### PHIL 2101: Introduction to the Problems of Philosophy

*Fully Online*

Instructor: Michael L. J. Greer, she/her

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**Time of Synchronous Sessions (on Zoom): Mondays and Wednesdays 9.30am – 10.45am**

Office hours (on Zoom): Wednesdays 10.45am – 11.45am and by appointment.

Click here to book: <https://calendly.com/mljgreer/office-hours-for-phil2101>

Here is the Zoom link for office hours and live sessions:

<https://gc-cuny-edu.zoom.us/j/82906288357?pwd=ckFKNjZnRGNORytzTmNVMmo1MXVHdz09>

Passcode: 2101

### **Class Website and Blackboard:**

Here is the link to our class website: <https://introphil.commons.gc.cuny.edu/>.

*You can find all our class’s readings, assignments, and extra resources by navigating the menu at the top of the webpage.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

We will use Blackboard for five things:

1. **To hand in assignments**. *To do this, navigate to “Hand In Assignments” on the left.*

2. **To use the discussion boards***. To do this, navigate to “Discussions” on the left.* *Two assignment options ask you to use the Discussion Board. I’ve also set up some informal forums for us to use.*

3*.***To sign up for and collaborate over your group projects.** *To do this, navigate to “Groups” on the left. More details below.*

4. **For important announcements.** *To check announcements, navigate to “Announcements” on the left.*

* *I will mostly be in touch with you via email, however I will repeat important announcements on Blackboard.*
* *Make sure your fill out the intro questionnaire with your preferred email address, as that is how I will usually contact the class. I will take your phone number at the end of our first class but will only use it if I am having trouble getting in touch with you via email.*

5. **To store recordings of (and sometimes notes from) our synchronous Zoom live sessions.** *To find these recordings, navigate to "Class Recordings & Notes" on the left. I will update this weekly.*

### **Course Description**

The world is a curious place. As children, we wonder about it. To questions like: “Why is the sky blue?” and “How do microwaves work?” we get initially satisfactory answers. To questions like “Why should I do what my parents tell me to do?” and “How do you know*for sure*there aren’t aliens on Mars?”, we get less satisfactory answers. Questions, and their possible answers, are the currency of philosophy, and (as you will see) permeate every aspect of human life. This class will interrogate our philosophically imbued experiences of the world by exploring questions like: How can we distinguish what is real from what is not real? How is knowledge shaped or constrained by one’s location? Why is truth important? What is morally important and why? Should there be a revolution, and if so, what should it look like? Where is the self located? Are there different ‘kinds’ of people? In what sense do race(s) and gender(s) exist? You will leave this class with an understanding of some philosophical issues found in three main branches of Western philosophy: epistemology, axiology, and metaphysics. *No previous experience with professional philosophy is assumed or needed in this class.*

### **Learning Objectives**

#### Content-Based Objectives [information to learn and engage with]

1. Acquire an understanding of philosophical issues found in the study of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics. [student-material]
2. Learn about central arguments and positions on said problems. [student-material]

#### Skill-Based Objectives [tools and mental resources to continue using in the future]

1. Improve reading comprehension and efficiency. [student-material]
2. Identify arguments, specifying premises and conclusions. [student-material]
3. Critically examine arguments (test consistency among claims, test limits, or test capacity to address a relevant issue or problem). [student-material]
4. Practice active listening, including the skill of charitable interpretation. [student-student]
5. Interrogate the weaknesses of one’s own view and the strengths of alternative views. [student-material] [student-student] [student-teacher]
6. Practice formulating original arguments and foresee (and respond to) strong objections. [student-material] [student-self][student-student] [student-teacher]
7. Identify and explain how philosophical concepts inform discussions of real-world issues. [student-material] [student-self] [student-student]
8. Cultivate critical writing and communication skills. [student-material] [student-student] [student-teacher]
9. Develop a philosophical curiosity that will serve you outside of the classroom. [student-material] [student-student] [student-teacher]
10. Develop appreciation for and sensitivity to philosophical questions. [student-material] [student-student] [student-teacher]

### **Course Format and Expectations:**

This course will have synchronous live sessions, held on Zoom every week, as well as asynchronous activities (the Zoom link and password are above and on Blackboard). Attendance is expected.[[2]](#footnote-2)

## **The course is divided into three units.** Each unit is comprised of **5 weeks:**

## Unit 1:Epistemology, the study of knowledge

## Unit 2: Axiology, the study of value

## Unit 3: Metaphysics, the study of nature or existence

Classes will be recorded and posted on Blackboard by the Wednesday of each week. Sometimes we will have collaborative google doc handouts which I will also link on Blackboard.

Every **week you should:**

* + Read the assigned text(s), watch assigned video, listen to assigned audio
  + Attend the live session (this is the **synchronous** component of the course)

Assignments and activities **you will complete asynchronously**:

* Introductory Assignment. *Builds community rapport.*
* Office Hours Requirement (explanation below). *Builds student-teacher rapport.*
* Two notes to self. *Addresses all LOs.*
* Philosophical Skills Assignment. *Addresses all LOs.*
* Three short essays on a topic from each unit. *Addresses LO 1, 2, 3,4, 5, 7, 8, 10*
* Group research project (including presentation). *Addresses all LOs.*

### Course Grading

Introductory Assignment 5%

Office Hours Requirement: 5%

Two Notes to Self: 15% cumulatively

Philosophical Skills Assignment: 20%

Three Short Essays: 30% (10% each)

Group Research Project (incl. Presentation): 25%

### Assignments

*Navigate to the “Assignments” page on our* [*class website*](https://introphil.commons.gc.cuny.edu/) *for detailed descriptions of assignments.*

Introductory Assignment **This is pass/fail.** This is a fun and quick opportunity for you to introduce yourself to your classmates and vice versa. I have created a private Instagram page for us to introduce ourselves to each other. You will create a very short Instagram post introducing yourself to your classmates. I take exercises like these to be an important part of building an online learning community, which itself plays an important part in augmenting learning outcomes. **Detailed instructions are on the** [**class website**](https://introphil.commons.gc.cuny.edu/) **in the “Assignments and Grading” section.**

Due **August 29th**.

Office Hours Requirement **This is pass/fail.** In order to pass this requirement, you must meet

with me in my office hours, at least once. Office hours are on the first page of this syllabus, and you use the same zoom link and password as the live sessions. You may book with me here: <https://calendly.com/mljgreer/office-hours-for-phil2101>.

To get credit for this, you must meet with me by **October 4th**.

Notes to Self (2 parts) **This is self-graded.** The assignment is comprised of two letters: *Note to Self 1* and *Note to Self 2*. The purpose of this two-part assignment is to interrogate your assumptions about what philosophy is, to evaluate if or how your beliefs have changed over the class, to promote metacognition about learning you do in class, and to help keep you accountable to yourself and to me (so that you get the most out of your experience!). **Detailed instructions are on the** [**class website**](https://introphil.commons.gc.cuny.edu/) **in the “Assignments and Grading” section.**

Note to Self 1 Due **September 6th**.

Note to Self 2 Due **December 15th**.

#### Philosophical Skills Assignment (PSA)

**Graded according to a provided rubric.** I provide a number of “Philosophical Skills Assignments” for you to choose from. The nature of these assignments varies but tests from among the following skills and learning objectives: reading comprehension, reconstructing arguments, presenting objections, asking relevant questions, testing consistency among claims, testing limits, and testing capacity to address a relevant issue or problem.

I accept PSAs on **September 15th**, **October 17th**, **November 3rd**, **December 8th**.

You are only required to hand in ***one*** PSA.

You are only required to do **one** PSA, but I accept PSAs at four times in the semester. This gives you the choice to complete yours at a time in the semester that is best for you. If you don’t like your grade, you may hand in another one to try and get a better grade, **but you must hand in a different PSA option.** I will incorporate your highest PSA grade into your overall grade.

PSA Options (you must choose *one*):

1. Philosophical Opinion
2. Respond to a Philosophical Opinion
3. Agree w/ Conclusion, Disagree w/Argument
4. What’s Missing (Partner Work)
5. Philosophy in Movies
6. Reconstruction, Objection, and Response
7. Making Connections (Partner Work)

**Detailed instructions including a task checklist are on the** [**class website**](https://introphil.commons.gc.cuny.edu/) **in the “Assignments and Grading” section.**

*Three Short Essays*

I ask you to write three short essays: one for each unit that we

cover. For each short essay, you will thoroughly explain, in your own words, one author’s position on some philosophical topic or problem.

Short Essay 1 due: **October 11th**

Short Essay 2 due:

**November 15th**

Short Essay 3 due:

**December 13th**

**Detailed instructions including a task checklist are on the** [**class website**](https://introphil.commons.gc.cuny.edu/) **in the “Assignments & Grading” section.**

**The first essay will be graded Pass/Fail. I will give you feedback on the writing and content, according to which you will write your next two essays. Your last two papers are graded according to a rubric which is included on the instruction sheet and Blackboard.**

#### Group Research Project & Presentation

**Timeline:**

1. Organize first group meeting by **Sep 20th** (email prof. Greer time, date, Zoom info)

2. Literature Review: **Oct 18th**

3. Project Proposal due: **Nov 1st**

4. Project Presentation: **Dec 13th or 15th**

**Graded according to a provided rubric.** One of the skills-based objectives for this class is to cultivate critical writing and communication skills. Others include practicing the skill of active listening, developing a philosophical curiosity, and improving reading comprehension and efficacy. This assignment helps you practice these skills in tandem with your classmates.

The group research project is scaffolded in such a way that it will reflect a semester’s worth of work. First you must self-enroll as a group of around ***five***people on BB. We will go over how to do this in more detail in class, but to see where to begin you may navigate to “Groups” on the left-hand side of BB. Then you must organize a meeting with your group and email me the time, date, and Zoom/BB Collaborate info by **September 20t**h. You will complete a collaborative literature review, and you must upload evidence of this by **October 18th**. Based on this research, you will craft a project proposal together and submit it by **November 1st**. I will give you feedback by **November 15th**, and based on that feedback you will craft a group project that is verbally presented on **December 13th** or **15th**.

**Detailed instructions including a task checklist are on the** [**class website**](https://introphil.commons.gc.cuny.edu/) **in the “Assignments and Grading” section.**

### **Zoom/Live Session Etiquette**

(Credit to [Rima Basu](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1b_8DA_vYo3dG9sHmGZjFX77-GZj2ikxWzeK4ZaMZXR0/edit?fbclid=IwAR3qhqWuD706L4dOJR0ywe68vnbYPAw9Q63DRxEA4s-Fbox16sc8YED7424)) This class will be taught *synchronously* meaning that I expect that you to attend class on Mondays and Wednesdays from 9.30am to 10.45am. This class is heavily discussion based and **you are expected to do the required readings, listen to the podcasts, and watch the relevant media before each live session and come prepared to discuss the material.** The vibrancy of the class discussion, which is extremely important for you to get the most out of this class, relies on you spending a good amount of time working through the materials every week.

During class, you should make an effort to listen carefully to each other as your peers have much to say that is insightful, and their points of view deserve careful attention. Additionally, the better classroom dynamic and community we build, the better our learning outcomes will be. For this class to work well, it will require a lot of flexibility, patience, and empathy from all of us.

**For these reasons:**

* Be on time and be ready to participate.
* Avoid disruptions during Zoom sessions if possible.
* If you are not talking, mute your audio. Nonetheless, be engaged; ask questions via chat, raise your hand, use the clap button when you like a point, participate in polls, etc.
* Email me a picture of a cat if you’ve read carefully enough to notice this.
* Make sure that you display your preferred name on Zoom. You may also use this function to display your pronouns. You can do this either by clicking on your video or on the participant’s page.
* You’re welcome to Zoom from wherever it’s most comfortable to Zoom for our class time.

### **Student Expectations**

* Check your email regularly for updates (please make sure you have proper access to it, and that you give me the correct email address in the intro questionnaire).
* Due dates are calculated by EST – assignments are due by midnight EST on the date.
* If and when issues arise (be they technical or personal) that interfere with your studies, communicate with me as soon as possible. I am happy to make any necessary accommodations and work with you. Online learning in a pandemic is not normal! We will all have to be kind to ourselves and one another, as well as flexible with our self-expectations. I am here to help in any way I can.
* Grades will not be curved.
* This is an inclusive space for all students, and absolutely no discrimination in any form will be tolerated. If you ever feel uncomfortable or unsafe throughout the course, please let me know via email or in office hours (see password and zoom information above). **I am not a mandated reporter.**
* Plagiarism is unacceptable. **I would rather grant an extension than receive plagiarized work.** If you find that you need more time to complete an assignment, *please talk to me.* If you are wondering whether something counts as plagiarism, see the handout (on the [class website](https://introphil.commons.gc.cuny.edu/) and Blackboard). If you are still unsure, feel free to ask me!
  + I have a “two-strike” policy. The first time any work is plagiarized, I will fail the assignment. The second time I will bring the matter to the office of academic integrity and recommend course failure – no exceptions and no questions asked.

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### **Expectations of Instructor (Communications and Turnaround Expectations)**

* I aim to get you feedback on written work within two weeks of handing it in.
* My office hours are on Wednesdays from 10.45am – 11.45am where you can meet with me one-on-one via phone or Zoom. You can sign up for a slot here: <https://calendly.com/mljgreer/office-hours-for-phil2101>. Note: I require that you attend my office hours at least once before **October 4th** so start thinking about when you’re going to sign up!
* The best way to reach me is via email ([mgreer@gradcenter.cuny.edu](mailto:mgreer@gradcenter.cuny.edu)). I generally respond to emails within 24 hours during the week, but I do not check my emails over the weekend. I will respond to emails sent over the weekend on Monday.

### Health and well-being

University life can be challenging, and I understand that your physical and mental health may be impacted. If you feel that you are struggling, please reach out to me and we can work something out.

### Lateness and absences

Try to arrive to our live sessions on time. This respects other students’ time as well as mine. Saying that, I would rather you come late than not at all.

If you cannot make it to class, or are having internet problems, **please email me before class letting me know**. You will not be penalized for being absent, however, not coming to class will make it difficult for you to absorb the material and get a good grade. **If you are having consistent trouble making it to our live sessions and want to talk to me about your progress, send me an email or come to my office hours (see password and zoom information above).**

### Informal Connecting

(Credit to [Rima Basu](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1b_8DA_vYo3dG9sHmGZjFX77-GZj2ikxWzeK4ZaMZXR0/edit?fbclid=IwAR3qhqWuD706L4dOJR0ywe68vnbYPAw9Q63DRxEA4s-Fbox16sc8YED7424)) It’s much harder now to continue conversations as you walk to your next class, or to ask your classmates about the dilemmas that came up in class to see if they have the same intuitions, etc. In order to facilitate that kind of informal conversation about the material, I’ve set up two Threads on Blackboard’s Discussion Board that apply to the class as a whole. To navigate to them, click on “Discussions” on the left of our Blackboard page:

## **Q&A Forum:** A discussion forum established for Q&A about the course, monitored by me, the instructor. *Students may post questions that may not be directly related to a discussion topic of the week. For example, questions about assignments and requirements of the course, how to perform a task, to report a broken hyperlink, etc.*

## **Philosophers’ Café:** A casual, ungraded discussion forum for off-topic and informal conversations. *This forum is for you to connect with each other! I will refrain from entering this space too much. This can be a place to continue conversations you thought were interesting, to raise new ideas or topics that are tangentially related to what we’re talking about in class, or even to share social media information! I’ll let you make what you want of the space (:*

### Technology Support

## If you need help accessing Blackboard or your email, you can get in touch with the Brooklyn College Information Technology Services (ITS) Help Desk (718.951.4357), Monday–Thursday, 8 a.m.–8 p.m.; Friday 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

### **CUNY Rules, Regulations, and Services**

#### Accessibility

The Center for Student Disability Services (CSDS) will be working remotely for the fall semester. See [here](https://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/about/offices/studentaffairs/student-support-services/disability.php) for more details. In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations students must first be registered with CSDS. Students who have a documented disability or suspect they may have a disability are invited to schedule an interview by calling (718) 951-5538 or emailing testingcsds@brooklyn.cuny.edu. If you have already registered with CSDS, email Josephine.Patterson@brooklyn.cuny.edu or testingcsds@brooklyn.cuny.edu to ensure the accommodation email is sent to your professor.

Note: I assume that all of us learn in different ways and live in very different circumstances. I understand that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, or you might prefer to articulate ideas via email or chat/discussion/comments. While I hope that you will all engage and participate generously, please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. (Credit to [Jessie Male](https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/files/Jessie%20Male%20Syllabus.pdf)). **Your access to our class matters to me—matters a lot. While I work hard to make our class accessible, I understand that you may have access needs I have not addressed. Access is an ongoing process. Please meet with me to discuss your access needs.**

#### Plagiarism

The faculty and administration of Brooklyn College support an environment free from cheating and plagiarism. Each student is responsible for being aware of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism and for avoiding both. The complete text of the CUNY Academic Integrity Policy and the Brooklyn College procedure for policy implementation can be found at www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/bc/policies. If a faculty member suspects a violation of academic integrity and, upon investigation, confirms that violation, or if the student admits the violation, the faculty member MUST report the violation*. Students should be aware that faculty may use plagiarism detection software.*

#### Nonattendance because of religious beliefs

NY State Education Law provides that:

(1)  Any student in an institution of higher education who is unable, because of their religious beliefs, to attend classes on a particular day or days shall, because of such absence on the particular day or days, be excused from any examination or any study or work requirements.

(2)  It shall be the responsibility of the faculty to make available to each student who is absent from school, because of religious beliefs, an equivalent opportunity to make up any examination, study or work requirements which they may have missed because of such absence on any particular day or days.

Any student who is aggrieved by the alleged failure of any faculty or administrative officials to comply in good faith shall be entitled to maintain action or proceeding in the supreme court of the county in which such institution of higher education is located for the enforcement of their rights.

#### Student bereavement policy

Students who experience the death of a loved one must contact the Division of Student Affairs, 2113 Boylan Hall, if they wish to implement either the Standard Bereavement Procedure or the Leave of Absence bereavement procedure. The Division of Student Affairs has the right to request a document that verifies the death (e.g., a funeral program or death notice). See the following:

<http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/about/initiatives/policies/bereavement.php>*.*

### Local and National Mental Health Resources

* [Brooklyn College Personal Counseling Services](https://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/about/offices/studentaffairs/health-wellness/counseling.php): 0203 James Hall - 718.951.5363, 718.951.5734. Or email [bcpersonalcounseling@gmail.com](mailto:bcpersonalcounseling@gmail.com)
  + Personal counseling is available to Brooklyn College undergraduate and graduate students. A staff of psychologists, counselors, and social workers are available to assist you with personal issues or problems you may experience during your academic years. Reach out via email with your name and EMPLID.
* National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1.800.273.8255
* Safe Horizon 24/7 Domestic Violence Hotline: 1.800.621.4673
* Safe Horizon 24/7 Rape and Sexual Assault Hotline: 1.212.227.3000
* Samaritans 24-Hour Crisis Hotline: 212.673.3000
* Trans Lifeline: 877.565.8860
* NYC Anti-Violence Project English/Spanish hotline: 212.714.1141 (AVP empowers lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and HIV-affected communities and allies to end all forms of violence through organizing and education and supports survivors through counseling and advocacy.)

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### Schedule overview

For full lists of readings, assignments, and due dates, see the [Course Schedule](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1G7T1Rk-sSWINdtAjfj5II31KQVKPwNtT/view?usp=sharing) or go to the [class website](https://introphil.commons.gc.cuny.edu/).

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Unit** | **Week dates** | **Guiding Question(s)/** | **Live Session Dates** |
|  | Week 1 8/25 - 8/29 | What are we doing when we do philosophy? | 8/25 |
| Epistemology | Week 2 8/30 - 9/5 | How can we know what is real and what isn't? | 9/30 and 9/1 |
| Week 3 9/6 - 9/12 | N/A | No class 9/6 or 9/8 |
| Week 4 9/13 - 9/19 | *What* can we know? | Class 9/13 No class 9/15 |
| Week 5 9/20 - 9/26 | How is knowledge shaped or  constrained by your location? | 9/20 and 9/22 |
| Week 6 and first part of Week 7 9/27 - 10/3 | (Why) Is truth important? | 9/27, 9/29, 10/4 |
| Axiology | Week 7 (part 2) 10/4 - 10/10 | What is morally important? | 10/6 |
| Week 8  10/11 - 10/17 | (continued) | No class 10/11.  Class 10/13 |
| Week 9 10/18 - 10/24 | (continued) | 10/18 and 10/20 |
| Week 10  10/25 - 10/31 | Should there be a revolution? What should it look like? | 10/25 and 10/27 |
| Week 11 11/1 - 11/7 | (continued) | 11/1 and 11/3 |
| Metaphysics | Week 12 11/8 - 11/14 | Where and what is the self? | 11/8 and 11/10 |
| Week 13 11/15 - 11/21 | (continued) | 11/15 and 11/17 |
| Week 14 11/22 - 11/28 | Are there "kinds" of people? | 11/22 and 11/24 |
| Week 15  11/29 - 12/5 | Do race(s) and gender(s) exist? | 11/29 and 12/1 |
| Week 16  12/6 - 12/12 | Buffer Week | 12/6 and 12/8 |
|  | Week 17 12/13 - 12/19 | Presentation/Exam Week | 12/13 and 12/15 |

1. This materials for this class are mostly Open Access, Open Educational Resources, or in the public domain. There are a couple of exceptions to this rule however they should still be free at the point of access (e.g., available online through your public library, or a news article that runs into a paywall after viewing five articles). You should feel free to share this Website with friends and family who are not at Brooklyn College but are interested in the things you’re studying. They will have access to all the educational materials I post on the [class website](https://introphil.commons.gc.cuny.edu/). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Online participation for Verification of Enrollment purposes will be assessed using Zoom attendance. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)