

# PHIL 240: Introduction to Epistemology

Winter 2025, Term 1 (Sect. 003)

Meets: T 15:30-17:00 and R 15:30-17:00 MATX-Floor 1-Room 1100

## Instructor:

Stefan Lukits  
stefan.lukits@ubc.ca

## Teaching Assistant:

TBA  
TBA

## Office Hours:

- Stefan: by appointment
- TBA: by appointment

We will be using Piazza discussion about course logistics. Piazza is an alternative to emailing questions to the instructor, the TA, or your classmates with the added advantage that everyone can follow the discussion. Find our class signup link [here](#). Use the access code 115fyn2qwfj. It is imperative that students read UBC-generated emails by the instructor sent to all students, as they may contain important announcements.

## Description

PHIL 240 is an introduction to philosophical issues concerning the nature of knowledge and justification. Our goal is to understand the work of the contemporary epistemologist Amia Srinivasan. On the way there, we will pick up the basic tool box of epistemology and learn about justified true belief, Gettier cases, standpoint epistemology, and the internalism versus externalism debate.

## Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete the course will be able to:

1. Outline a complex argument in an assigned text, stating premises and conclusion.
2. Assess the strength of arguments in assigned texts.
3. Complete an essay that discusses and evaluates arguments with a clear structure and well-supported arguments.
4. Discuss and defend one's own view around issues of introductory epistemology.

## Course Website

We have a site on the UBC course website system called [Canvas](#). Your grades are recorded and accessible in Canvas. To access the Canvas site, go to [this site](#) and log in with your Campus Wide Login and password.

## Evaluation/Assignments

### 25% Reading Assessments

There is a fair bit of reading to do for this course. There will be reading assessments on Canvas during class time to ensure that students read these texts carefully. Attendance is also a part of this grade component. The 25% break down as follows: 5% attendance; 20% reading assessment quizzes. Taking the quiz automatically gives you the attendance mark. If for some reason you miss the quiz, you can always tell me to mark you present manually after the lecture.

### 25% Freestyle Essay

The first essay assignment (Freestyle Essay) is an assignment that you submit in hardcopy before Thursday, September 18, 2025, at 3:30pm (under normal circumstances, you will just bring the hardcopy to class). It is freestyle, which means that you have a fair amount of artistic licence. One conventional choice for students is to write personal literary non-fiction. There is no limit on what you can do EXCEPT write an academic or argumentative paper. You do not need (and in fact are discouraged) to refer to philosophy or the material that we have covered in class.

The idea is to write a literary text broadly in response to the Kimmerer reading *Planting Sweetgrass* or an interview with Tyler Cowan and Amia Srinivasan. You can find the interview [here](#). Some questions to pursue are whether there is a right to sex; what the relationship is of power/knowledge and gender; how the MeToo movement impacted you; what your experience with sex work or incel culture is; whether socialism or Marxism is part of your culture or upbringing; how your parents or caregivers raised you in gendered and nongendered ways; how indigenous teachings have affected you or appeal to you; how the history of your family informs your identity. Note that I do not want you to answer these questions in a detached and academic manner. You definitely don't have to cover all of them (you may not even want to cover any of them explicitly). I want the Freestyle Essay to be personal and non-academic, perhaps like a journal entry or a letter written to a close friend. You are also encouraged to drill down immediately into something that is pointedly particular about you—do not waste time with generalities. The more detailed and specific this paper is about you, the better, and you get to choose YOUR preferred way of expressing yourself about what matters to you.

Don't worry about your grade or a grading rubric for the Freestyle Essay. If you put recognizable effort into this project, you will receive 85% or more. The first paper is freestyle in the extreme and meant to be personal -- about YOU, meaning that there are really no limits as to what you can do -- EXCEPT write an academic or argumentative paper. You do not need to address the questions suggested in the previous paragraph, they are only meant to help you think about this project. You will submit the paper anonymously with no name on the paper, only the first-placed, third-placed, fifth-placed, and seventh-placed digits of your student number (for example, if your student number is 40867512, then put 4871 on your Freestyle Essay with no other identifying information). The essay must be exactly two letter-sized pages (no title page!), but the formatting can be anything you like. Print the two pages on one sheet (back and front). Each student therefore submits exactly one sheet with only a four-digit identifying code on it.

## **25% Daily Questions**

For each reading, you will submit a question video (minimum 30 seconds, maximum 60 seconds). Good questions usually receive 4 out of 5 points. If you get less than that, there is something not quite satisfactory about your question (sometimes the grader suspects that you are using AI in contravention to what is said below about the use of AI in this course). It is rare but possible to achieve 5 out of 5 points.

## **25% Final Exam**

The Final Exam will be held during the exam period for term 1, which is December 9–20, 2025. Date and time are set by UBC. During the exam, you will write a prepared essay with no access to the internet or your notes (closed book). The Final Exam Essay is an academic paper in which you address a philosophical question based on the readings. Your audience is an intelligent undergraduate student who has attended our course and done our readings. The essay will be marked on content (clarity of presentation, strength of argument, relevance of thesis) and form (spelling, grammar, presentation), with much less emphasis on the latter. The Final Exam Essay needs to be argumentative, not expository or interpretive. You need an informative thesis, one that is strong enough so someone can reasonably disagree with it. Then you defend your thesis against the best objections of your reasonable opponents, much like a lawyer would: professionally and without flourish. You pick your own topic; it must fulfill the following constraints: (1) it is based on one of the class readings; (2) it relevantly touches on a theme or an issue that we have talked about in the lectures. I will put some material in the Modules section of Canvas to help you get started. You can write the final exam essay in any language you like. If there is no grader who can read your language we may ask you to translate it (it is usually sufficient to use a translation program for this). You must write a minimum of 1200 words. You can bring an 8.5x11 piece of paper with handwritten notes or an outline on it (one-sided); however, fully formulated paragraphs are not permitted on your notes.

## **Course Policies**

### **Class Etiquette and Rules**

I don't encourage the use of computers during class time, although you may do so if you are taking notes. Use the computer as you would on an airplane, i.e. offline. Often it's best to raise your hand if you want to speak, but I'm also happy to have free-form discussions in class where people don't raise their hands as long as everyone is respectful of others (avoid cutting others off, interrupting them when they're in the middle of saying something).

Basic rules of respectful dialogue will be enforced. Disrespectful speech such as name-calling, stereotyping, and derogatory remarks about ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation and sexual/gender identity should be avoided and may constitute harassing speech.

General information on assignments: Students should retain a copy of all submitted assignments and should also retain all their marked assignments in case they wish to apply for a Review of Assigned Standing. A final examination becomes the property of the University and must remain in the possession of the University for one year from the date of the examination, after which it should be destroyed or otherwise disposed of in accordance with UBC policy.

A word about the use of generative AI (for example ChatGPT). You are allowed to use it as you are allowed to use a dictionary. If the AI helps you with research, grammar, and spelling, that's perfectly fine. If the AI produces content for you, you should indicate this by citation. Be warned that an AI is surprisingly good at producing undergraduate papers, but it is unlikely that it would receive an above-average grade even if it were skillfully edited. Dependence on content creation by generative AI will therefore most likely lead to a grade deduction, not to mention the violation of academic integrity. If you are not a native English speaker or more generally do not feel comfortable with your ability to express yourself, the TA and I still want to hear your voice, not the voice of a computer. We predominantly grade on the basis of your argument's substance and usually try to look past issues you may have with spelling and grammar.

### **Policies on Late or Missed Assessments**

All essays are due on the day noted on this syllabus and on the assignment instructions. Late essays are subject to a 5% per 24 hours reduction in points. The first late day carries an extra penalty of 5%. This means that if you submit ten minutes late, the penalty is already 10% (5% for lateness, 5% for the first 24 hours). Arts Students must contact Arts Advising as soon as you are aware you may need an in-term concession. Please review their website for concession criteria as well as process to follow. Students in other faculties should contact their faculty advising office for direction. As instructors are no longer able to assess documentation other than the Student Self-Declaration Form, I will not be handling any in-term or final exam concessions. Go [here](#) instead.

## Grading Standards

The following provide general guidelines that apply to all courses in the Faculty of Arts, including this one.

The following guidelines offer a broad-brush characterization of the type of work that might be associated with various ranges of grades. The intent here is to encourage general consistency across the Faculty of Arts rather than to provide precise specifications.

- 80% to 100% (A- to A+) Exceptional performance: strong evidence of original thinking; good organization; capacity to analyze and synthesize; superior grasp of subject matter with sound critical evaluations; evidence of extensive knowledge base.
- 68% to 79% (B- to B+) Competent performance: evidence of grasp of subject matter; some evidence of critical capacity and analytic ability; reasonable understanding of relevant issues; evidence of familiarity with the literature.
- 50% to 67% (D to C+) Adequate performance: understanding of the subject matter; ability to develop solutions to simple problems in the material; acceptable but uninspired work, not seriously faulty but lacking style and vigour.
- 0% to 49% (F) Inadequate performance: little or no evidence of understanding of the subject matter; weakness in critical and analytic skills; limited or irrelevant use of the literature.

Marks in this course may be scaled (see Calendar, under Grading Practices).

## University Policies

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.

## Schedule of Readings and Assignments

		Mandatory	Optional
<b>Week 1</b>	<i>Introduction</i>		
	September 2	no class	Imagine Day at UBC
	September 4	<a href="#">CWT</a>	RTS
<b>Week 2</b>	<i>Western Epistemology</i>		
	September 9	RWK	<a href="#">PST</a>
	September 11	CAR	MAD
<b>Week 3</b>	<i>Ghost in the Machine</i>		
	September 16	RYL	SLR
	September 18	SOS	LWS
<b>Week 4</b>	<i>No Class</i>		
	September 23	no class	Instructor Away
	September 25	no class	Instructor Away
<b>Week 5</b>	<i>Gettier Cases</i>		
	September 30	no class	National Day for Truth and Reconciliation
	October 2	JJI without 1.8--1.11	KDR,JJI 1.8--1.11
<b>Week 6</b>	<i>Knowledge First</i>		
	October 7	WLM	
	October 9	RWW	JMD,CHI
<b>Week 7</b>	<i>Externalism</i>		
	October 14	LBJ	
	October 16	CFE	EVI
<b>Week 8</b>	<i>Standpoint</i>		

	October 21	NHS	
	October 23	CAL	
<b>Week 9</b>	<i>Feminism</i>		
	October 28	WYL	
	October 30	RCE	
<b>Week 10</b>	<i>Srinivasan</i>		
	November 4	ASA	
	November 6	NAN	
<b>Week 11</b>	<i>Srinivasan</i>		
	November 11	no class	midterm break
	November 13	ASB	
<b>Week 12</b>	<i>Srinivasan</i>		
	November 18	ASC	
	November 20	ASD	
<b>Week 13</b>	<i>Srinivasan</i>		
	November 25	ZJK	
	November 27	NAN	
<b>Week 14</b>	<i>Skepticism</i>		
	December 2	OMA	
	December 4	OMB	NUS

## Readings

Acronym	Author	Title	Pages
ASA	Amia Srinivasan	Normativity Without Cartesian Privilege	273--299
ASB	Amia Srinivasan	The Archimedean Urge	325--362
ASC	Amia Srinivasan	Are We Luminous?	294--319
ASD	Amia Srinivasan	Radical Externalism	395--431
CAL	Silvia Federici	The Great Caliban	133--162
CAR	Rene Descartes	Meditations on First Philosophy	Meditations I and II
CFE	Conee and Feldman	Internalism Defended	1--18
CHI	Roderick Chisholm	Internalism and Externalism	75--84
<a href="#">CWT</a>	Tyler Cowan	Amia Srinivasan on Utopian Feminism	podcast
EVI	Richard Feldman	Respecting the Evidence	95--119
KDR	Keith DeRose	Solving the Skeptical Problem	1--52
JJI	Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa	Knowledge	11--44
JMD	John McDowell	Knowledge and the Internal	877--893
LBJ	Laurence Bonjour	Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge	53--73
LWS	David Lewis	Elusive Knowledge	549--567
MAD	Penelope Maddy	Carnap's Rational Reconstruction	65--82
NAN	No Reading Assigned		
NHS	Nancy Hartsock	Feminist Standpoint	283--310
NUS	Martha Nussbaum	Luck and Ethics	1--22
OMA	Odo Marquard	In Defense of the Accidental	109--129
OMB	Odo Marquard	In Praise of Polytheism	87--110
<a href="#">PST</a>	Paulette Steeves	The Old Stone Age in the Western Hemisphere	podcast
RCE	Crewe and Ichikawa	Rape Culture and Epistemology	253--282
RTS	Amia Srinivasan	The Right to Sex	all
RWK	Robin Wall Kimmerer	Planting Sweetgrass	11--47

RWW	Ralph Wedgwood	Internalism Explained	349--369
RYL	Gilbert Ryle	Descartes' Myth	1--13
SLR	Sherrilyn Roush	Tracking: At Home on the Range	1--37
SOS	Ernest Sosa	How to Defeat Opposition to Moore	141--153
WLM	Timothy Williamson	Introduction / A State of Mind	1--48
WYL	Alison Wylie	Why Standpoint Matters	26--48
ZJK	Zoë Johnson King	Radical internalism	46--64

## Copyright

All materials of this course (course handouts, lecture slides, assessments, course readings, etc.) are the intellectual property of the course instructor or licensed to be used in this course by the copyright owner. Redistribution of these materials by any means without permission of the copyright holder(s) constitutes a breach of copyright and may lead to academic discipline. Students are permitted to record lectures for personal use only.