

PHIL 100 A01

CRN# 13801+ 23614

ECS 116 + CLE A127

September 2025 – April 2026

TWF: 11:30am – 12:20pm

Introduction to Philosophy

Instructor: Scott Woodcock

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Office Hours: Tues 10am-11am open hours + individual zoom meetings by appointment

Course Description:

The aim of this course will be to introduce students to the most fundamental philosophy questions in the Western tradition. A mix of classic and contemporary readings will be used. We will work our way through the essential issues that have attracted attention from philosophers as old as Plato right up to those working in the field today. Careful examination of these issues will give students a sense of what philosophy in the Western tradition is about, and it will allow students to learn the more general (and exceedingly valuable!) skill of thinking critically about difficult conceptual problems. Our topics will include: How can we be certain about what we think we know about the external world? Can rational arguments be used to prove the existence of God? Do human beings have free will, or are our 'decisions' determined by purely physical forces? Is there an objective basis for morality? The goal of the course will be to encourage students to develop informed opinions about these kinds of fundamental questions.

Course Website: Online materials will be made available via Uvic *Brightspace*.

Texts: *Reason and Responsibility*, 16th ed. by Joel Feinberg and Russ Shafer-Landau
Writing Philosophy, 3rd ed. by Lewis Vaughn

The *R&R* textbook is expensive, but prior editions work reasonably well.

Requirements: Ten quote & comment assignments (1% each)



Two short writing assignments (5% each)

Two longer writing assignments (10% each)

Two midterm tests (10% each)

Two end of term exams (20% each)

Note: Writing assignment due dates and midterm test dates are posted below in the weekly schedule. *You are responsible for knowing these dates.* Plan ahead, and manage your personal workload accordingly.

Grading System

Percentage	Letter Grade	Grade Point	Grade Definition
90 – 100	A+	9	An A+, A, or A- is earned by work which is technically superior , 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 good 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 adequate 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 minimal 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 inadequate and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.

Interpretation of these grade definitions is up to the discretion of the instructor. If you receive a grade during the course that you believe is unfair, please begin by discussing the matter with the instructor (or TA) in a respectful, open-minded manner. Rest assured that 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 undergraduate grades, please consult the [Grading](#) section 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.

Final examinations are the property of Uvic and are not returned. They are available for viewing at the Records Office according to Uvic [Examinations](#) procedures and regulations.

Uvic is committed to providing a safe, supportive learning environment for all members. Further information regarding Uvic policies on human rights, equity, discrimination and harassment are located in the Uvic calendar [General University Policies](#), but if you have any particular concerns related to our course please do not hesitate to contact me.

Policy on Late Assignments: 5% per working day will be subtracted from grade unless students face [unexpected or unavoidable circumstances](#).

Academic Integrity: Review the [Uvic Policy on Academic Integrity](#) *carefully*. Note: AI/plagiarism detection software may be used in this course, and students may be asked for oral explanations of written work.

Student Conduct: This course is governed by [general Uvic policies](#) for equity, fairness, & discrimination, and the Tri-Faculty [Student Code of Conduct](#).

Counseling: Many students experience difficulties with mental health during their years as undergraduate students. Make sure you are familiar with [Uvic Student Wellness](#), which is an excellent resource on campus. It is hard to shake the stigma associated with problems like depression and anxiety, but if you can benefit from help with mental health issues, then why not take advantage of this free resource? They are understaffed, but they genuinely want to help.

Important Dates: Please consult the Uvic calendar's [Academic Year Important Dates](#) for information about last possible dates to withdraw from courses without penalty, examinations period start/end dates, etc.

Tech in Class: Some students require laptops/tablets for their learning strategies, so I do not prohibit their use in class. However, studies prove that multi-tasking *reduces performance for nearby students*, so anyone who distracts others will be asked to leave and potentially subject to disciplinary action.

Academic Advising: For information about declaring a program (e.g. a major or minor in Philosophy!) or interpreting your Uvic CAPP report, please visit [Academic Advising](#) and make an appointment with an adviser.

Uvic Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response:

Sexualized violence is a serious issue on campus. You can learn about how Uvic defines this kind of violence and its approach to prevention by visiting www.uvic.ca/svp. If you or someone you know is impacted by sexualized violence and needs information, advice, and/or support, please contact the Uvic [Equity and Human Rights](#) (EQHR) office.

Territory Acknowledgment

The University of Victoria acknowledges and respects the Lək'wəḡən (Songhees and X̱sepsəm/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək'wəḡən and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

For information about support for indigenous students and efforts to foster reconciliation, please visit the Uvic [Office of Indigenous Academic & Community Engagement](#).

An Important Note on Diversity:

You may notice that in this course we will be reading an overwhelming majority of “dead white men”. You may wonder why this is the case. Why not read more women and non-European philosophers? This is an excellent question. Here are some initial answers:

1. This course introduces students to a particular thread of philosophical thought that is grounded in work from Ancient Greece and European enlightenment thinking, but it should not be viewed as the *only* valuable thread in the history of philosophy. It is a thread best studied comprehensively as a linked narrative, but it is one among many.
2. I obviously believe this thread of philosophical thought is worth studying, but I also encourage students to take courses at Uvic that explore alternative perspectives. For example, courses like *Gender Studies* (GNDR 100; Gender, Power and Difference) and *Indigenous Studies* (IS 101; Indigenous Foundations) would nicely complement our survey of Western philosophy.
3. The fact that there are so few women and persons of colour on our reading list is *not* because they are less philosophically capable than white men! It is because Western civilization has a long history of gender discrimination, racism, and colonialism that excluded women and persons of colour from the formal study of philosophy.
4. There is still much work to be done to make philosophy fully inclusive for members of disadvantaged groups, but remember that (despite our reading list) there are many distinguished philosophers today who are women, persons of colour, members of the LGBTQ+ community and disabled persons. Students who identify with these groups can take inspiration from the fact that contemporary role models exist.

If you have further concerns about diversity in our course or suggestions for how it may be more effectively promoted, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Note: Dates and page numbers listed are subject to change, so regular class attendance is essential to stay informed about scheduling changes. Material should be read *before* the class in which it is discussed. Note that the page numbers assigned often refer to selected passages from longer chapters in the text.

RR page #'s refer to the 16th Edition of the, *Reason & Responsibility* textbook.

WP page #'s refer to the 3rd Edition of the *Writing Philosophy* textbook.

Other readings listed by author are available online via *Brightspace*. Access these online readings well in advance to avoid last-minute technical problems.

Dates Readings **FALL 2025**

Sept. 3	First Meeting
Sept. 5	Shelley Kagan: <i>Why Study Philosophy?</i> [pdf]
Sept. 9	René Descartes: <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> [RR 242 – 249]
Sept. 10	René Descartes: <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> [RR 249 – 256]
Sept. 12	Saja Parvizian: <i>Al-Ghazālī and Descartes on Defeating Skepticism</i> [pdf]
Sept. 16	René Descartes: <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> [RR 256 – 260]
Sept. 17	Michael Huemer: <i>Three Skeptical Arguments</i> [RR 195 – 200]
Sept. 19	G.E. Moore: <i>Proof of an External World</i> [RR 290 – 293] + John Locke: <i>The Causal Theory of Perception</i> [RR 279 – 282]
Sept. 23	John Locke: <i>The Causal Theory of Perception</i> [RR 274 – 279]
Sept. 24	George Berkeley: <i>Three Dialogues between Hylas and ...</i> [pdf: 1 – 15, 24 – 32]
Sept. 26 	George Berkeley: <i>Three Dialogues between Hylas and ...</i> [pdf: 38 – 45] *** Writing Assignment #1 Due ***
Sept. 30	No Class – National Day for Truth and Reconciliation
Oct. 1	David Hume: <i>An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> [RR 293 – 302]
Oct. 3	David Hume: <i>An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> [RR 302 – 308]
Oct. 7	Wesley C. Salmon: <i>An Encounter with David Hume</i> [RR 320 – 340]
Oct. 8	Review
Oct. 10	*** Midterm Test #1 ***

Oct. 14	Deductive Arguments [WP chapter 2]
Oct. 15	More Deductive Arguments [WP chapter 2]
Oct. 17	Even More Deductive Arguments [WP chapter 2]
Oct. 21	Anselm of Canterbury: <i>The Ontological Argument</i> [RR 31 – 33] Gaunilo of Marmoutiers: <i>On Behalf of the Fool</i> [RR 33 – 36]
Oct. 22	William L. Rowe: <i>The Ontological Argument</i> [RR 36 – 46]
Oct. 24	Blaise Pascal: <i>The Wager</i> [RR 169 – 172] Simon Blackburn: <i>Infini – Rien</i> [RR 180 – 183]
Oct. 28	Inductive Arguments [WP chapter 2]
Oct. 29	More Inductive Arguments [WP chapter 2]
Oct. 31	William Paley: <i>The Argument from Design</i> [RR 59 – 64]
Nov 4	David Hume: <i>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</i> [RR 76 – 88]
Nov 5	David Hume: <i>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</i> [RR 88 – 90, 101–6]
Nov 7	Richard Dawkins: <i>Accumulating Small Change</i> [pdf]
Nov. 11 Nov. 12	----- Reading Break – No Class -----
Nov. 14	Logical Fallacies [WP chapter 6]
Nov. 18	More Logical Fallacies [WP chapter 6]
Nov. 19	Saint Thomas Aquinas: <i>The Five Ways</i> [RR 47 – 48] Samuel Clarke: <i>A Modern Formulation of the Cosmological...</i> [RR 49]
Nov. 21 	William L. Rowe: <i>The Cosmological Argument</i> [RR 50 – 59] *** Writing Assignment #2 Due ***

Nov. 25	Émilie du Châtelet: <i>Foundations of Physics chapter 2</i> [pdf]
Nov. 26	J.L. Mackie: <i>Evil and Omnipotence</i> [RR 118 – 126]
Nov. 28	Peter Van Inwagen: <i>The Argument from Evil</i> [RR 126 – 136]
Dec. 2	Review
Dec. 3	No Class: National Day of Remembrance & Action on Violence Against Women

Warning: there will be a **Registrar Scheduled Exam in December**. I do not control the date of this exam, and I don't have the power to change this date once it is scheduled. Therefore, *do not book travel during the exam schedule* until you know this date.

Dates Readings **WINTER 2026**

Jan. 6	Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia: <i>Letters to Descartes</i> [pdf]
Jan. 7	Frank Jackson: <i>The Qualia Problem</i> [RR 372 – 376]
Jan. 9	David Papineau: <i>The Case for Materialism</i> [RR 376 – 382]
Jan. 13	William G. Lycan: <i>Robots and Minds</i> [RR 407 – 413]
Jan. 14	John R. Searle: <i>Minds, Brains, and Programs</i> [RR 400 – 407]
Jan. 16	Daniel C. Dennett: <i>Imagining a Conscious Robot</i> [pdf]
Jan. 20	How to Write a Philosophy Paper [WP chapters 3 – 5, 7 – 9]
Jan. 21	Paul Churchland: <i>Functionalism and Eliminative Materialism</i> [RR 387 – 391]
Jan. 23	Paul Churchland: <i>Functionalism and Eliminative Materialism</i> [RR 382 – 387]
Jan. 27	John Locke: <i>The Prince and the Cobbler</i> [RR 413 – 416]
Jan. 28	Thomas Reid: <i>Of Mr. Locke's Account of Personal Identity</i> [RR 416 – 419]

Jan. 30	David Hume: <i>The Self</i> [RR 419 – 421] Derek Parfit: <i>Divided Minds and the Nature of Persons</i> [RR 421 – 427]
Feb. 3	James Rachels: <i>The Case against Free Will</i> [RR 481 – 490]
Feb. 4	Roderick M. Chisholm: <i>Human Freedom and the Self</i> [RR 459 – 467]
Feb. 6 	Helen Beebe: <i>Compatibilism and the Ability to Do Otherwise</i> [RR 510 – 521] *** Writing Assignment #3 Due ***
Feb. 10	Harry Frankfurt: <i>Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility</i> [RR 528–34]
Feb. 11	Review
Feb. 13	*** Midterm Test #2 ***
*****	February 16 – 20 Reading Break No Class
Feb 24	Plato: <i>The Immoralist's Challenge</i> [RR 574 – 580]
Feb. 25	Plato: <i>Crito</i> [pdf]
Feb. 27	James Rachels: <i>Ethical Egoism</i> [pdf]
Mar. 3	Thomas Hobbes: <i>Leviathan</i> [RR 622 – 624]
Mar. 4	Thomas Hobbes: <i>Leviathan</i> [RR 625 – 626]
Mar. 6	Thomas Hobbes: <i>Leviathan</i> [RR 626 – 628]
Mar. 10 	Immanuel Kant: <i>The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative</i> [RR 638 – 642] *** Last day to start writing Q&C Assignments to get full marks ***
Mar. 11	Immanuel Kant: <i>The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative</i> [RR 642 – 644]
Mar. 13	Immanuel Kant: <i>The Good Will and the Categorical Imperative</i> [RR 644 – 645]

Mar. 17	John Stuart Mill: <i>Utilitarianism</i> [RR 645 – 648]
Mar. 18	Peter Singer: <i>Famine, Affluence, and Morality</i> [RR 672 – 678]
Mar. 20	John Harris: <i>The Survival Lottery</i> [RR 678 – 683]
Mar. 24	Hilde Lindemann: <i>What is Feminist Ethics?</i> [RR 663 – 670]
Mar. 25	Sally Haslanger: <i>Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them To Be?</i> [pdf]
Mar. 27 	Kwame Anthony Appiah: <i>What Will Future Generations Condemn Us For?</i> [RR 670-672] *** Writing Assignment #4 Due ***
Mar. 31 	Richard Taylor: <i>The Meaning of Life</i> [RR 705 – 711] *** Last Day to Submit Q&C Assignments ***
April 1	Review

Warning: there will be a **Registrar Scheduled Exam in December**. I do not control the date of this exam, and I don't have the power to change this date once it is scheduled. Therefore, *do not book travel during the exam schedule* until you know this date.

Major Registration Issue:

Be advised that *this is a single, full-year course*. Unfortunately, the Uvic Registration System requires you to register for two single-term sections of the course (each with its own CRN number). This is a very unfortunate glitch. It is a technicality in the general registration system used by the university, and it is highly misleading. This course is a **single, year-long course** that oddly requires you to register via two different sections: fall (CRN 13801) and spring (CRN 23614).

In other words, students are **not permitted** to drop the course after one term and receive 1.5 units of credit. Students are also **not permitted** to switch into a different section of PHIL 100 during the year. Each section is taught in a unique way according to its own unique schedule, so switching midway is not an option.

Frequently Asked Questions

Please read these over so you can anticipate common issues before it's too late.

Q: Do I really need to read the material assigned? It's very hard to understand.

A: Yes, *make the effort*. We can sort things out in class, but reading the material on your own (and then also coming to class) will help you to understand the content.

Q: Do I need to complete each of the course requirements to pass the course?

A: No, in this particular course (unlike other courses at Uvic), I do not require each of the various tests/assignments to be completed for an overall pass. So, for example, if you are unable to complete a certain assignment you can still pass the course.

Q: I'm having a difficult week in terms of workload in my other courses and hours at my job (that I need to pay for school). Can I have an extension?

A: No. I genuinely sympathize with these requests, but I do not grant extensions based on workload rather than illness or family emergency so **please do not ask me this**. As stressful as workload issues are for students, I can't compare the workloads different students in the class might be facing without my knowledge. All I can do is give due dates well in advance and recommend that students plan accordingly.

Q: I'm over the word count. Does this really matter?

A: Would I include it in the instructions if it didn't? If you are only a few words over I won't give you a zero, but still: use the opportunity to work on *editing* your writing.

Q: Are you willing to look over drafts of our assignments?

A: I'm not against it in principle, but in a large class it's not always feasible. Still, if you finish early enough I'll do my best to make time. More often it's helpful to send me a provisional outline of your argument so that I can make suggestions.

Q: I didn't read the instructions for the Q&C Assignments. Now it's the last week of class. Can I hand in retroactive assignments on readings we already covered?

A: No. It defeats the point of the assignment. Read instructions. Read course outlines.

Q: I'm not feeling well, but *maybe* I'm ok to write the test. Should I just try and see what happens? I can always just quit and write it again later, right?

A: No. I respect students trying to tough things out, but think it over procedurally from the perspective of the university: it is 100% reasonable to delay a test due to student illness, but it is another thing entirely to let a student see the contents of that test and then take a second try at it. So if you think you might not be well enough to write an exam, then do not write that exam. Contact me instead.

Q: Is philosophy really that great? Will it really change the way I think?

A: Yes, it is. Yes, it will. ☺