency: In Defense of Empiricism”
8	Mar 6	<i>Doxastic Agency For and Against II</i> Pamela Hieronymi, “No Inertia in Consciousness” Kieran Setiya, “Epistemic Agency: Some Doubts”
9	Mar 13	<i>Believing for a Reason</i> Ram Neta, “The Basing Relation”
10	Mar 20	<i>Reasoning and the Taking Condition</i> Paul Boghossian, “What Is Inference?” Conor McHugh and Jonathan Way, “Against the Taking Condition”  Recommended: Conor McHugh and Jonathan Way, “What is Reasoning?”
11	Mar 27	<i>Reasoning and Self-Consciousness</i> Eric Marcus, <i>Belief, Inference, and the Self-Conscious Mind</i> , chs. 4&5
12	Apr 3	Buffer
Final papers due on April 10		

#### Attendance and Preparation

You are expected to attend class and come prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Your standing assignment is to write down the thesis defended in each reading and the argument given in support of it. In addition, start thinking about potential weak spots of, and objections to, the argument. Come prepared to raise these in class. Since this is a seminar, how productive our in-class discussions are depends to a large degree on the level of preparation you bring to class. In a seminar format, the primary aim is not for the instructor to present course material to students. Instead, it is for us jointly to work through and discuss this material. In this way, a seminar is intended to be closer to a reading group than a lecture class.

### **Office Hours**

I hold regular office hours. I encourage you to make use of these. No sign-up needed; just drop in. I especially encourage you to come to office hours if there is something you don't understand or if you are struggling in the course. The sooner you do, the better I will likely be able to help you. The default mode for office hours is in-person, but I would be happy to meet on Zoom. If you prefer Zoom, please email me, so I can set up a meeting.

### **Announcements and Email**

I will regularly communicate course-related information to you using the 'Announcements' function in *Brightspace*. Please ensure that you read these announcements. You can configure your *Brightspace* page so that you get notified (by email or text) when a new announcement is posted. Occasionally, I will also email you. Emails will be sent to the address listed in UVic's system as your contact information. It is your responsibility to make sure that this information is current and to check this email address at least once a day. If you contact me via email, I will make every effort to respond in a timely manner, which generally will be within 48 hours (longer on weekends). To make sure your email does not end up in my spam folder, I encourage you to put the course number in the subject line (i.e. PHIL 490) and use your UVic email address. If you have a question about assignments, due dates, or other course policies, the syllabus should be your first resource. *I will not respond to any emails that ask questions which are answered in the syllabus.* Your second resource should be the discussion board, which is accessible through the course website. You are encouraged to use this feature to discuss questions about course mechanics as well as course content.

### **Student Conduct**

The University of Victoria is committed to providing a respectful and productive learning environment. All members of our community, including students, have both the right to experience and the responsibility to help create such an environment. For details on the rights and responsibilities this involves please read through the [Trifaculty Standards of Professional Behaviour for Students](#). This document also contains links to applicable university policies. It is part of your responsibility as a student in this course to know your responsibilities as outlined in the code of professional behaviour (which covers, among other things, attendance and classroom behavior, online conduct in university learning systems, and academic integrity).

### **Intellectual property of materials on D2L Brightspace**

Please note that all assignments for this course and all materials posted to the course's *Brightspace* site or distributed in class are the intellectual property of myself and the University of Victoria. Do not circulate this material or post it to note-sharing sites without my permission. Posting course materials to note-sharing sites or otherwise circulating course materials without the permission of your instructor violates the [Policy on Academic Integrity](#). Any evidence you are circulating materials without permission will be referred to the Chair of the Philosophy Department for investigation.

### **Academic Integrity (Plagiarism etc.)**

Violations of academic integrity, such as plagiarism, cheating on exams etc., constitute breaches of university policy and carry serious penalties (e.g. failing the class, being put on disciplinary probation).

Note that it is *your responsibility* to be aware of what constitutes plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity, and that *ignorance of this is not an acceptable excuse*. For information, please consult [UVic's Policy on Academic Integrity](#) or contact me. If you are interested in learning more about academic integrity, you can also self-enrol in the [Integrity Matters](#) course in Brightspace. Search for this course under the [Discover](#) tab on your Brightspace homepage.

### Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT or Dall-E) constitute sources just like books and articles. This means that, if you use such tools for completing assignments, you must acknowledge this just as you would other sources. For example, text generated using ChatGPT-3 should include a citation such as: “Chat-GPT-3. (YYYY, MM, DD of query). “Text of your query.” Generated using OpenAI. <https://chat.openai.com/>”.

Using AI without proper acknowledgment constitutes a violation of academic integrity.

Assignments in this course are designed to help you develop your understanding of complex philosophical material. Typical uses of generative AI do not do this (though there are exceptions). For this reason, I discourage you from using it. Exception: Some assignments may ask you to use AI in a particular way. If you do use AI tools (e.g. to help you get started on an assignment), you need to cite them (see above) and explain *how* you used them. For example, did you use ChatGPT just for outlining or are passages in your paper copied from it (and if so, which ones)?

You are responsible for what you submit. If an AI-generated text turns out to include mistakes, you are responsible for including these in your assignment.

### Accessibility

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me. If you require academic accommodations you need to register with the Centre for Accessible Learning (<https://www.uvic.ca/services/cal>). Please do so as early as possible. You can find information about academic accommodations through the Centre for Accessible Learning’s website (<https://www.uvic.ca/services/cal/programs/academic/index.php>).

### Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

### Significant Dates (<https://www.uvic.ca/calendar/dates/>)

- Sun, Jan 19: last day for 100% reduction of fees
- Wed, Jan 22: last day to for adding second-term courses
- Sun, Feb 9: last day for 50% reduction of tuition fees. 100% of tuition fees will be assessed for courses dropped after this date.
- Fri, Feb 28: last day for withdrawing from second-term courses without penalty of failure.

### Grading Scheme

Percentage	Letter Grade	Grade Point	Grade Definition
90-100	A+	9	An A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically <b>superior</b> , shows mastery of the subject matter, and in the case of an A+ offers original insight and/or goes beyond course expectations. Normally achieved by a minority of students.
85-89	A	8	
80-84	A-	7	

77-79	B+	6	A B+, B, or B- is earned by work that indicates a <b>good</b> comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student's full engagement with the course requirements and activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. Normally achieved by the largest number of students.
73-76	B	5	
70-72	B-	4	
65-69	C+	3	A C+ or C is earned by work that indicates an <b>adequate</b> comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and/or participating in class activities
60-64	C	2	
50-59	D	1	A D is earned by work that indicates <b>minimal</b> command of the course materials and/or minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.
0-49	F	0	F is earned by work which, after the completion of course requirements, is <b>inadequate</b> and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.
0-49	N	0	N is earned if a student has <b>failed to complete</b> one or more <b>required components</b> of a course. N is a failing grade, but, unlike an F, makes the student eligible for Academic Concessions (so that outstanding requirements may be completed later). However, being eligible for Academic Concessions does not guarantee that these will be granted.

Interpretation of these grade definitions is at the discretion of the instructor. If you receive a grade that you believe is unfair, please begin by discussing the matter with the instructor in a respectful, open-minded manner. If you still believe the grade you received is unfair you can appeal the matter to the chair of the department.

For additional information regarding grades, please see the most recent edition of the UVic [Undergraduate Calendar](#). All evaluations of tests and assignments will be calculated according to percentage scores. Letter grades and grade point scores are listed purely for reference.

### Counselling Services

Your mental health is as important as your physical health. During the semester you might feel overwhelmed, lonely, or stressed about your academic performance. You might experience a personal or family tragedy. The University provides FREE counselling services. (Check [www.uvic.ca/services/counselling/](http://www.uvic.ca/services/counselling/) for more information).

### Course Experience Surveys (CES)

I value your feedback on this course. Towards the end of term, as in all other courses at UVic, you will have the opportunity to complete an anonymous survey regarding your learning experience (CES). The survey is vital to providing feedback to me regarding the course and my teaching, as well as to help the department improve the overall program for students in the future. The survey is accessed via MyPage and can be done on your laptop, tablet, or mobile device. I will remind you and provide you with more detailed information nearer the time, but please be thinking about this important activity during the course.