

PHIL 375: Philosophy and Literature

Winter 2025, Term 2 (Sect. 902)

Meets: T 18:30-20:00 and R 18:30-20:00 BUCH A-203

Instructor:

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Office Hours:

- Stefan: by appointment
- Yamina: 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 rnv619uwp4c. It is imperative that students read UBC-generated emails by the instructor sent to all students, as they may contain important announcements.

Description

PHIL 375 "Philosophy and Literature" addresses philosophical issues in works of literature or arising from theories of literary interpretation. Topics include issues relating to relativism, the nature of morality, free will, personal identity, the nature of the emotions. This course in particular will be about the question what the interpretation of texts and the methods associated with interpretation (hermeneutics) can teach us about more general philosophical questions such as metaphysics, scientific method, moral responsibility, and personal identity.

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 problems of hermeneutics and hermeneutic philosophy.

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 Tuesday, January 20, 2026, at 6:30pm (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 nonfiction text based on the idea that your life and the narrative associated with it provides a "text" for interpretation. Some questions to pursue are whether there are overall meanings or intentions in your life; what the role of contingency and randomness is; whether there is some kind of narrative with a beginning, an ending, and a middle that holds your life together; and what the continuity of personal identity is throughout the history or story of your life. Note that I do not want you to answer these questions in a detached and academic manner, and 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 nonacademic, 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. 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. As the essays are anonymous, I will not return them to you or comment on them.

25% Daily Questions

For each reading, you will submit a question video (minimum 30 seconds, maximum 60 seconds). I am not providing criteria for asking particular types of questions, because a great variety of questions (from honest-to-god "I don't know what's going on" questions to deep philosophical probing) can be excellent.

What makes a question good or even excellent is the precision with which it is asked, the depth of philosophical understanding that it reveals, the wrestling with the text to which it testifies. If you read your question or in some other way make the grader suspect that you have used AI in the formulation of your question, then it is more difficult to get a good grade for your question.

25% Final Exam

The final exam will be held during the exam period for Term 2, which is April 14–25, 2026. 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 (back and front); 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. The final exam essay, for example, requires the vigorous defence of a claim, not mere summary or exposition. 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.

Course Calendar

		Mandatory	Optional
Week 1	<i>Trust</i>		
	January 6	RSA	AWP
	January 8	KVH	HOD
Week 2	<i>Narrativity</i>		
	January 13	EKS	RKY
	January 15	GSA	MET
Week 3	<i>Existentialism</i>		
	January 20	MSN	VUC
	January 22	JPS	ONO
Week 4	<i>Utilitarianism</i>		
	January 27	CTA	WID,NTZ
	January 29	PAR	HUM,JSM
Week 5	<i>Dostoevsky</i>		
	February 3	DOS	JAS,OCC,EAG
	February 5	GIR	EOL,MMP,AUS
Week 6	<i>Tradition</i>		
	February 10	HOL	HEI
	February 12	NAN	HAN
Week 7	<i>Reading Break</i>		
	February 17	no class	Reading Break
	February 19	no class	Reading Break
Week 8	<i>Normativity</i>		
	February 24	HGG	
	February 26	CTH	
Week 9	<i>Habermas</i>		
	March 3	JHZ	JHC,JHH
	March 5	NAN	
Week 10	<i>Naturalism</i>		
	March 10	MAD	CAR,IBE
	March 12	POP	DBA,DBB
Week 11	<i>Skepticism</i>		
	March 17	OMA	KOL
	March 19	OMB	
Week 12	<i>Poststructuralism</i>		
	March 24	BAR	
	March 26	BUT	MFA,VGL
Week 13	<i>Foucault</i>		

	March 31	MFB	CTC
	April 2	MFD	MFC,DRD
Week 14	<i>Conclusion</i>		
	April 7	RSB	
	April 9	NAN	

Readings

Acronym	Author	Title	Pages
AUS	Thomas Fuchs	Wege aus dem Ego-Tunnel	801--823
AWP	Martin Heidegger	The Age of the World Picture	57--86
BAR	Roland Barthes	The Death of the Author	2--6
BUT	Judith Butler	Identity, Sex, and the Metaphysics of Substance	22--34
CAL	Silvia Federici	The Great Caliban	133--162
CAR	Rudolf Carnap	The Logic of Science is Syntax	331--333
CTA	Charles Taylor	What Is Human Agency?	15--44
CTC	Charles Taylor	Foucault on Freedom and Truth	69--102
CTH	Chris Thornhill	Two Rival Critiques of Metaphysics	331--365
DBA	John Dewey and Arthur Bentley	Interaction and Transaction	505--517
DBB	John Dewey and Arthur Bentley	Transactions as Known and Named	533--551
DOS	Fyodor Dostoyevsky	Underground	1--54
DRD	Jacques Derrida	The Theory of Writing	293--344
EAG	Terry Eagleton	The Rise of English and PHRT	22--30,54--73
EKS	Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick	Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading	1--37
EOL	Katharina Pistor	Empire of Law	1--22
GIR	René Girard	The Dostoyevskian Apocalypse	256--289
GSA	Galen Strawson	Against Narrativity	428--450
GSB	Galen Strawson	Why I Have No Future	21--26
HAN	Byung-Chul	From Things to Non-Things	8--16
HEI	Martin Heidegger	Being and Time	Sections 60 62 72 74
HGG	Hans-Georg Gadamer	Elements of a Theory of Hermeneutic Experience	265--285, 291- -300
HOD	Charles Hodge	On Method	20--31
HOL	Robert Holub	On Ideology and Interpretation	32--50
HUM	David Hume	Of Personal Identity	164--178

IBE	Igor Douven	Inference to the Best Explanation	7--24
JAS	Karl Jaspers	The Tension Between Technical Mass-Order and Human Life	44--69
JHC	Jürgen Habermas	The Conflict of Beliefs	30--45
JHH	Jürgen Habermas	The Hermeneutic Approach	143--170
JHZ	Jürgen Habermas	The Sociology of Law versus the Philosophy of Justice	42--66
JPS	Jean-Paul Sartre	Existentialism Is a Humanism	17--72
JSM	John Stuart Mill	On the Logic of the Moral Sciences	chapters III and XII
KOL	Leszek Kolakowski	Fabula Mundi and Cleopatra's Nose	242--248
KVH	Kevin Vanhoozer	Faith Seeking Textual Understanding	16--35
MAD	Penelope Maddy	Carnap's Rational Reconstruction	65--82
MET	Thomas Metzinger	From Ownership to Agency to Free Will	1--14, 115--132
MFA	Michel Foucault	Nietzsche, Genealogy, History	139--164
MFB	Michel Foucault	The Incitement to Discourse	17--35
MFC	Michel Foucault	Nietzsche, Freud, Marx	59--68
MFD	Michel Foucault	The Body of the Condemned	3--31
MMP	Michael Sandel	Markets, Morals, and the Public Sphere	Lecture II
MSN	Marya Schechtman	The Narrative Self-Constitution View	93--135
NAN	Reading Furlough	No Reading or Quiz That Day (Attendance Will Be Taken)	0
NTZ	Friedrich Nietzsche	Interpretation	43--58
OCC	Karl Popper	Of Clouds and Clocks	206--255
OMA	Odo Marquard	In Defense of the Accidental	109--129
OMB	Odo Marquard	In Praise of Polytheism	87--110
ONO	Onora O'Neill	Constructions of Reason	chapters 3, 4, 7
PAR	Derek Parfit	Why Our Identity Is Not What Matters	266--282
POP	Karl Popper	The Logic of Scientific Discovery	3--26, 276--281
RKY	Richard Kearney	Narrative and Ethics	29--45
RSA	Rebecca Solnit	Apricots I	1--16
RSB	Rebecca Solnit	Apricots II	237--254
VGL	Candace Vogler	Sex and Talk	328--365
VUC	Alisdair MacIntyre	The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of a Tradition	204--225
WID	Wilhelm Dilthey	The Rise of Hermeneutics	101--114

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