

Phil 15: Knowledge and its Limits

Matthew Fulkerson

Lectures: T/Th 12:30-150 RWAC 0426

Fulkerson Office Hours: Tues 11-12am and by appt

TAs:

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Course Description:

This is an introductory course in *Epistemology*, or the study of knowledge. Along with Ethics and Metaphysics, Epistemology is one of the essential core elements of Philosophy. It focuses on the analysis of knowledge. Its traditional focus has been on questions about the nature of truth, the normative standards of justification, and worries about skepticism (about the possibility that we do not, perhaps cannot, know anything). More recently, epistemology has focused on understanding the social aspects of knowledge (testimony, group knowledge, and our communal knowledge practices) and on formal models of knowledge practices (of the kind that could be used, for instance, in machine learning contexts). In this course, we do some traditional things and some contemporary things. But everything we do is meant to provide a solid foundation in the essential elements of Epistemology.

Required Texts:

All readings will be made available through the Canvas site for the course.

Course Mechanics:

Canvas: All handouts, assignments, and supplementary readings (if any) will be made available through canvas. It is your responsibility to check this site regularly.

Lectures and Discussion: The lectures are just that: a focused presentation of the course materials. They are based upon the readings, but often will present new material or examples not found in the readings. There are also discussion sections for this class where you will be able to discuss the material in a smaller setting.

Reading Assignments: Philosophy can be incredibly difficult, and in ways that you may not expect. Many philosophical texts, including those we are going to read, are difficult because they use new technical language that may be unfamiliar, and they will use familiar words in technical ways. It can be hard just to figure out what the author is saying. Philosophy is difficult in another sense too. Many of our readings are written in relatively clear, modest prose. These works will be difficult not because it's hard to understand what is said, but because what is said

will be hard to understand. For this reason the lectures and readings should be seen as compliments to each other.

Grading:

There are three short essays and a comprehensive final exam:

Assignment	Value	Due Date
Essay 1 (2-3 pgs)	25%	April 25 th
Essay 2 (2-3 pgs)	25%	May 16 th
Essay 3 (2-3 pgs)	25%	June 6 th
Final Exam	25%	Mon 2:30pm, June 10 th

Course Policies:

To avoid penalties for late assignments, students must provide official documentation explaining why the assignment could not be handed in on time. Late homework without documentation will not be accepted. Late papers without documentation will receive a late penalty of 1/3 letter grade for each day a paper is late, including weekend days (no exceptions).

Turnitin: Students agree that by taking this course all required papers will be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism (via the Canvas interface). All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the terms of use agreement posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Academic Integrity: All suspicions of academic misconduct will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office according to university policy. Academic misconduct is not just blatant cheating (e.g., copying off another student during an exam), but includes copying other students' essays; copying or using old essays; forgetting to cite material you took from an outside resource; turning in work completed in total or in part by another. This is an incomplete list; if you have questions concerning academic misconduct it is your responsibility to ask me for advice.

Tentative Reading Schedule (subject to small changes):

Week 1: Beliefs

Tues (2nd): Introduction, course mechanics, outline

Thurs (4th): "Belief": <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/belief/>
"Propositional Attitudes," Tim Schroeder

Week 2: Beliefs and Other Attitudes

Tues (9th): Elizabeth Jackson, "Belief and Credence"

Thurs (11th): Tamar Gendler "Aliefs and Beliefs"

Week 3: Truth

Tues (16th): Marion David, "The Correspondence Theory of Truth"
Thurs (18th): John McFarlane, "A Taste of Relativism"

Week 4: Justification and Reasons

Tues (23rd): Roderick Chisholm, "The Problem of the Criterion"
Thurs (25th): Sophie Archer, "Delusion and Epistemic Reasons"
[FIRST ESSAY DUE]

Week 5: Knowledge

Tues (30th): Gettier "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"
Thurs (2nd): John Turri, "Is Knowledge Justified True Belief?"

Week 6: Testimony and Epistemic Injustice

Tues (7th): Jennifer Lackey, "The Nature of Testimony"
Thurs (9th): Miranda Fricker, "Epistemic Injustice and a role for virtue in the politics of knowing"

Week 7: Systems of Knowledge

Tues (14th): Melissa Fagan, "Collective Scientific Knowledge"
Thurs (16th): Julia Duetz, "Conspiracy Theories are Not Beliefs"
[SECOND ESSAY DUE]

Week 8: Practical Knowledge

Tues (21st): L.A. Paul, "What you can't expect when you're expecting"
Thurs (23rd): Barnes, "What you can expect when you don't want to be expecting"

Week 9: Skill and Know How

Tues (28th): Pavese and Beddor, "Skills as Knowledge"
Thurs (30th): Continued.

Week 10: Skepticism?

Tues (4th): Bertrand Russell, "The Problems of Philosophy, Chapter 1"; Descartes, *Meditations I* and II <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5827/5827-h/5827-h.htm#link2HCH0001>

Thurs (6th): Jessica Wilson, "The regress argument against Cartesian skepticism" and Susanna Rinard, "Reasoning One's Way out of Skepticism"
[THIRD ESSAY DUE]