

Syllabus for *Theory of Knowledge*: PHI-220-1

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Introduction

Welcome to Philosophy 220, the Theory of Knowledge, or epistemology. If there is one guiding question for the course, it is this: What should we believe?

Course Goals

Students will acquire proficiency in the basic issues in analytic epistemology, especially regarding skepticism and dogmatism, the nature of knowledge, and social epistemology. Students will be encouraged to try out their own answers to central questions in the field, and to think creatively while appreciating influential answers that have come before.

Students will continue to develop the general philosophical skill of writing arguments clearly and concisely. Students in this course should already be familiar with the art of raising objections and counterexamples. By the end of the course, they should have made progress in thinking two or three moves ahead—not simply, “what’s an objection to this view?” but “how could this view handle this objection?” “What modifications would preserve as much insight as possible from the original view?”

A related goal is to learn to build a research paper in stages. Writing the paper in stages makes it easier to develop an appropriate, back-and-forth dialectic by making it easier to incorporate various positions in the literature and feedback and objections from peers.

Required Materials

You should bring a composition notebook, a writing utensil, and a copy of the day’s reading to class everyday.

There are no required texts to purchase. All readings will be posted to Sakai several weeks before the required date.

Course Readings: General Description

Our class is organized into three units. First, we’ll look at skepticism and dogmatism. Can we know anything about the objective world? And should our fundamental epistemic orientation toward the world tilt toward doubt or belief? What is it to doubt or believe in the first place?

This unit is more historical than the others, featuring Sextus Empiricus, Al-Ghazali, Descartes, and Hume.

The first unit is primarily normative: what *should* we believe? But our second unit is descriptive: what *is* knowledge? Is it valuable? Does it have foundations? Is there an analysis of knowledge, and if so what is it? But this descriptive question has normative implications. If as epistemic agents we aim to know, it'd be good to know what sort of thing it is we are aiming at.

Our final unit is social epistemology, a topic that has rightly surged to prominence in epistemology in recent decades. Epistemic agency is not performed in isolation: we benefit from and are hindered by the epistemic actions of our community. There are three sub-questions that we'll address. First, when (if ever) can we learn that something is true just by someone's say-so? This is the question of testimony. Second, how is our capacity as knowers affected by power and social position? These are questions of epistemic justice. Third, what should we do when the people with the best information disagree? This is the question of peer disagreement.

Course Readings: Schedule

Skepticism and Dogmatism

September 6 (Thursday)

Topic: Introduction to the Course; Is Skepticism a Good Thing?

Reading 1: The Syllabus

Reading 2: Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Book I, sections 1-15 (only parts of 14)

September 10 (Monday)

Topic: What is suspension?

Reading: Friedman, Jane (2017). "Why Suspend Judging?" *Noûs* 51 (2):302-326.

September 13 (Thursday)

Topic: Skepticism as Malady or Method?

Reading: Al-Ghazali, Introduction and chapter 1 of his *Deliverance from Error*

September 17 (Monday)

Topic: Descartes' Method of Doubt

Reading: Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* I-II

September 20 (Thursday)

Topic: Descartes and Reasoning One's Way Out of Skepticism

Reading: Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* III-IV

September 24 (Monday)

Topic: Dream Skepticism

Reading: Sosa, Ernest (2005). "Dreams and Philosophy," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* Vol. 79 (2): 7-18.

September 27 (Thursday)

Topic: Skepticism about Induction

Reading 1: Hume, David (1748). "Sceptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding," sect. IV of his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

Reading 2: Russell, Bertrand (1912). "On Induction," ch. 6 of his *The Problems of Philosophy*.

October 1 (Monday)

Topic: The Moorean Shift: Moorean Facts or Wittgensteinian Hinges?

Reading 1: Moore, G.E. Excerpts from "Proof of an External World" in Ernest Sosa and Jaegwon Kim (eds.) *Epistemology: An Anthology*, Blackwell Publishers: 24-26.

Reading 2: Excerpts from "Certainty" in this same volume: 29-32.

Reading 3: Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1969). Excerpts from *On Certainty*, G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (eds.), Basil Blackwell: paragraphs 243-344.

October 4 (Thursday)

Topic: The Problem of the Criterion

Reading: Chisholm, Roderick (1982). "The Problem of the Criterion," ch. 5 in his *The Foundations of Knowing*, University of Minnesota Press: 61-75.

October 8 (Monday)

Topic: Practical Reasons and Skepticism

Reading: Rinard, Susanna (forthcoming). "Pragmatic Skepticism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*.

Research Project: Question Due

October 11 (Thursday)

Exam: Skepticism and Dogmatism

Research Project: Comments on Question Returned

The Structure and Analysis of Knowledge

October 15 (Monday)

Topic: Foundationalism and Coherentism

Reading 1: Sellars, Wilfrid (1956). "Does Empirical Knowledge have a Foundation?" in H. Feigl and M. Scriven (eds.) *The Foundations of Science and the Concepts of Psychology and Psychoanalysis*, Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science, vol. I, University of Minnesota Press: 293-300.

Reading 2: Sosa, Ernest (1980). "The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1):3-26.

Research Project: Revised Question and Initial Bibliography Due

October 18 (Thursday)

Topic: The Gettier Problem

Reading 1: Plato, (brief) Excerpts from *Meno*

Reading 2: Gettier, Edmund (1963). "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* 23 (6):121-23.

Reading 3: Zagzebski, Linda (1994). "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems," *Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (174):65-73.

October 22 (Monday)

Topic: Reliabilism

Reading: Goldman, Alvin I. (1976). "A Causal Theory of Knowing," *Journal of Philosophy* 64 (12):357-372.

Research Project: *Précis* Due

October 25 (Thursday)

Topic: Virtue Epistemology (and Safety)

Reading: Sosa, Ernest (2007). "A Virtue Epistemology," ch. 2 of his *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, Vol. I*, Oxford University Press: 22-43.

October 29 (Monday)

Topic: Knowledge First?

Reading: Nagel, Jennifer (2013). "Knowledge as a Mental State," *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* 4: 275-310.

Research Project: Abstract Due

November 1 (Thursday)

Topic: A Matter of Context

Reading: Lewis, David (1996). "Elusive Knowledge," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (4):549-567.

Research Project Suggestion: Begin Working on Draft

November 5 (Monday)

Exam: The Structure and Analysis of Knowledge

Research Project: Abstracts Returned

Social Epistemology

November 8 (Thursday)

Topic: Testimony

Reading 1: Excerpts from the *Nyaya Sutra*, Book I ch. 1 sect. 5, 7 & Book II ch. 1 sect. 110-120.

Reading 2: Fricker, Elizabeth (1994). "Against Gullibility," in A. Chakrabarti & B. K. Matilal (eds.), *Knowing from Words*, Kluwer Academic Publishers: 125-161.

November 12 (Monday)

Topic: Peer Review Workshop

Reading: None

Research Project: First Draft Due, peer review groups assigned

November 15 (Thursday)

Topic: Testimony and Knowledge

Reading: Lackey, Jennifer (1999). "Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission," *Philosophical Quarterly* 49 (197):471-490.

November 19 (Monday)

Topic: The Norm of Assertion

Reading 1: Williamson, Timothy (2000). "Assertion," ch. 11 of his *Knowledge and its Limits*, Oxford University Press: 238-269.

Reading 2: Lackey, Jennifer (2007). Excerpts from "Norms of Assertion," *Noûs* 41(4): (only read pages) 598-600.

Research Project: Peer Review Forms Due

November 20 (Tuesday but Thursday schedule)

Topic: Introduction to Epistemic Injustice

Reading: Fricker, Miranda (2007). "Testimonial Injustice" ch. 1 of her *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford University Press.

Research Project: First Drafts Returned

November 26 (Monday)

Topic: Epistemic Oppression

Reading: Dotson, Kristie (2011). "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia* 26:236-257.

November 29 (Thursday)

Topic: Race, Oppression, and Ignorance

Reading: Mills, Charles W. (2007). "White Ignorance," in Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.) *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, State University of New York Press: 13-38.

Research Project: Final Paper Due

December 3 (Monday)

Topic: The Epistemology of Disagreement: Conciliationism

Reading: Christensen, David (2007). "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News," *Philosophical Review* 116 (2):187-217.

December 6 (Thursday)

Topic: The Epistemology of Disagreement: Steadfastness

Reading: Kelly, Thomas (2010). "Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence," in Alvin I. Goldman & Dennis Whitcomb (eds.), *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings*, Oxford University Press: 183-217.

December 10 (Monday)

Exam: Social Epistemology

Research Project: Papers Returned

December 15

No Class Scheduled

Research Project: Reflection Due (by email)

Expectations and Assessments

It is expected that you will carefully read the texts before class and contribute to discussion during class. The overall length of reading per class will never exceed 40 pages, but those pages should be read closely.

Apart from your contributions to discussions in class, your reading of the material will be assessed by (a) random spot-checks on your journals and (b) exams at the end of each major unit. The exams are not cumulative.

You are also expected to produce a research paper of 3k words during the semester. You will be expected to complete various stages of the writing process at various checkpoints throughout the course.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory. This class is based on discussion, and when you miss class, you miss an integral part of the course (and rob us of your contributions as well!). I will take attendance at the beginning of every class. A pattern of unexcused absences can result in a lower grade or failure to pass.

Barring extreme circumstances, excused absences will never be granted if they are requested after the start time of a class period. It's your obligation to request an excused absence before missing it.

Journal

In this class, we'll use handwritten journals to help us process the reading material. There should be a journal entry for each class day for which reading was assigned. Your journal should be brought to class each day in the form of a composition notebooks. Each journal entry must include:

- 1) The date of the reading
- 2) The name of the article(s)
- 3) A sticky passage from the readings--a passage you had trouble understanding, or where you think the author might not be maximally clear. Actually write out the passage--slowing down to think about each word is a helpful way to begin to understand a sticky passage.
- 4) A question or objection that you have in response to the reading. Your questions don't need to be longer than a paragraph, but I expect them to be reasonably detailed and to show engagement with the reading.

- 5) A question or comment that another student asked during the discussion in class that you found insightful, along with the other student's name.
- 6) Elements 1-5 should be clearly labeled.

This is what is required in the journals, but I strongly recommend that you also use it to take other notes that may be useful to you as you read and as we discuss the readings in class.

About three or four times during the semester, I will randomly collect the journals to check that they are being completed in good faith and to assign a grade. I will also sometimes ask students to share their sticky passages or questions/objections during class.

(If there's a reason that handwritten notes are not feasible for you, please talk to me and we'll find an alternative.)

Exams

For the exams, several of the readings from the relevant unit will be selected. Each selected reading will have three questions: (a) an exegetical question to test comprehension of the concepts used in the paper, (b) a question that asks you to represent or otherwise engage with one of the central arguments of the passage, and (c) a question that introduces a new idea from outside the readings and invites you grapple with the new idea in light of the passage under discussion. You will have some (limited but significant) choice over which subset of the passages to answer questions about. But you must answer every question for any passage that you choose to engage. (I will show you a sample question set before the first exam.)

Research Paper

You will write one 3k word research paper over the course of the semester on an epistemological question of your choice. The project will be completed in stages:

1. Select a Question: The question should be (a) epistemological, (b) suitably narrow for a 3k word paper, and ideally (c) something that genuinely interests you! The question only needs to be a sentence or two, but this is arguably the most important step of the whole project!
2. Revise Question: Since it's the most important step, I will provide some feedback on your first question to make sure it is properly focused. You'll then submit a revised version of the question.
3. Bibliography Construction: Once you have your question, you'll need to identify some papers to research. You must compile a bibliography that contains at least 5 articles, at least 3 of which are not on the syllabus. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and PhilPapers.com will be good resources for you. We'll talk more in class about good strategies for finding useful articles.
4. *Précis*: You will be required to write two, 300-400 word *précis* of any two of the articles on your bibliography that are not also on the syllabus. A *précis* should briefly

summarize the thesis and central argument in the article, so that someone who has not read the article can easily understand the basic moves of the paper.

5. Abstract: A question picked and some research done, you're now in a position to write an abstract. Your abstract should (1) clearly identify your thesis, (2) outline the main argument(s) of the paper, and (3) give the reader a sense of the flow of the paper. Your abstract should be 400-500 words.
6. First Draft: Your first draft should be at least 2500 words and should have the number of words clearly displayed. It should be a complete draft, in that the central argument of the paper should be present and at least one objection should be developed with a response. Your draft will be graded.
7. Peer Review (2x): Every student will review two other students' papers. Students will complete a peer review form (to be given in class) in which they identify the strengths and weaknesses of the paper, evaluate the paper according to a rubric, and offer an objection to the view. Reviews should be charitable in tone, but it's also important to be honest about where the paper needs improvement--that's how you can be most helpful! One day of class is set aside to begin the peer review process and to discuss good peer review practices.
8. Final Version: Your final paper should be no more than 3k words (and should have the number of words clearly displayed). The paper should respond to (a) the comments in the peer review and (b) the instructor's comments on the first draft. How you responded to these comments will be a part of your grade so that, e.g., an unchanged draft resubmitted as a final version of the paper would earn a worse grade on the final version than it did on the draft. There should be a clear argument and at least two objections should be considered and responded to.
9. Writing Reflection: At the end of the writing project you will be asked to submit a one-page writing reflection. The reflection should address two questions: 1) What is one thing I learned by writing this paper? 2) If I could do one thing differently about the writing process, what would it be?

You will receive grades for your abstract, your draft, and your final version. The others will be checked for completeness and good-faith effort. Half a letter grade (5%) will be deducted from the grade of the final paper for each (ungraded) stage of the project that is not completed with a good-faith effort. (The two *précis* and the two peer review forms each count as two separate stages for this purpose.)

Assessment

Your grades on individual assignments will be combined to form your course grade in the following way:

Journals: 10%

Exam 1: 15%

Exam 2: 15%

Exam 3: 15%

Abstract: 5%

Draft: 10%

Final Paper: 30%

As noted above, the final grade can be affected by unexcused absences. The following guidelines translate what the various grades mean (esp. as applied to the research paper).

A: 90-100% Truly excellent work that goes above and beyond the baseline requirements for the course. Work that achieves the level of an A exhibits mastery of the material taught in the course and the ability to build on that mastery to contribute something creative, rigorous, and ambitious of your own thought to the assignment.

B+: 85-90%

B: 80-85% Solid, commendable work that fulfills all of the project requirements. B-level work exhibits competence with the course material and genuine insight that goes beyond the confines on what was taught. There may, however, be small errors, or the paper may lack the full rigor or creativity of an A paper.

C+: 75-80%

C: 70-75% Decent work that fulfills most of the project requirements. C-level work may, however, show gaps in understanding of the course material or substantial defects in the argument presented.

D: 60-70% Incomplete work that exhibits a poor understanding of the course material and makes a weak contribution to the discussion.

F: <60% Dishonest work

Late Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted. One of the goals of the course is to learn how to write a research paper in stages, and maintaining a writing schedule is vital to this.

Extensions may be requested. But except in extreme circumstances, extensions should always be requested well in advance (at least 48 hours, ideally more).

Plagiarism and Citations

Plagiarism is representing someone else's work as your own. Don't do it. Give proper credit whenever you are using another person's words, arguments, or ideas. When in doubt, cite.

Citing well isn't just a way to avoid plagiarism--it's an opportunity to demonstrate that you have engaged seriously and in good faith with other thinkers. Citing well also (perhaps counter-intuitively!) highlights where you have made an original contribution, making it easier for your readers to see what distinguishes your work from that of others.

When citing printed material, always include the author's name, date of publication, and page number. Every citation should match an entry in your bibliography.

Plagiarism will result in an F on the assignment and reported to the dean. If the plagiarism is blatant or repeated, it will result in an F in the course.

The university's policy on academic integrity can be found here: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>

Technology Policy

You are welcome to use technology in class for and only for class-related purposes (i.e. displaying the course readings). Please be aware that when you use screens for other purposes it is often a distraction to others around you.

Email Guidelines and Office Hours

You should feel free to email me at any point for any course-related or philosophy-related questions!

Email is an excellent medium for short, specific questions about the course. I will always aim to get a response to you within 24 hours on a weekday and 48 hours on the weekend. Feel free to gently remind me if I seem to have overlooked your email.

For more substantial questions or for extensive feedback on an assignment, I prefer to meet during office hours when possible. If my regular office hours do not work for you, we can set up an appointment for an alternative time.

Note: I share an office with Ernie Sosa (whose name is on the door) and Laura Callahan. If we meet at a time outside of our scheduled office hours, I may not have access to the office, in which case we will arrange for another location to meet in the department.

Expectations for Discussion

All discussion in this class must be performed in a respectful and charitable way. The Rutgers Philosophy department writes:

“In our community we expect all participants to observe basic norms of civility and respect. This means stating your own views directly and substantively: focusing on reasons, assumptions and consequences rather than on who is offering them, or how. And it means engaging other's views in the same terms. No topic or claim is too obvious or controversial to be discussed; but claims and opinions have a place in the discussion only when they are presented in a respectful, collegial, and constructive way.”

Here are three small recommendations that I think go a long way toward making philosophical discussions better:

1. Adopt a general attitude that you and your classmates are involved in the common pursuit of the truth, even when defending contrary theses.
2. Name other students when you're responding to their idea. This shows that you've been listening to them and gives them credit for their contributions. Even when you are (politely) disagreeing, mentioning them communicates that you think their comment is worthy of discussion.
3. Unless the class is very small (and maybe even then), raise your hand before making a contribution. This allows me as the instructor to see that quieter students have a chance to enter the discussion when they want to.

Finally, if I do anything that doesn't promote good dialogue in our seminar, please let me know! I'm still learning how to be a good philosophical interlocutor as well, and some of my best feedback comes from you.

Accessibility

Please get in touch with the Office of Disability Services (ods.rutgers.edu) if there is any way at all that this course can be made more accessible for you. I want to make this course as accessible for everyone as possible!

Other Services for Students

Student-Wellness Services

[Just In Case Web App](#)

<http://codu.co/cee05e>

Access helpful mental health information and resources for yourself or a friend in a mental health crisis on your smartphone or tablet and easily contact CAPS or RUPD.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS):

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/ www.rhscaps.rutgers.edu/

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professional within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA):

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 /

www.vpva.rutgers.edu/

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and

stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181.