

PHIL 120
Knowledge and Reality
Fall 2021
CRN 91106, Section AB2
Tuesdays 13:00-15:50, Room A310

Professor: Dr. Joseph Carew
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Office Hours:
Mondays 13:00–14:00, Room K155
Fridays 8:30–9:30

The University of the Fraser Valley is located on the unceded territory of the Stó:lō peoples. We gratefully acknowledge our ability to live and work on the traditional territory.

Short Course Description

This course is an introduction to philosophy. Philosophy is best understood as an investigation into the foundations of knowledge (the branch of epistemology) and reality (the branch of metaphysics). Put differently, philosophy seeks to answer the “big” questions that have perennially puzzled humanity about the universe, our place in it, and how we can be certain that our beliefs about it, who we are, and how we should act are true. These questions deal with complex topics including but not limited to: What distinguishes truth from mere opinion? What is the relationship between mind and body? Are we free? What makes something morally right or wrong? Why is there something and not nothing? Does life have a meaning? We will cover historical and contemporary responses to such questions from the Western tradition, all the while approaching philosophy both as a discipline and a way of life.

Detailed Course Description

Everyone asks “big” questions of a philosophical nature. We all have at some time wondered about what is and is not a credible source of information, whether nature or nurture determines our personality, whether humans have free will, what is right and wrong, how the universe came to be, or whether life has a purpose. We might think that science alone tells us what is true, that one’s personality is fixed by one’s genes, that we are always in control of our actions, that murder is universally wrong, that God did not create the world, or that some higher power has given life meaning. In other words, we all operate with a particular philosophical worldview about the universe, our place in it, and how we come to know both.

However, we often take our worldview for granted. We acquire our basic beliefs about the world and how we should act through our friends and parents, inherit them from our cultural background, or have been taught them in school or Church. The task of philosophy is to try to provide a systematic analysis and evaluation of our worldviews, revise when they prove to be problematic, or invent entirely new ways of looking at the world. It does so by employing critical thinking to propose good arguments and avoid fallacies, biases, and inconsistency as we investigate into the very foundations of knowledge and reality.

Accordingly, we will look at highly influential positions upheld by philosophers concerning its two main branches of epistemology and metaphysics. In terms of epistemology, we will tackle

questions such as: How do we know life is not just one long dream? Can we know for sure that the sun will rise tomorrow? Can we know the world as it is, or only how it appears to us? As for metaphysics, we will discuss questions such as: Am I the same person I was ten years ago, even though I am constantly changing? Am I nothing but my brain? If everything event has a cause, am I responsible for my actions? Can we prove God's existence? If the universe is meaningless, can human life still have meaning?

Focusing on the Western tradition of philosophy, we will examine both classical and contemporary answers to these kinds of questions and the philosophical worldviews they entail. Throughout this course, we will emphasize how philosophical thinking has influenced world history and influences our day-to-day lives, even when we do not realize it.

Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Articulate central themes in Western epistemology and metaphysics.
- Explain major philosophical positions on the source and limits of knowledge, the nature of mind, ethics, theology, and the meaning of life.
- Use the methods of philosophical analysis and argumentation to evaluate these positions.
- Use key philosophical terms, concepts, and theories in conversation and writing.

Texts

The following texts are required and are the basis of coursework. They are available through UFV's bookstore:

- Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated by Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Edited by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Translated by James W. Ellington. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Translated by Carol Macomber. Edited by John Kulka. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Other required readings are available online via Blackboard.

Background Reading

If you are looking for extra or supplementary readings, there are many great resources available. These include the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, and the *Very Short Introduction* series published by Oxford University Press. All of these are written by experts for a general audience.

Student Evaluation

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|-----------------|-----|-----------------------------|
| • Participation | 10% | |
| • Essay 1 | 20% | October 17 |
| • Midterm | 20% | November 1 |
| • Essay 2 | 25% | December 5 |
| • Final | 25% | To be set by the university |

Essay 1:

The first essay will be of a historical and exegetical nature. You will contextualize and summarize key concepts and reconstruct the formal argument for them. The essay is designed to initiate you into philosophical thinking. The essay will be 1000 words.

Midterm:

A combination of true-and-false, multiple-choice, and short-answer questions on Parts I and II.

Essay 2:

The second essay will be a reflective essay that deals with a theme of your choice and argues for your own position with regard to this theme. I will circulate a list of topics, although you are encouraged to choose a topic of your own in consultation with the professor if there is something you would like to explore. This essay can be a place for you to investigate your philosophical interests and existential concerns through the course material. The essay will be 1200 words. The document should be double-spaced and in Times New Roman, 12-point font.

Final:

A combination of true-and-false, multiple-choice, and short-answer questions on Parts III and IV.

Class Schedule

Introduction: The Nature and Value of Philosophy

September 14: The What, Why, and How of the Philosophical Enterprise

Part I: Belief, Knowledge, and Skepticism

September 21: Rationalism: Knowledge is Based on Reason

- Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Translated by Donald A. Cress. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999. 1-6 & 59-69 [Discourse Part One, Meditations One & Two].

September 28: Empiricism: Knowledge is Based on Experience

- Hume, David. *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter Millican. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 12-34 [Sections II-V, Part I].

October 5: Idealism: The Mind Creates Experience

- Kant, Immanuel. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*. Translated by James W. Ellington. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001. 1-5, 9-19, 35-43 [Preface, §§1-3, an excerpt of §5, §§14-21]
- Recommended Reading: Kant, Immanuel. "Preface to the second edition." *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 110-111.

Part II: Bodies, Minds, and Personal Identity

October 12: Mind-Body Dualism: The Mind is Not Physical

- Descartes, René. *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. 92-103 [Meditation Six].

October 19: Psychological Continuity and Bundle Theories: Are We the Same Person Throughout Our Lives?

- Locke, John. "Human Beings Have an Identical Self [an excerpt of "Of identity and diversity" from the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*]." In *Classic Philosophical Questions*. Edited by Robert J. Mulvaney. 14th Edition. Boston: Pearson, 2012. 342-348.
- Hume, David. "Of personal identity." *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. Clarendon Press, 2007. 164-171.

October 26: Neuroscience and Eliminative Materialism: The Self is Not Real

- Metzinger, Thomas. *The Ego Tunnel: The Science of the Mind and the Myth of the Self*. New York: Basic Books, 2009. 1-24 & 62-65.

Midterm on Parts I and II

November 2

Part III: Human Freedom and Responsibility

November 9: Determinism, Compatibilism, and Freedom: Is Free Will an Illusion?

- Holbach, Paul Henri Thiry. "Humans Are Determined." In *Classic Philosophical Questions*. Edited by Robert J. Mulvaney. 14th Edition. Boston: Pearson, 2012. 322-329.
- Mill, John Stuart. "Determinism and Free Will Are Compatible." In *Classic Philosophical Questions*. 331-335.
- Taylor, Richard. "Humans Are Free." In *Classic Philosophical Questions*. 337-340.

November 16: Are Moral Principles Universally Valid?

- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Edited by Mary Gregor and Jens Timmermann. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 1-19 [Preface, Section I].

November 23: The Categorical Imperative, Human Dignity, and the Nature of Freedom

- Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. 24-46, 52-58 [excerpts of Sections II, III].
- Recommended Reading: Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. 58-72.

Part IV: God and the Meaning of Life

November 30: "God is Dead": The Nihilism of an Atheistic World

- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None*. Translated by Adrian del Caro. Edited by Adrian del Caro and Robert B. Pippin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1-25 [Prologue, On Three Metamorphoses, On the Teachers of Virtues, On the Hinterworldly, On the Passions of Pleasure and Pain].
- Recommended Reading: Paley, William. *Natural Theology*. Edited by Matthew D. Eddy and David Knight. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. 7-18.

December 7: Existentialism, Absurdity, and the Creation of Meaning

- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Translated by Carol Macomber. Edited by John Kulka. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Course Guidelines and Rules

- 1 *Email Format*: emails to the professor must indicate your name, student number, and the course number with section number. Please provide a course-specific subject line. I will respond within 2 business days.
- 2 *If you miss a test or assignment*, you must contact the professor within 48 hours. If you are excused (for medical reasons, bereavement, etc., as determined by the professor on a case-by-case basis), you must reschedule the test or discuss a plan to make up for it with the professor.
- 3 *Late assignments*: any assignment handed in late will be penalized by 5% per day for a maximum of 7 days. Late assignments after this point will not be accepted, except at the professor's discretion.

Institutional Procedures and Policies

Students registered in UFV courses should be aware of the following institutional procedures and policies:

About Covid, and returning to campus: please consult the official [UFV Return to Campus webpage](#).

Daily Assessment: All individuals entering UFV campus spaces are currently required to [conduct a self-assessment health check](#).

If you are sick: The option of requiring a doctor's note to document a short term illness is suspended. Please do the following:

- Do not come to campus.
- Contact your instructor to explain your situation.
- Submit a [student declaration of absence form](#) to your instructor and work together on a plan for you to make up any missed learning activities or assignments. This applies to both online classes or scheduled face-to-face classes.
- Communicate with your instructor if you are unable to complete the course due to illness and request an [Incomplete Grade Contract](#).

Guidelines for suspected or confirmed Covid case on campus: Please familiarize yourself with [this document](#), which provides the necessary guidelines for how to deal with confirmed or probable cases of covid on campus.

Attention: If you communicate to a UFV staff or faculty member by email, Blackboard Course Messages, or phone that you have Covid, being tested for Covid, or exposed to Covid, UFV staff or faculty will complete a [Priority Access to Student Supports \(PASS\) referral](#) and Student Services will follow-up with you to assess your situation.

Priority Access to Student Supports (PASS): UFV faculty and staff may use the PASS program to connect you to supports and resources to help you succeed in your courses. Such assistance may include putting you in touch with an academic advisor, financial aid, a counsellor, or another resource. PASS referrals are also used for reporting positive cases

of Covid-19, as well as for those who may have to self-isolate as a result of contact. If your instructor is concerned about your progress, he/she may refer you to PASS. The referral is treated confidentially and is sent because your instructor cares about your progress and success. Your response to PASS is entirely voluntary. Instructors will let you know they are making a referral. If you do not wish your instructor to make a referral to PASS on your behalf, please let them know by using your UFV email.

Visit ufv.ca/student-services/PASS for more information.

UFV Academic Policies

For a full list of UFV policies please refer to the [University Secretariat website](#). Below is an overview of policies that directly relate to your success:

Grading: All undergraduate students at UFV are evaluated using the same grade scale:

A+	90-100	B	73-76	C-	60-62
A	85-89	B-	70-72	D	50-59
A-	80-84	C+	67-69	F	<50
B+	77-79	C	63-66		

All students who are admitted to, or declare, a program or program option require a [minimum program grade point average \(PGPA\) of 2.00](#) (3.00 for graduate level) on all courses taken at UFV that are used to meet program requirements.

Academic Misconduct: UFV Policy 70 includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, impersonation, improper access to examination materials, falsification or unauthorized modification of an academic document/record, resubmission of work, improper research practices, obstruction of the academic activities of another, and aiding and abetting.

Attendance Policy: UFV Policy 62 states that instructors may withdraw students who do not attend the first class and penalize lack of regular attendance. Instructors are expected to advise students of penalties at the start of term.

Audit Policy: UFV Policy 108 explains that a student intending to audit a course must do so before 30% of the course is complete. Please refer to [Important Dates](#).

Final Exams: UFV Policy 46 explains that final exams are scheduled by the institution during the pre-determined final exam period. Students must be available for the entire exam period and should not make travel or other plans which conflict with this schedule. Instructors are entitled to require that students take all examinations at the times scheduled.

Final Grade Appeals: UFV Policy 217 outlines the appeal process for final grades. All appeals must be made within 14 days of the final grade becoming available.

Pre-requisites: UFV Policy 84 states that the minimum grade required for a prerequisite course is C- unless another grade is stated.

[Safe Student Learning Community: UFV Policy 204](#) states “Students are required to conduct themselves in a mature and responsible manner, consistent with the university mission, policies, and regulations, and in compliance with federal, provincial, and municipal laws.

Students will be held accountable for their actions whether acting alone or in a group.” Further information can be found on the [Safe Student Community website](#).

[Withdrawal: UFV Policy 81](#) states students may choose to withdraw from a course without penalty before completing 60% of the course. Students withdrawing before they have completed 30% of the course will not receive a “W” on their transcript; students withdrawing after completing 31% to 60% of the course will receive a “W” on their transcript. A “W” has no academic penalty and is not counted in the student’s GPA. After 60% of the course has been completed, students must apply for [Late Withdrawal](#). Please be aware of [semester withdrawal deadlines](#).