



Philosophy 1902A (670)
THE ART OF THINKING WELL
Fall/ Winter 2025-2026

Instructor: D. Proessel
Email: dproesse@uwo.ca

Course Information

Calendar Description:

Thinking well is an art that begins with self-awareness, is guided by learning criteria for reasonableness of claims and decisions, and improves with practice. This course offers students an opportunity to enhance these lifelong skills and to develop as responsible learners and communicators.

Antirequisite(s): Philosophy 1230A/B, Philosophy 1900E.

Extra Information: 3 lecture hours.

Course Weight: 0.50

Breadth: Category B

Subject Code: PHILOSOP

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), or special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

**King's University College at Western University
Department of Philosophy**

Philosophy 1902A (670): The Art of Thinking Well

Instructor: Dr. Dean Proessel

Email: dproesse@uwo.ca

Asynchronous: video lectures

Office Hours: via zoom (TBA)

Course Description

Thinking well is an art that begins with self awareness, is guided by learning criteria for reasonableness of claims and decisions and improves with practice. This course offers students an opportunity to enhance these lifelong skills and to develop as responsible learners and communicators.

Course Syllabus

This course provides students an opportunity to think through and learn the art of thinking well. In our polarized and diverse world, we are often overrun with information and misinformation and the competing claims and beliefs of others. This makes difficult determining and assessing what it is we should believe, what it is reasonable to believe, what makes a claim worthy of belief, or what it is for a belief to be true. In other words, we have a need to think *critically* about the beliefs we hold and thus to interrogate our own assumptions. Which raises the question: what is it to think critically? By examining the views of a variety of philosophers and thinkers on themes in philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, epistemology, and moral philosophy, we will examine critical thinking in *practice*. It is through practice and through example, it is through a dialogue with texts, that one not only learns the art of critical thinking and more generally thinking well, but also what sorts of questions to ask about critical thinking; that is, one learns to think critically about critical thinking.

Since the art of thinking well begins in self awareness we will begin our investigation in antiquity and Socrates idea that the unexamined life is a life not worth living. Then moving to the modern world, we examine what might be called bad thinking, specifically Frankfurt's view concerning the prevalence of bullshit and how our modern tendency towards bullshit undermines our self awareness and ability to tell the truth or even to seek it. The remainder of the course is devoted to *questions* that surround critical thinking in practice. Questions such as: What makes a belief something we should and do accept? Do we decide what to believe? If beliefs are based on evidence, what is good evidence? Is science the best source of evidence and truth and what are the limits of science. Given that we get our beliefs from others, is there a right way of doing so? Or is our relation to others a matter of trust? How are religious beliefs different from scientific beliefs? Are religious beliefs rational? Does it make sense to believe in miracles? What does it mean to be objective? Why not subjective? Are there instances when we shouldn't be critical at all? These, and many other questions like them, surround critical thinking and, by involving ourselves in a conversation with what philosophers have said about such questions, students will learn the art of thinking well.

Method of Delivery

Some of the course readings will be posted on OWL Brightspace; most of the readings are from the anthology assigned. Since this course is on-line, each week will include power-point slides and video recordings on the readings and themes being investigated that week. You will also have a chance to discuss the readings via a weekly zoom meeting.

Prerequisite(s): None

Antirequisites: Philosophy 1230A/B, Philosophy 1900E

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Course Materials

Paul Gombert, *What Should I Believe? Philosophical Essays for Critical Thinking*, Broadview Press, 2011 (cost: 41.80)

Students are welcome to purchase second-hand or earlier editions of this textbook.

Additional readings posted on OWL Brightspace.

Methods of Evaluation

Essay 1	30% (Due October 10)
Essay 2	35% (Due November 21)
Final Exam	35% (TBA)

The penalty for late assignments is 3% a day.

Reading List: *The Art of Thinking Well*

Thinking in Antiquity

Week 1: September 8-12
Plato, *Euthyphro*, *Apology*

Bad thinking

Week 2: September 15-19
Henry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit*

Good thinking

Week 3: September 22-26
John Dewey, *How to Think Well*, Chapter 1
Charles Pierce, "The Fixation of Belief."

Two Defenses of Critical Belief

Week 4: September 29-October 3
William Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"

Uncertainty and Scrutiny in Science

Week 5: October 6-10
Paul Gomberg, "Miracles and Scientific Research"
Steven Jay Gould, "Sex, Drugs, Disasters, and the Extinction of Dinosaurs"
Paul Gomberg, "Are we related to Other Life?"

Racism: Ideology in Science and Phenomenology

Week 6: October 13-17
Nancy Krieger and Mary Bassett, "The Health of Black Folk: Disease, Class, and Ideology in Science"
Franz Fanon, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," from *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Wittgenstein and Winch: On Understanding Others and *Scientism* in Philosophy

Week 7: October 20-24
Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society"

Why Do We Believe Others?

Week 8: October 27-31
David Hume, "On Miracles"
William Clifford, "From the Ethics of Belief"

Reading Week: November 3-9

Belief and Trust

Week 9: November 10-14

Nicholas Wolterstorff, *The Epistemology of Testimony*

Lars Hertzberg, "On the Attitude of Trust"

Wittgenstein on Trust: Selections from *On Certainty*

Religious Beliefs and Critical Scrutiny

Week 10: November 17-21

Richard Dawkins, "A Scientist's Case Against God"

William James, "From the Will to Believe"

Richard Feldman, "Clifford's Principle and James Options"

Kierkegaard: Truth as Subjectivity

Week 11: November 24-28

Soren Kierkegaard, "Truth is Subjectivity"

Wittgenstein and Religious Belief

Week 12: December 1-5

Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Lectures on Religious Beliefs"

Hilary Putnam, "Wittgenstein and Religious Belief"

Review

KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
GENERAL COURSE POLICIES
2025-2026

1. Academic Accommodations, Consideration for Absences

Academic Accommodation (Accessibility)

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate), they should follow the procedures below.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration. Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration. For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate is available at https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses_enrollment/exams_and_tests/SMC-Feb-2025.pdf.

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per course.

Instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline for each course.

For further information, please see:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

Absences from Final Examinations

If you miss the Final Exam, contact the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a “Multiple Exam Situation” (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details (under Special Examinations).

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

2. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King's University College:
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-services/>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University

College: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-supportservices/personal-counselling/>

Good2talk is a good online and phone 24/7 resource for students and is available in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options about how to obtain help:
https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/

Academic Support Services at King's University College:
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/>

GBSV Support:

King's is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at:
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing Care@kings.uwo.ca or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a social worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western's Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by email or by calling 519-661-3568.

Further supports can be found on this website: <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safecampus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

See also https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

University Students' Council offers many valuable support services for students, including the health insurance plan: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

3. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Use of Electronic Devices: Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom: King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/code-of-student-conduct1/>

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

4. Statement on Academic Offences

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. Check with you instructor on what tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammarchecking tools) are permitted in the course. Because a tool is permitted in one course, that does not mean it is permitted in other courses.

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system; see <https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality Reports - TurnItIn.html>.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

5. Copyright of Course Material

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member. Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

6. Use of Recordings

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

7. Policy on Attendance

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.