

PHIL-UA 76: Epistemology

Instructor: Annette Martin
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Office Hours: By appt.
Office: 5 Washington Pl. #313

Meeting: MTWR 1:30-3:05pm
Location: 5 Washington Pl. #302
Class Numbers: 3049, 3059
Class Dates: July 2- Aug 9

Course Description: This course is an introduction to epistemology, or the study of knowledge. The first part of the course will focus on classic topics in epistemology, including radical skepticism, knowledge as justified true belief, the structure of knowledge, and the nature of justification. The second part of the course will focus on contemporary questions in social epistemology. We will consider when, if ever, an agent is culpable for lacking knowledge, as well as how to rationally respond to disagreement with a peer, and whether reasonable disagreement is possible between peers. The main objectives of the course will be to develop an understanding of the central questions in these debates, while also learning how to think and write like a philosopher.

Prerequisites: None

Required Text: There is no required text that must be purchased for this course. Instead, I will make the readings for each session available via the Dropbox for the course. Note that we will periodically be reading parts of Bonjour's *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (referred to in the schedule as "Bonjour text.") The necessary portions will also be made available electronically.

Assignments and Grading:

- Reading Quizzes and Assignments – 10%
- Active Participation – 15%
- Four Weekly Responses (10% each) – 40%
- Term Paper (6-8 pgs; 10% draft, 25% final) – 35%

Late and Missing Assignments: Timely completion of the weekly responses, draft paper, and final paper are all required for passing the course. Assignment grades will go down 1/3 of a letter grade for each day late and will not be accepted after 9 days past the original due date or after 11:59pm on August 11th (whichever comes first).

Missed Quizzes: Quizzes cannot be made up unless one has an excused absence.

Grade Changes: To be fair to all students, at the end of the semester I will not be awarding extra credit, allowing students to rewrite old papers, or otherwise raising students' grades because they are unhappy with the grade they have earned. If you are struggling (personally, academically, etc.) talk to me as soon as possible so that we can work together to put you in the best position for success in the course.

Blind Grading: In an effort to reduce the effects of implicit and explicit biases, I will be grading blindly for the course. This means that you should not put your name or initials on any assignment you submit; instead, use your NYU N-number to identify yourself.

Plagiarism: The penalty for plagiarism will be automatic failure of the course. If you have questions about plagiarism or how to avoid it, or if you have any doubts about whether what you are doing will count as plagiarism, *please come talk to me (before submitting the assignment)!*

Course Policies

Attendance: Because of the brisk pace of the course, attendance will be mandatory and will count as a portion of the participation grade. Consistent lateness and/or leaving class early will also be penalized. However, in line with NYU's policy, you will be excused for religious holidays. Please let me know in advance.

Reading: Reading the material *before* class will be crucial for good class discussions and success in the course. There will not be many pages of reading assigned, but you will quickly realize that philosophy is dense and can be hard to get through. It may take multiple passes to understand what's going on.

For additional motivation, there will be a combination of reading quizzes and short reading assignments. These should not require detailed comprehension of what happened in the paper (that's what we work on in class!), but a general understanding of the main ideas.

You should bring the readings to class with you each day.

Participation: Learning philosophy requires doing philosophy. We will be tackling tough questions and concepts, and part of the process is being confused and working through the material with your peers. This means that you are expected to come to class and be active – ask questions, answer questions, etc. *Expect to be called on even if you are not raising your hand* – if this happens, you can ask a question, admit that you are confused, or offer a response. You can also take an occasional, no-questions-asked pass.

Civility: A major part of doing and learning philosophy is engaging in dialogue. It is important that we engage with each other in respectful and constructive ways. That doesn't mean that we can't disagree – disagreement is also essential to philosophy! – but that we must engage thoughtfully and respectfully. Uncivil and disrespectful behavior will be grounds for removal from the classroom for the remainder of the day, and, if necessary, dismissal from the course. (See the [NYU Honor Code and CAS Standards of Academic Integrity](#).)

Electronic Devices: Laptops, phones, and other electronic devices will not be allowed in the classroom.* (A map of printing stations around NYU is available [here](#).)

(*However, if anyone requires the use of electronic devices as part of disability or other special accommodations, this ban will be lifted.)

University Resources

Disability Accommodations: If you require special accommodations in the classroom or on assignments, contact the [Moses Center for Students with Disabilities](#).

Health and Wellness: It's hard to get much done when you are unwell. Please be conscious of your well-being and turn to [NYU's Wellness Exchange](#) for physical and mental health resources. They also have a 24/7 Hotline that you can call anonymously with any concern: (212) 443-9999 (it's also on the back of your NYU ID card.)

Writing Assistance: General help with writing is available through [NYU's Writing Center](#). Also check out the [University Learning Centers](#).

Diversity and Inclusion: As human beings, we all carry complex identities. For resources and support, check out the [Center for Multicultural Education and Programs](#) (CMEP), as well as the [NYU LGBTQ Student Center](#).

General Philosophy Resources:

- [Pryor's Guidelines for Reading Philosophy](#)
- [Pryor's Guidelines for Writing Philosophy](#)
- [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) (SEP)
- [PhilPapers](#)

Reading Schedule:

Week 1: Radical Skepticism

- M Jul 2 Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy"
T Jul 3 G.E. Moore, "Proof of an External World"
W Jul 4 **NO CLASS- 4th of July!**
R Jul 5 Barry Stroud, "The Problem of the External World"
Jim Pryor, "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper"
Response 1 due by 1pm on Sun. July 8th

Week 2: What is Knowledge? (JTB and Gettier Problems)

- M Jul 9 A.J. Ayer, "Knowing as Having the Right to be Sure"
Bonjour text, Ch. 3 pp. 23-39 (up to Gettier Problem; you can skim the discussion of theories of truth, ~pp. 28-34)
T Jul 10 Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"
Bonjour text, Ch. 3 pp. 39-45
W Jul 11 Linda Zagzebski, "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems"
R Jul 12 David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge"
Response 2 due by 1pm on Sun. July 15th

Week 3: The Structure of Knowledge- Foundationalism vs Coherentism

- M Jul 16 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, excerpt
Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, Chapters 1 and 2
T Jul 17 Bonjour text, Ch. 9 pp. 177-186 (up to Coherentism)
Catherine Elgin, "Non-Foundationalist Epistemology: Holism, Coherence, and

Tenability"

W Jul 18 Bonjour text, Ch. 9 pp. 186-202 [*Plus short debate-prep assignment*]

R Jul 19 **Movie Screening**

Response 3 due by 1pm on Sun. July 22nd

Week 4: The Nature of Justification- Internalism vs. Externalism

M Jul 23 Alvin Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?"

T Jul 24 Feldman and Conee, "Evidentialism"

W Jul 25 Bonjour text, Ch. 10 [*Plus short assignment to prepare for in-class debate*]

R Jul 26 Amia Srinivasan, "Radical Externalism"

F Jul 27 **MAKEUP DAY:** Miranda Fricker, "Epistemic Injustice and a Role for Virtue in the Politics of Knowing"

Listen to Invisibilia's "[The Culture Inside](#)"

Response 4 due by 1pm on Sun. July 29th

Week 5: Ignorance, Culture, and Blame

M Jul 30 Jan Wieland, "Willful Ignorance"

T Jul 31 Miranda Fricker, "The Relativism of Blame and Williams' Relativism of Distance" (You can skip Sect. III)

W Aug 1 Michele Moody-Adams, "Culture, Responsibility, and Affected Ignorance"

R Aug 2 Mason and Wilson, "Vice, Blameworthiness, and Cultural Ignorance"

Outline/Draft of Final Paper due by 1pm on Sun. Aug 3rd

Week 6: Social Epistemology- Peer Disagreement

M Aug 6 Tom Kelly, "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement"

T Aug 7 David Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News"

W Aug 8 Richard Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements"

R Aug 9 Annette Martin, "Relative Uniqueness and Reasonable Disagreement"

Final Paper due by 5pm on Saturday August 11th.

Late papers will only be accepted until 11:59pm on Saturday August 11th.