

**PHIL 335: Theory of Knowledge**  
UNC Chapel Hill, Philosophy, Fall 2016  
Syllabus

**Instructor:** Prof. Alex Worsnip

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**Class Meetings:** Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:30-1:45pm, Caldwell Hall (CW) 105

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays, 2-3pm and Thursdays, 3:30-4:30pm, Caldwell Hall (CW) 202A

### **Course Description**

This class is an introduction to epistemology, or theory of knowledge. Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of knowledge and rational belief, so it is in many ways foundational to philosophy and indeed to intellectual inquiry in general: epistemological questions arise wherever we care about the pursuit of knowledge and truth. The material of the class is organized around four broad questions. First, what is knowledge – that is, what does it take to know something? Second, can we really in fact know anything? Third, what is the meaning and significance of our attributions of knowledge to ourselves and others? Fourth, what is the interaction between knowledge and our social practices? We will mainly read contemporary texts, plus one or two canonical “classics”, with the aim of critically evaluating their arguments.

### **Prerequisites, Target Audience and Course Goals**

This course is designed for students who have taken at least one prior philosophy class (**this is a prerequisite of taking the class**), but who are new to epistemology specifically. The class builds on students’ foundations in philosophical thinking, introduces them to a core part of philosophy, and prepares them for upper-level courses in epistemology and related areas such as philosophy of mind, philosophy of psychology, metaphysics, and metaethics. It would be particularly useful to those who are majoring or considering majoring in philosophy, but the pervasiveness of questions about knowledge and rational belief across the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences means that this could be useful class for students with a wide variety of majors. The class also aims to develop students’ philosophical reading and persuasive writing skills: to become more comfortable reading and understanding works of contemporary analytic philosophy, and to become more confident writing sustained pieces of philosophical argumentation that go beyond textual exegesis and systematically defend the student’s own point of view, at (by the final paper) a slightly longer length than students may be used to doing. Enrollment is capped at 30.

### **Requirements/Assessment**

- **Participation.** Including attendance of all classes, having done adequate preparation AND participation in discussions. *20% of grade*
- **Reading responses.** You will take turns writing short reading responses (600-750 words  $\approx$  2-2½ double-spaced pages each) on that day’s reading. Every student will write three reading responses

over the course of the semester. Soon after the start of the semester, I will distribute a schedule for the responses and share more details about them. Reading responses are due at 5pm on the day before class. *10% of grade per response*

- **Two longer papers (prompts will be provided):**
  - Midterm Paper: 1500-2000 words ( $\approx$  5-6 double-spaced pages). Due Sat, 10/15 at 5pm. *20% of grade*
  - Final Paper: 2000-2500 words ( $\approx$  6-8 double-spaced pages). Due Fri, 12/9 at 12 noon. *30% of grade*

In this class, the final paper fulfills the role of the final exam. As per UNC regulations, the final paper is due at the time that the final exam is scheduled to take place. However, again as per UNC regulations, **we will still meet for class during the scheduled time for the final exam**, and **attendance at this final meeting is (like all other class meetings) compulsory**. So, although the paper is officially due at the time that class starts, **you will need to submit it in time to then get to the classroom on time for our class meeting**. We will use the final session as a round-up to reflect on the themes of the class.

## Grading

- Your **participation** will be graded on the basis of 5 criteria:
  - *Attendance record (including punctuality)*. You are expected to attend every class meeting unless you have an *outstanding* excuse that you inform me of before class. You are also expected to be punctual: to be in the room, sat down, and ready to learn when class is scheduled to begin.
  - *Alertness/attentiveness*. During class hours, you are expected to be fully awake. You are also expected not to be on your computer, tablet or phone.
  - *Frequency of participation in discussion*. You are expected to participate in class discussions frequently. **If you do not participate in class at all, your overall participation grade can be no higher than a C (and that's if your attendance and alertness are perfect)**.
  - *Respectfulness of participation*. You are expected to be respectful to the instructor and to other students. This includes not talking over others or drowning them out, as well as listening to others and responding to what they say.
  - *Preparedness*. Your participation should reflect having done all the required reading and thought about it. You can demonstrate this by referring to specific parts of the readings in your comments, and by answering questions where I ask the class to recall something from a reading. This component also includes bringing the text that we are discussing that day to class, when it is in hard copy.

Note: you will not be graded on the philosophical quality of your contributions, as I want people to be able to speak freely and try out new ideas without fear of judgment. I also want to add that asking questions can be a great way to participate. If you are unsure or feel confused about something, either in a text or in lecture, that shows that you are thinking about, interrogating, and trying to understand the ideas. And if you're confused, chances are that others are too. So asking for more clarity in these situations is a great service to the class discussion. Finally, I understand that

participation can be difficult or intimidating for many students. I want to create an environment in which you feel comfortable participating. If you are having difficulty, please come to office hours or email me and we can set up a meeting to discuss strategies.

- The **reading responses** should highlight and explain an aspect of that day's reading that you found interesting, and critically respond to it. This critical response could take many different forms: a criticism, a counter-argument, a further argument in support of the author's position, a comparison with another reading from the class, an analysis of what the author is implicitly assuming, etc. Whatever you choose, it should be manageable in the limited space rather than an attempt to deal with every point made in the reading. Reading responses will be graded on their clarity, their accuracy and their cogency of argumentation.
- **Papers** will be graded on a rubric that includes 5 criteria: (i) approach; (ii) cogency & argumentation; (iii) conclusion; (iv) originality; and (v) writing. I will assign a number for each category and base the total grade off of these numbers. A more detailed grading rubric for papers will be available on Sakai.
  - NB: I will grade your papers in anonymized form: that is to say, without knowing your identity at the time that I assign the grade. To facilitate this, please do not include your name on your papers. Use your UNC PID instead, and in the title of the file, write the assignment name (e.g. 'Midterm Paper') followed by your PID. After I have finished grading a batch of papers, I will match up the PIDs to names before returning them to you.

In addition to communicating them to you directly, I will post all grades for the course on the Gradebook feature of Sakai. If you want to understand a grade you have received, and the reasons for it, you are more than welcome to meet with me. However, all grades are final: I will not negotiate grades.

### Honor Code

UNC's honor code, which is available at [honor.unc.edu](http://honor.unc.edu), applies to all class assignments. Violations of the honor code will be taken very seriously and will be reported to the Student Attorney General. Consequences will include, at minimum, a 0 for the assignment, and could potentially be much more serious. In addition, please take note of the following points:

- Reusing a paper that you have written for another class qualifies as academic dishonesty.
- Summarizing ideas or arguments that you have found in articles or on the internet, without citing your sources, qualifies as academic dishonesty. **It doesn't matter if you put them into your own words.** If you have got an idea from a source, you must acknowledge the debt by citing the source.

If you are in any doubt at all about whether something contributes academic dishonesty, **err on the side of caution** and talk to me **before** you submit the assignment to clarify the policies.

### Other Class Policies

- *Electronic Devices.* The use of laptops, tablets and cell phones in class is forbidden, unless they are required for class participation due to a disability.
- *Extensions.*

- For the reading responses, I will only grant extensions under absolutely extraordinary circumstances. The whole point of these responses is that they are to be completed *before* class, to get your reaction to the article from your reading, rather than from the class discussion. In fact, I will sometime use points from your reading responses as a jumping-off point for class discussion.
- For the papers, I am somewhat more flexible. If you have a good reason and make a reasonable extension request **in advance of the deadline**, I will usually grant your request. However, I will not grant (i) extensions after the deadline, when the paper is already late; (ii) very lengthy extensions; (iii) more than one extension on any one individual paper; (iv) extensions when you have had to ask for extensions on multiple previous assignments; (v) extensions where I judge that you are simply looking to put off the work rather than to put extra care and attention into it; (vi) extensions that will get in the way of your ability to keep up with other required work for the class; or (vii) extensions that get in the way of my ability to submit your final grades in a timely manner.
- If any assignment is late without my having agreed to an extension, it will lose 1/3 of a letter grade per day.
- In exceptional circumstances, I may permit rewrites, but only when you have a clear strategy for substantially improving your paper and I judge that it will not interfere with other assignments that are coming up. You must always seek my permission first if you want to do a rewrite. Rewrites that simply incorporate comments I make on your paper, put into your own words, will not improve your grade.
- I am very happy to meet with you at any time to discuss your progress in the class, to discuss assignments (before or after they are submitted) or simply to talk more about the topics of the class. Please come to my office hours, or if those times don't work, email me to set up an appointment. You are particularly encouraged to meet with me in the early stages of planning your papers. This is free advice and almost always improves your paper (and its grade) considerably.
- I will distribute further guidelines on writing philosophy papers with the first paper prompts.
- I am committed to making class fully accessible regardless of disabilities. Students who require extra time on exams will be accommodated. If I can do anything to help make the class more accessible to you, please do let me know, or (if you would prefer) have the Accessibility Office contact me on your behalf.
- I am also committed to making the class a safe space for everyone irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, religion, or other individual or group identity. As should go without saying, personal attacks or discriminatory treatment of others on any of these bases will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

### Course Materials

The required text is *Epistemology: An Anthology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), edited by Sosa, Kim, Fantl & McGrath, Blackwell, 2008. Readings from this book are marked "(SKFM)" in the schedule of readings below. All other readings will be made available on Sakai.

## Schedule of Readings

Date	Topic	Readings
<b>Part One: What is Knowledge?</b>		
Tues 8/23	JTB & Gettier Problems I	Edmund Gettier, 'Is Knowledge Justified True Belief?' (SKFM, ch. 15)
Thurs 8/25	JTB & Gettier Problems II	Linda Zagzebski, 'The Inescapability of Gettier Problems' (SKFM, ch. 17)
Tues 8/30	Externalist Analyses I	Alvin Goldman, 'A Causal Theory of Knowing' (Sakai)
Thurs 9/1	Externalist Analyses II	Alvin Goldman, 'Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge' (pp. 771-780, 790-1) (Sakai)
Tues 9/6	Externalist Analyses III	Robert Nozick, 'Knowledge and Skepticism' (SKFM, ch. 21, up to p. 262 – stop at the heading entitled 'Skepticism')
Thurs 9/8	Against Analysis	Timothy Williamson, 'A State of Mind' (SKFM, ch. 18)
<b>Part Two: Skepticism &amp; Responses</b>		
Tues 9/13	Cartesian Skepticism I	Rene Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> , Meditation I (Sakai)
Thurs 9/15	Cartesian Skepticism II	Barry Stroud, 'The Problem of the External World' (SKFM, ch. 1)
Tues 9/20	Moorean Responses	G.E. Moore, 'Proof of an External World' (SKFM, ch. 2)
Thurs 9/22	Evidentialist Responses	Ned Markosian, 'Do You Know That You Are Not A Brain in a Vat?' (Sakai)
Tues 9/27	Closure-Denying Responses	Robert Nozick, 'Knowledge and Skepticism' (SKFM, ch. 21, p. 262 to end)
Thurs 9/29	Further Discussion	[No new reading]
Tues 10/4	Entitlement Responses	Allan Hazlett, 'How To Defeat Belief in the External World' (Sakai)
Thurs 10/6	Self-Defeat Responses	Susanna Rinard, 'Reasoning One's Way Out of Skepticism' (Sakai)
Tues 10/11	Inductive Skepticism	David Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> , sec. 4 (Sakai)
Thurs 10/13	Further Discussion	[No new reading]
<b>Part Three: Knowledge Attributions</b>		
Tues 10/18	Contextualism & Skepticism I	Gail Stine, 'Skepticism, Relevant Alternatives and Deductive Closure' (SKFM, ch. 20)
Thurs 10/20		<i>No class – Fall break</i>
Tues 10/25	Contextualism & Skepticism II	Keith DeRose, 'Solving the Skeptical Problem' (SKFM, ch. 47)
Thurs 10/27	Contextualism	Keith DeRose, 'Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions' (Sakai)
Tues 11/1	Sensitive Invariantism	John Hawthorne, 'Sensitive Moderate Invariantism' (SKFM, ch. 52)

Thurs 11/3	Classical Invariantism	Jennifer Nagel, 'Knowledge Ascriptions and the Psychological Consequences of Changing Stakes' (Sakai)
<b>Part Four: The Social Role of Knowledge</b>		
Tues 11/8	Action I	John Hawthorne & Jason Stanley, 'Knowledge & Action' (Sakai)
Thurs 11/10	Action II	Jessica Brown, 'Subject-Sensitive Invariantism and the Knowledge Norm for Practical Reasoning' (Sakai)
Tues 11/15	Assertion I	Timothy Williamson, 'Knowing and Asserting' (Sakai)
Thurs 11/17	Assertion II	Jennifer Lackey, 'Norms of Assertion' (Sakai)
Tues 11/22	Testimony	Elizabeth Fricker, 'Against Gullibility' (SKFM, ch. 55)
Thurs 11/24		<i>No class – Thanksgiving break</i>
Tues 11/29	Disagreement I	Thomas Kelly, 'The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement' (Sakai)
Thurs 12/1	Disagreement II	David Christensen, 'Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News' (Sakai)
Tues 12/6	Irrelevant Influences	Katia Vavova, 'Irrelevant Influences' (Sakai)
Fri 12/9, 12-2pm	Final Roundup	[No new reading]