

Introduction to Philosophy
PHIL101 Winter 2022
University of British Columbia
Professor Eric Margolis

This document contains a general overview of the course; it isn't a complete syllabus. For FAQ's, see my website:
<https://www.margolisphilosophy.com/101-faq.html>

For students who are enrolled in the course, detailed course information (dates, reading list, assignments, etc.) can be found on Canvas once classes begin.

Philosophy challenges us with questions that are directed to our most basic intellectual assumptions and forces us to think hard about ourselves and our position in the world. With its focus on arguments, philosophy also brings clarity and rigour to matters that may otherwise seem inherently obscure and perplexing. Different instructors teach PHIL 101 in different ways. The approach I take doesn't emphasize historical analysis and won't touch on the many philosophical systems that are associated with the great philosophers of the past. Instead, the course will focus on a small number of philosophical problems and some important ways of thinking about them. Your job is to adopt a critical stance to the readings and to the lectures, and to develop your own views based on the arguments we work through. Topics include: Does God exist? Do people have souls? Is there free will?

Course Objectives

This course has four major objectives: (1) to provide you with an introduction to philosophy by exposing you to a number of representative philosophical arguments and theories, (2) to help you to begin to think philosophically, (3) to improve your critical thinking skills, and (4) to improve your analytical writing skills.

Method of Delivery

This course employs a hybrid (synchronous/asynchronous) method of delivery in which pre-recorded videos are substituted for one of the scheduled class meetings and then we meet in person (or if needed, via Zoom) for the other day(s). The synchronous meetings will be flexible and eclectic—a mix of Q&A, small group discussion, large group discussion, workshops, as well as lectures that expand on the material in the videos.

Grading Scheme (tentative)

- 15% homework
- 10% Paper 1
- 15% Paper 1 rewrite
- 27% Paper 2
- 33% Paper 3

Papers. You will have several topics to choose from for each assignment (apart from the rewrite exercise). These assignments are meant to test your understanding of the covered philosophical material as well as your analysis of this material and your ability to express this knowledge in writing. A good philosophy paper has a focused thesis and a carefully presented argument that supports the thesis. It isn't simply a book report that repeats the material in the texts. It does explain this material, but also does something new, reflecting your own critical assessment of the issues. Papers will be marked for clarity, accuracy regarding the relevant philosophical material, originality, and quality of argumentation.

Exam. For this term, I will be using a paper assignment (Paper 3) in place of a standard exam. This means that you won't need to come to campus to sit for the exam. Instead, you will complete the final exam/ paper and submit it online, just as with your other work for the course.

Homework. For each homework assignment, one of the required readings or videos will be singled out and you are to submit a written response. The point of the homework is to help you prepare for the in person meetings that week and to make sure you are staying on top of the required readings. Your response should be succinct and should avoid purely autobiographical or personal remarks (e.g., remarks about your family life or religious upbringing). What we are looking for is something that demonstrates not only that you have completed the reading but that you are critically thinking about this material—that you have started to evaluate the key concepts, views, and arguments in the text.

Attendance and Participation. Attendance is expected and class participation is strongly encouraged. Keep in mind that participation in philosophical discussion is critical to learning how to “do philosophy”. However, because of the ongoing Covid situation, I have designed the course in such a way that you can still successfully complete the course even if your arrival to campus is delayed (e.g., because of a student visa issue) or are otherwise unable to attend some of the synchronous meetings. For further details once you are enrolled in the course, see the Canvas Page *What if you can't come to class?*