

Phil 342 – Introduction to Epistemology
Spring 2017
MW 4-5:15pm
South College E241

Instructor

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Office hours: Wednesday 2-3pm or by appointment

“Did I miss anything” friends

Name	Email

Overview and course objectives:

In this course we will focus mostly on questions about knowledge and epistemic rationality. What does it take to have knowledge, and what can we know? What do we have reason to believe? What do we have reason to doubt? How are reasons to believe different from (and related to) reasons for action? In the last part of the class we will get into some contemporary questions about disagreement: should you doubt your previously-held beliefs when you find out that others disagree with you? Can there be reasonable disagreements?

The aim of this course is to familiarize you with various questions and considerations in the theory of knowledge, to have a basic understanding of some of the major debates in recent epistemology, and to have more in-depth understanding of the topics you choose to write about in your papers. You will also develop and improve your skills at philosophical writing and discussion.

Assignments:

Reading responses

Each week I will post questions on Moodle regarding that week’s readings. Submit your answers on Moodle. These are pass/fail and don’t require more than about 300 words/1 paragraph of writing. You need to write at least 1 per week, due before class the day we discuss that paper. More than three weeks without a passing reading response will lower your grade. The purpose of these responses is to help you understand the papers and to prepare you for class discussion. There are no extensions on reading responses.

Papers

There are three short papers required for this class. Length: 4-5 pages (double-spaced, 12-pt font) for the first two, and 8-10 pages for the third. I will post paper prompts in advance on Moodle.

For the first two papers, we will have writing workshops in class. You are required to bring a hard copy draft of your paper to class on that day. If you do not participate, or if you don't bring in a real draft of the paper, your grade for that paper will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (e.g. from a B+ to a B). (If you must miss class on one of the workshop days, please let me know **in advance** to schedule a make-up assignment.)

Course Materials:

There are no required textbooks for this class. Readings are available on Moodle.

Grading:

Grades are calculated as specified below.

Reading responses	10%
Paper 1	20%
Paper 2	20%
Paper 3	40%
Attendance & Participation	10%

I have provided a rubric for the papers. These give the numerical grades that I will record on Moodle as well as the letter grades they correspond to. I am using the standard UMass scale (so, the final cutoff for an A- at the end of the semester will be a 90%, etc.).

Extensions and Late Work:

Late work will be marked down 1/3 of a full grade per day (for example, from B+ to B). Work that is more than 2 weeks late (without an extension) will not be accepted and will receive a 0. The purpose of this is to keep everyone in the class on track, and to allow me to grade as fairly as possible (as it is easier to be consistent when grading all the papers at once).

However, I recognize that you may sometimes need to move things around in order to manage your own time. If you need an extension on your first two papers for *any reason whatsoever*, however, ask me at least a day in advance and it will generally be granted. This does not apply to the last paper or to the reading responses.

Extra Credit:

There isn't any.

Class expectations:

* Students should do the reading assigned for each class meeting *before* that class meeting. All reading is available on the course website. There is no required textbook. Please print out the articles we read so that you can bring them to class. (This should work out to be much less expensive than the average textbook; however, if it is a hardship please let me know.)

* **20th Century Policy:** This classroom exists in the 20th century. Please do not make use of any electronics that would not have been available to you in the 20th century.

This includes all cell phones smaller than a Coke can and laptops weighing less than five pounds. Come see me if you want an exception for *any reason whatsoever*, and I will decide whether to grant it. Good reasons for exceptions include documented disabilities, truly horrible handwriting, broken arm, etc. Bad reasons include “I just like to take notes on a laptop” (sorry) and “I want to check my March Madness app during class”.

* **Attendance** is required to pass the class. If you miss more than three meetings without a legitimate excuse, are regularly late to class, or regularly violate the 20th Century Policy, you can expect this to lower your grade for that portion of the class.

Academic Honesty:

I follow UMass protocol for academic honesty. (See <http://www.umass.edu/honesty/>) I am using Turnitin for all three papers.

All written work should be written entirely by you (and written for the purpose of *this class, this semester*) unless otherwise specified. You are encouraged to talk to one another about assignments at early stages, but any sources you consult – including one another – must be properly cited. It is common philosophical practice to cite the names of those whose remarks in philosophical discussion (verbal or written correspondence), or comments on drafts of your paper that influenced your revisions.

Please do not circulate drafts of your papers with other students (except during in-class paper workshops).

If you are unsure of how or whether to cite a source, come ask me. It is always better to err on the side of too many citations rather than too few!

Office hours:

My office hours this semester will be Wednesdays, 2-3pm. Office hours are a time when I am in my office and available to meet with students. You are welcome to come by to ask questions about the reading or to talk about a paper outline or draft. If you can't come during office hours, please email me to schedule an appointment.

Students with disabilities:

Please contact me to discuss your needs. You should also contact Disability Services at 161 Whitmore.

This syllabus is subject to change. I will notify you of any changes.

Schedule:

Week 1 1/23, 1/25 **Truth**

Monday, 1/23

No reading; Relativism Quiz in class.

Wednesday, 1/25

No class (SPH out of town).

Week 2 1/30, 2/1 **Truth and knowledge**

Monday 1/30

Read:

Searle, John. [2009] “Why Should You Believe It?”

Listen:

Diane Rehm Show, “How Journalists are Rethinking Their Role Under a Trump Presidency”. 11/30/16. (Relevant portion starts around 14:00)

This American Life 599: “Seriously?” 10/21/2016. Prologue and Act 1.
(Transcript available online)

Wednesday 2/1

No reading

Week 3 2/6, 2/8 **Knowledge**

Monday 2/6

Optional: Gettier, Edmund. [1963] “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”

Clark, Michael. [1963] “Knowledge and Grounds: A Comment on Mr. Gettier’s Paper”

Lehrer and Paxson. [1969] “Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief” (pp. 225-231; skip sections 3 and beyond)

Wednesday, 2/8

Optional: Zagzebski, Linda [1994]. “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems”

BonJour, Laurence [2010]. “The Myth of Knowledge” (skip section 4)

Week 4 2/13, 2/15 **Reasons for belief and action**

Monday, 2/13

Pascal, Blaise. [1660] *Pensées*, Section 233.

Wednesday, 2/15

Rinard, Susanna. [Forthcoming] “No Exception for Belief”

Week 5 2/20, 2/22 **Paper workshop; skepticism**

Monday, 2/20

Paper workshop

Before class, look at Angela Mendelovici’s sample paper (on Moodle).

*****Paper 1 workshop copy due; submit on Moodle before class and bring a hard copy to class**

Wednesday, 2/22

Descartes, Rene. [1641] *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy: Meditation 1.*

Stroud, Barry. [1984] “The Problem of the External World”, in *The Philosophical Significance of Skepticism*. pp. 7-12

*****Paper 1 due on Moodle Friday, 2/24**

Week 6 2/27, 3/1 **Response to Skepticism 1: Content Externalism**

Monday, 2/27

Putnam, Hilary. [1981] “Brains in a Vat.” from *Reason, Truth, and History*

Wednesday, 3/1

Putnam, continued

Week 7 3/6, 3/8 **Responses to Skepticism 2: Internalism/Externalism**

Monday, 3/6

Bonjour, Laurence. [1980] “Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge”

Wednesday, 3/8

Goldman, Alvin. [1999] “Internalism Exposed”

*****Spring break*****

Week 8 3/20, 3/22 **Responses to Skepticism 3: Moore’s Proof**

Monday 3/20

Moore, G. E. [1939] “Proof of an External World” (Just the last 5 pages. Start on p. 144: “It seems to me that, so far from its being true...”)

Wednesday 3/22

Kelly, Tom. [2005] “Moorean Facts and Belief Revision or Can the Skeptic Win?” (This looks long when you download it, but it’s a quick read.)

Week 9 3/27, 3/29 **Paper workshop; disagreement**

Monday 3/27 Paper workshop.

*****Paper 2 workshop copy due; submit on Moodle before class and bring a hard copy to class**

Wednesday 3/29

No reading, but answer the questions about disagreement on Moodle (under “Reading Responses”)

*****Paper 2 Due on Moodle Friday, 4/7.**

Week 10 4/3, 4/5 **Disagreement**

Monday, 4/3

Baghramian, Maria. [2012] “Dealing with Religious Diversity.”
Feldman, Richard. [2005] “Reasonable Religious Disagreements”

Wednesday, 4/5

Elga, Adam. [2007] “Reflection and Disagreement”

Week 11 4/10, 4/12 **Disagreement**

Monday, 4/10

Setiya, Keiran [2012] “Disagreement”, ch. 1 of *Knowing Right from Wrong*.
(skip section 2).

Wednesday, 4/12

Optional: Lackey, Jennifer. [2010] “A justificationist view of disagreement’s epistemic significance”
Vavova, Katia. [2013] “Confidence, Evidence, and Disagreement”

Week 12 4/18, 4/19 **Permissivism** (**class is Tu/Wed this week)

Tuesday, 4/18

White, Roger. “Epistemic Permissiveness”

Wednesday, 4/19

Neta, Ram. “In Defense of Epistemic Relativism” (sections 2-3)
Optional: Schoenfeld, Miriam. [2014] “Permission to Believe: Why Permissivism is True and What it Tells Us About Irrelevant Influences on Belief”

Week 13 4/24, 4/26 **Self-Doubt**

Monday, 4/24

Coates, Allan. [2012] “Rational Epistemic Akrasia”

Wednesday, 4/26

Rinard, Susanna. [ms] “Reasoning One’s Way Out of Skepticism”

Week 14 5/1

Monday, 5/1

Wrap up.

Final paper due 5/2 (the last day of classes).