

PHILO 340: Epistemology: Justification and Reliable Knowledge

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Office Hours: MW 3:30-4:30 & By appointment.

Description: ‘Epistemology’ literally means the study of knowledge, but the philosophical field of epistemology studies in addition to knowledge things like rational or justified belief, evidence, when you ought to believe certain things, how you ought to manage your beliefs, and how certain social arrangements promote or impede the acquisition of knowledge and rational belief.

Questions we will address include: What is skepticism? Can we know anything about the external world? What is knowledge? To what extent do we depend on others for our knowledge? What are the benefits and costs of this dependence? What are echo chambers? What is fake news? Must we only believe what our evidence says? Do we have special obligations to our friends to believe against our evidence? Is rational belief determined in just the way rational action is?

Note about Philosophy: You may know that philosophy classes differ from other kinds of classes. You will be a **truth-seeker** in this class, **not a mere information consumer**: you will try to answer the questions raised in the course through rational means, rather than just learning what others have thought. This means you are expected to play an active role in class discussions.

Learning Goals:

By the end of this semester, you should understand and be able to accurately and clearly explain:

- Some problems posed by the gap between external reality and our minds
- Solutions to these problems
- The problem of analyzing knowledge
- Prominent solutions to this problem
- Some costs and benefits of relying on others for information
- Some conflicts between evidential and practical reasons for belief

Along the way, you will:

- Improve your analytical skills
- Improve your reading skills
- Search for and analyze epistemology in your life outside of the classroom

Texts: All will be freely available on Canvas.

- There will be around **25 pages of very difficult reading per week**. Please plan accordingly.
- When reading, attempt to go beyond merely understanding the text and/or finding it interesting. You should constantly be asking: Is that true? Is that a convincing argument? How would the author deal with this problem?

Grading Policy

5 Reading Quizzes	50 pts
5 Reading Memos	50 pts
Revised Reading Memo	50 pts
Exam 1	75 pts
Exam 2	75 pts
Final Exam	100 pts
	400 pts

A	> 90%	360-400 Points
B	> 80%	320-359 Points
C	> 70%	280-319 Points
D	> 60%	240-279 Points
F	< 60%	0-239 Points

Other Required Assignments

1. Philosophy in Life Post 1 and Comments
2. Philosophy in Life Post 2 and Comments

To earn a C or better, you must complete **all** of these assignments.

Grade Changers

- Participation: 25 points will be deducted from your final grade if you do not participate regularly or you are regularly distracting in class.
- Attendance: You have 3 free absences. 2.5 points will be deducted from your final grade for any unexcused absences. Attendance will be recorded starting in the 3rd week of classes.
- Extra Credit: You may complete up to two optional assignments for up to 12 points each. I won't offer other extra credit upon request.

Coursework Descriptions

Attendance: Attendance is required because you won't do well in this course if you don't attend. To find out what you missed when you miss class, come to office hours or ask:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Exams: You will take two take-home exams and one cumulative final take-home exam. Exams will test your understanding of course content, not your opinion. They are meant to assess your grasp of the readings and in-class discussions, to provide you with more incentive to reflect on the material, and to allow you to demonstrate what you've learned.

Reading Memos: 6 memos/10 points each. To help you reflect on the readings, you will write a reading memo every other week starting in week 3. On weeks when there is more than one reading assignment, you may choose which reading to write on. The memos are to be turned in on Canvas before the beginning of class on the first day we are scheduled to discuss that reading.

These memos are relatively informal. Here's what you do: You'll reflect philosophically on some component of the article. This might mean raising an objection, or summarizing and clarifying some point

that seemed obscure, or providing some additional argument in support of a claim you take the author to be making. The idea is for you to engage philosophically with the texts before you come to class.

How the Memos will be Scored: If your memo clearly shows me that you made a good-faith effort to carefully read and understand the article, then you will get at least 7 points. If your explanation of the point you discuss is fully accurate, you will get at least 8 points. Scores of 9 and 10 will be reserved for those who offer a cogent critical contribution—who raise some objection or offer some support of their own that challenges or reinforces the author’s argument. There are six assigned memos. At the end of the semester, I will drop your lowest memo score and replace your next lowest **completed** memo score with a 10. (This means you can skip exactly one memo without any loss of points.)

In the event of an *excused* absence, you may turn in a reading memo late without penalty, as long as (i) I receive it within one week of the day it would have been due and (ii) you come to my office to discuss it with me. No late memos will be accepted otherwise.

Revised Reading Memo: I will give you comments on your reading memos aimed at improving your understanding of the content of your reading memo. You will choose one of your graded and commented on reading memos to revise in light of my comments and resubmit at the end of the semester. It should be much better and more developed than it was the first time.

Reading Quizzes: 6 quiz pairs/10 points each. To give you incentive to read the assigned articles carefully when there isn’t a reading memo assigned, you will take six reading “quiz-pairs.” Your quiz score will be the sum of your five highest quiz pair scores. (No mixing and matching.) This means you can skip exactly one quiz-pair without any loss of points.

This assignment will seem weird at first. By the end of the semester, you’ll like it. Here’s how it works:

You will be expected to read each article twice. As you read it, come to class, and read it again, you will develop a deeper understanding of the article. During the second reading, you will be able to draw on the discussion we have in class on the previous day. You will have to take each quiz twice: the day we discuss the reading in class and the next day of class. (Hence, “quiz-pair.”) There will be five questions on each quiz. You will get one point for each question you answer correctly each time the quiz is given.

My goal in using quizzes this way is to help you get the most out of the readings: You can use the quiz you take on one day to help guide you as you re-read the material in preparation for the next class. And since you already know the questions that will be on the second quiz – they will be the exact same questions that were on the first quiz – you can read carefully the second time around to ensure that you get a perfect score.

Participation: Participating in class benefits you and others. We often learn while we attempt to express our thoughts. And since you have a unique perspective, everyone else in the class learns when you share that perspective. Here are **some ways to participate**:

1. Ask questions about the readings or lectures.
2. Answer questions when asked.
3. Contribute your perspective to a discussion.
4. Raise objections to arguments.
5. Mention a relevant life experience at an appropriate time.
6. Discuss course material with me outside of class.
7. Participate during small group activities.
8. Complete in-class writing assignments.

Philosophy in Life Posts: To help you get in the habit of approaching your life philosophically, you will complete two “philosophy in life” posts in the discussion forums on Canvas. For these assignments, you will write about connections between your life and what you’ve learned or thought about in this course. You will also read and comment on some of your peers’ posts.

Communication

Office Hours: I will have regular office hours on Mondays and Wednesdays throughout the semester. This means I will be available in my office to discuss course material (or other issues). If my scheduled office hours aren’t convenient, feel free to schedule a different time to meet.

“I wish I had come to office hours all semester!”

You can benefit from discussing course material outside of class. **True story:** One semester, a student of mine who never came to office hours earned one of the lowest grades on the midterm. Then he started regularly attending office hours. Right before the final, he told me, “I wish I had come to office hours all semester.” He ended up getting one of the highest grades on the final. Don’t wait! The course material is difficult. Come discuss it with me.¹

I would like each student to visit my office once during the 5th - 7th weeks of the semester.

Contact Policy: Outside of office hours, you can reach me at the email address above. I will respond promptly within 24 hours to most emails. If you do not receive a reply within 24 hours, please talk to me in class or send another email as a reminder. **If you have a question about the course mechanics or schedule, please check the syllabus before emailing.**

Your Responsibilities: I expect you to regularly check your email and Canvas for announcements.

Electronics

Electronic devices are permitted in class, but must be used solely for class purposes. Browsing Facebook, catching all of the Pokemon, and captioning animal pictures are not class purposes. I will prohibit devices if they are not being used appropriately.

Cheating and Plagiarism

If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing in this course, you will receive an XF as your final grade for the course. You’ll also be required to take the K-State Development and Integrity Course.

Completing this course will remove the X from your record, but not the F. Here is the university’s official statement on Academic Honesty:

Kansas State University has an Honor and Integrity System based on personal integrity, which is presumed to be sufficient assurance that, in academic matters, one's work is performed honestly and without unauthorized assistance. Undergraduate and graduate students, by registration, acknowledge the jurisdiction of the Honor and Integrity System. The policies and procedures of the Honor and Integrity System apply to all full and part-time students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate courses on-campus, off- campus, and via distance learning. The Honor and Integrity System website can be reached via the following URL: www.k-state.edu/honor. A component vital to the Honor and Integrity System is the inclusion of the Honor Pledge which applies to all assignments, examinations, or other course work undertaken by students. The Honor Pledge is

¹ Why should you go to office hours? <http://college.usatoday.com/2015/11/28/office-hours/> What are some things you might say in office hours? <https://studentlife.uoregon.edu/node/381050>

implied, whether or not it is stated: "On my honor, as a student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this academic work." A grade of XF can result from a breach of academic honesty. The F indicates failure in the course; the X indicates the reason is an Honor Pledge violation.

Feel free to ask before completing assignments whether some behavior counts as cheating or plagiarism.

Disabilities

I will do my best to help students with disabilities or learning challenges succeed in this course. Students with disabilities who need classroom accommodations, access to technology, or information about emergency building/campus evacuation processes should contact the Student Access Center and/or their instructor. Services are available to students with a wide range of disabilities including, but not limited to, physical disabilities, medical conditions, learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, depression, and anxiety. If you are a student enrolled in campus/online courses through the Manhattan or Olathe campuses, contact the Student Access Center at accesscenter@k-state.edu, 785-532-6441; for K-State Polytechnic campus, contact Academic and Student Services at polytechnicadvising@ksu.edu or call 785-826-2974.

Tentative Schedule

Week 1

Mon., Aug. 20 Introductions

Wed., Aug. 22 Background

Fri., Aug. 24 Descartes & Skeptical Problem

Descartes, *Meditation 1*

Week 2

Mon., Aug. 27 Descartes & Skeptical Problem

Wed., Aug. 29 Moorean Response to Skepticism

Fri., Aug. 31 Problems w/ Moorean Response

Descartes, *Meditation 2*

Moore, Proof of an External World

Assignments

Reading Quiz on Moore

Week 3

Mon., Sep. 3 LABOR DAY

Wed., Sep. 5 Deny Closure

Fri., Sep. 7 Deny Closure

Dretske, The Case Against Closure

Assignments

Reading Memo on Dretske

Week 4

Mon., Sep. 10 Problems w/ Denying Closure

Wed., Sep. 12 Contextualism

Fri., Sep. 14 Contextualism

Cohen, Contextualism Defended

DeRose, Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions

Assignments

Reading Quiz on DeRose

Week 5

Mon., Sep. 17 Problem
Wed., Sep. 19 New Solution
Fri., Sep. 21 New Solution

Rinard, Reasoning out of Skepticism

Assignments

Reading Memo on Rinard

Week 6

Mon., Sep. 24 Catch-Up
Wed., Sep. 26 Analysis of Knowledge and Gettier
Fri., Sep. 28 Analysis of Knowledge and Gettier

Gettier, Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?

Assignments

Reading Quiz on Gettier
Exam 1: Skepticism 9/29 1pm

Week 7

Mon., Oct. 1 Prominent Solutions
Wed., Oct. 3 Internalism, Externalism, & Reliabilism
Fri., Oct. 5 Reliabilism

Nagel, Analysis of Knowledge

BonJour, Internalism & Externalism (203-210)

Assignments

Reading Memo on BonJour

Week 8

Mon., Oct. 8 Problems for Reliabilism
Wed., Oct. 10 Catch-Up
Fri., Oct. 12 Dependence on Others for Information

BonJour, Internalism and Externalism pp. 210-215

Nagel, Testimony

Assignments

Reading Quiz on BonJour
Philosophy in Life 10/8 11:59pm

Week 9

Mon., Oct. 15 Echo Chambers
Wed., Oct. 17 Echo Chambers
Fri., Oct. 19 Echo Chambers

Nguyen, Escape the Echo Chamber

Assignments

Reading Memo
Exam 2: Knowledge 10/20 by 11:59pm

Week 10

Mon., Oct. 22 Upbringing and Prejudice
Wed., Oct. 24 Upbringing and Prejudice
Fri., Oct. 26 Fake News

Begby, The Epistemology of Prejudice
Rini, Fake News and Partisan Epistemology

Assignments

Reading Quiz on Begby

Week 11

Mon., Oct. 29 Fake News
Wed., Oct. 31 Fake News & Echo Chambers
Fri., Nov. 2 Fake News & Echo Chambers

Wodak, Fake News and Echo Chambers

Assignments

Reading Memo

Week 12

Mon., Nov. 5 Catch-Up
Wed., Nov. 7 Ethics of Belief: Clifford vs. James
Fri., Nov. 9 Friendship

Marusivic, The Ethics of Belief
Stroud, Epistemic Partiality in Friendship

Assignments

Reading Quiz on Marusivic
Philosophy in Life Due 11/5 11:59pm

Week 13

Mon., Nov. 12 Friendship
Wed., Nov. 14 Epistemic Rationality as Practical Rationality
Fri., Nov. 16 Epistemic Rationality as Practical Rationality

Rinard, Equal Treatment

Assignments

Reading Memo on Rinard

Week 14

Mon., Nov. 19 FALL BREAK
Wed., Nov. 21 FALL BREAK
Fri., Nov. 23 FALL BREAK

Week 15

Mon., Nov. 26 Catch-Up/New Topic
Wed., Nov. 28 Catch-Up/New Topic
Fri., Nov. 30 Catch-Up/New Topic

Assignments

Revised Reading Memo

Week 16

Mon., Dec. 3 DEAD WEEK Catch-Up/New Topic

Wed., Dec. 5 DEAD WEEK Catch-Up/New Topic

Fri., Dec. 7 DEAD WEEK

Assignments

Extra Credit Assignments

Week 17 Finals Week**Assignments**

Final Exam

Choices

If there's time, students can choose one of these topics for the last weeks of class.

1. **Disagreement:** What is the rational response to disagreement?
2. **Upbringing, Irrelevant Influences, & Belief:** If you believe something "just because" you were raised to believe it, does that mean your belief is irrational?
3. **Propaganda:** What is propaganda and how does it work?
4. **Feminist Epistemology:** What does gender (or race or class) have to do with knowledge and rational belief?
5. **Virtue Epistemology:** What is an epistemic virtue/vice? What is closed-mindedness? What is intellectual humility? Etc.
6. **Replication Crisis in Social Sciences:** Did you know that the more conservative (red) or liberal (blue) you are the more difficult it is for you, literally, to see shades of gray? Many fascinating scientific "findings" like this fail to be replicated. As a result, lots of what has been taken as truth in social sciences is being called into doubt. What's going on?
7. **Problem of Induction:** What reason do we have to believe the sun will rise tomorrow, or that we won't fall through the floor when we step off the bed in the morning, or that anything else we haven't observed is likely to be true?
8. **Formal Epistemology:** How can math and logic help us solve epistemological problems?
9. **Permissivism:** Does a body of evidence ever support more than one doxastic attitude?