# META101x: Philosophy and Critical Thinking

*What can we learn through philosophical inquiry that will help us to think with clarity, rigour and humour about things that matter?*

## ABOUT THE COURSE

META101x is an online introductory course in Philosophical and Critical Thinking.
This course introduces principles of philosophical inquiry and critical thinking that will help us tackle the BIG questions like 'how do we know things?', 'what is there?' and 'how should we live?' Learn how we can use philosophical ideas to think about ourselves and the world around us.

## EXPECTED LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of the course, you will:

- Think with more clarity and rigour
- Identify, construct and evaluate arguments
- Think of solutions to the central problems of philosophy
- Engage in philosophical conversations with others about topics that matter.

If you are an educator, you will find in the last module resources to help you transform your teaching in order to create more opportunities for critical thinking in your classroom. If you enroll as a verified student and educator, pass the course (obtain at least 65%), and keep a journal throughout the course and submit it, we will issue you with a special certificate certifying that you have completed 25 hours that you may be able to use towards your professional development quota for the year, depending on your school's structure for recognising professional development.

## VIDEOS

Each module contains a number of short videos that illustrate and explore key ideas in philosophy. (You can speed them up or slow them down as you prefer—our favourite is x 3.5 chipmunk speed!)
You can also view the videos in full screen or in high definition depending on the speed of your Internet connection. If you'd like to download videos to watch later on your mobile device, share with your friends, or present to your class, go right ahead! All of our content is available for use under a Commons Attribution–ShareAlike License.

UQX

## TEXT

Distilling complex ideas into 3 minutes is hard!  That's why you'll find the concepts covered in each video are also explained in a lot more detail in the surrounding text, under the banner '*Let's Philosophise!*.  We'll cover how philosophers have addressed these big ideas in the past and where the current 'state of the art' thinking is at.

## CERTIFICATION

To earn a verified certificate upon completion of the course, you must enroll as a verified student and pass the course. You will need to obtain an overall mark of at least 65%.

Educators who complete the journal activities, download and submit it to UQx, as per the instructions within the course, will receive a certificate stating that the recipient has completed 25 hours of professional development in Teaching for Thinking.

## COURSE OUTLINE

### MODULE 1

**What part of "know" don't you understand?**

We'll examine what makes an argument compelling, and how you can evaluate arguments to see if they are put together in a convincing way. We will develop this skill all throughout the course by applying it across a range of philosophical topics with increasing sophistication.  In each module, we will be analysing and evaluating arguments.

**Assessment**

Module Quiz

We'll also look at the topic of knowledge through an examination of radical doubt.  What is knowledge and how can we ever be free of doubt?  We'll look at some of the ideas and arguments used to try and answer these questions, as well as why it is important to think about how we know things to be true.

### MODULE 2

**Mind the Explanatory Gap**

Here we learn about a logical structure called the conditional. We'll see how this is linked to thinking about states of affairs that serve as either necessary or sufficient conditions for other states of affairs. This kind of thinking is central to many domains of inquiry and life. We'll also see how mistakes in using the conditional give rise to some very common logical errors of reasoning.

**Assessment**

Module Quiz

We'll then apply the distinction between necessary and sufficient conditions in thinking about the mind, (the subject of psychological inquiry), and matter, (the subject of physical, chemical and life sciences), as well as the problem of personal identity.

## MODULE 3
### Thinking About Higher Things

Religion is part of the very fabric of many societies and their moral codes. Here we consider some very ancient problems in philosophy concerning the relationship between religion and morality. Does morality derive its justification from religion or is it independent of religion? We also examine the variety of arguments philosophers and theologians have presented over the eons in an effort to prove that God exists.

In looking at these arguments, we will learn about the distinction between a priori and a posteriori reasoning—reasoning independently of observation and empirical investigation (a priori reasoning) and reasoning from observation and empirical evidence (a posteriori reasoning)--and how both styles of reasoning have played their part in the Philosophy of Religion.

## MODULE 4
### Is anybody out there?

Here, we consider two main types of inductive reasoning—generalizing and analogising—and we'll see what can go wrong when we use these poorly.
Induction is the bread and butter of scientific inquiry. But there's a problem justifying inductive inferences.  And because induction is hard to justify, it's unclear whether what we discover in science counts as knowledge. Induction is also intrinsic to the process of drawing causal connections between events on the basis of observations of their concurrence. What happens to causal reasoning if induction is unreliable?

## MODULE 5
### How should I live?

Everyone chooses and does what they think to be good. But how can we be sure that what we think is good really is good? How could we ever know that we have made the right choice? How should we organize society so as to ensure that we minimize the harms that people can do to each other? These questions will be familiar to anyone who has engaged in a moment of moral reflection. Here, we consider the contributions philosophers have made to our understanding of moral and political dilemmas and the various philosophical answers they have provided to questions about the nature of goodness, right action, and our duties and moral obligations to one another.

We also consider arguments advanced for the kind of social and political organization best adapted to maximizing human happiness and social equality. In the process, we will see how philosophers use arguments to advance our thinking about decisions that shape our lives.

**What should I believe?**

In this module, we explore how we socially construct and verify knowledge. We'll see how working collectively and collaboratively can improve the confidence we have in knowledge claims, including overcoming our cognitive biases, and we'll look at how these social processes can be mapped onto the methodologies of science. We'll also explore what we mean by pseudoscience, developing some key characteristics we can use to spot flawed reasoning and practice. There is often a close connection between fallacious or biased reasoning and a failure to adhere to ethical norms—self-interest can lead people not only to do bad things but to believe incorrectly. Bad ethics often leads to bad science! Being an effective knowledge-making society depends on mutual trust and violating that trust puts at risk the very validity of science.

A striking fact about human nature is that our behaviour is governed by norms and rules of our own making —norms about what words mean, norms of inference, norms of action and ethical norms. It's because of these norms that we can make mistakes— when, for example, we commit fallacies of reasoning. But herein lies another philosophical puzzle. How, on any given occasion when you are trying to follow a rule, can it be determined which rule you are following? This question is harder than it looks, and it may be that no one person in isolation from everyone else could possibly answer it.

## ASSESSMENT

You'll notice as you work your way through the course that you will be presented with a series of quiz questions, polls and opportunities to discuss or reflect on the issues raised during the course. The questions throughout the module are formative ones, which means they are not graded and you are allowed multiple attempts. Questions in quizzes at the end are graded and will count towards the final mark. Each of these quiz questions allows only one attempt, so read them well! There is no time limit so feel free to review the course material as you consider each question.

The pass mark for the whole course is 65%.
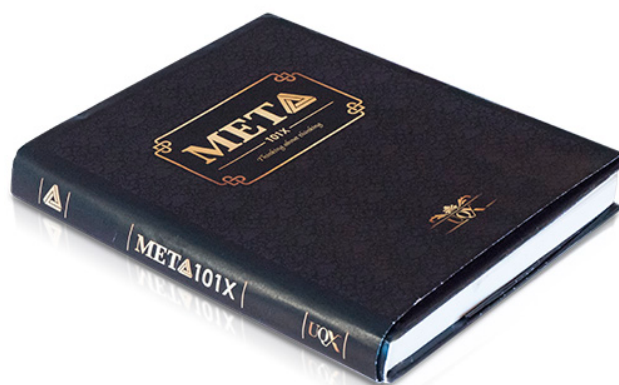
## DISCUSSION FORUM

Philosophy isn't just a bunch of facts you can learn about passively—it's a mode of thinking and engaging with the world that requires active cognitive and metacognitive development. So you need to practice by thinking, analyzing, evaluating and justifying your viewpoints and by developing well-reasoned arguments. You can practice your thinking in the discussion forum with other participants in the course and our moderator—this is exactly what it is for! Keep a record of your thinking about the topics or key points from the modules in the journal entries located at the end of each module. At the end of the course, you can download your entire journal for safekeeping.

Each module will have a number of discussion threads on the key issues covered where you can join in, reflect on what's been covered, and challenge the ideas presented. These forums will be moderated to point you in the right direction (assuming there is a right direction) but a lot of learning comes simply from responding to others.

There are a few important ground rules to be aware of however:

- Challenge ideas, not people. It might seem like philosophers are a critical bunch—probably because they are. But philosophers challenge ideas, not the people holding those ideas.

- Keep an open mind. Philosophy questions assumptions, and sometimes these assumptions can be deeply held. Having your strongest held views challenged can be uncomfortable so it's important be open to new ideas.

- Give the benefit of doubt. Online discussions aren't as information rich as in-person ones because they lack many visual and aural clues like body language and tone. It's important, therefore, to interpret others in the best light possible—philosophers call this the 'Principle of Charity'. It's important to see others' viewpoints in the best possible light to avoid committing the straw man fallacy—the fallacy of arguing against a position no one actually holds!


## HONOR CODE AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

This course is offered online and we encourage collaboration and help between students, but please avoid asking for and posting final answers to the course assessments. Violations of the honor policy undermine the purpose of education and the academic integrity of the course. We expect that all work submitted will be a reflection of one's own original work and thoughts.

Additionally, all students are expected to follow the EdX Rules of Online Conduct, available at www.edx.org/edx-terms-service