

PHIL 433: Current Issues in Analytic Philosophy: Normative Epistemology

UNC Chapel Hill, Spring 2019

Syllabus

Instructor: Alex Worsnip (aworsnip@unc.edu)

Class Meetings: Wednesdays, 1-3:30pm, Caldwell Hall (CW) 213

Office Hours: Monday 3:30-4:30pm & Thursday 11am-12pm, Caldwell Hall (CW) 202A

Course Description

This course will focus on recent work in normative epistemology: that is, epistemology as structured around the question “what ought I to believe?” (as opposed to “what is knowledge?”). Topics will include: the relationship between (binary) belief and credence; whether pragmatic and moral considerations bear on what we ought to believe; whether logic supplies norms for belief and reasoning; the nature of coherence and consistency norms on belief; epistemic consequentialism and its critics; irrelevant influences on belief; whether epistemic norms are (ever) permissive.

Enrollment/Prerequisites

This class is designed to be appropriate for graduate students, and undergraduate enrollment is by permission of the instructor only. Undergraduates should have taken several prior courses in philosophy, preferably including at least one class in epistemology (e.g. PHIL 140, 230 or 335) and at least one class in theoretical ethics (e.g. PHIL 160, 362 or 462).

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 – 500-750 words (\approx 1½-2½ double-spaced pages) each – on that day’s reading. Each student will write three reading responses over the course of the semester. The reading responses should highlight and explain an aspect of that day’s reading that you found interesting, and critically respond to it. Soon after the start of the semester, I will distribute a schedule for the responses. Reading responses are due at 8pm on the day before class. *10% of grade per response*
- **Term paper.** You will write one extended term paper for the class (length for undergraduates: 3000-5000 words (\approx 10-15 double-spaced pages); graduate students may (but need not) exceed 5000 words if they wish). This paper will be on a topic of your choice. Since this is an extended piece of work, we’ll follow a multi-step process for writing it:
 - Initial meeting to discuss ideas. *To be completed by **Thurs, 4/4** at the latest.* I will meet with each of you one-on-one to discuss your ideas for a possible topic for your term paper. Please come to the meeting having thought carefully about what you might like to write about. (Though this initial meeting is the only required meeting in the process, you are welcome to meet with me again at any point later in the process.)

- NB: if you want to write on a topic that we're covering at the end of the semester but haven't reached yet by 4/4, that is possible. If there's a forthcoming topic that catches your eye, have a look at the readings for it before our meeting.
 - One paragraph paper proposal. *Due Fri, 4/5, 8pm*. You will write up a proposal for the topic of your paper, explaining the issue(s) you plan to discuss and (if you know) what you (tentatively) plan to argue. The proposal should be clear, should propose a well-defined, manageable and tractable topic, and should be clearly related to the themes of the class. I will write back to you either approving the proposal as it is or asking you to make modifications.
 - Full draft. *Due Sat, 4/20, 8pm*. You will write a full, complete draft of the paper. I will send you detailed comments on your draft by Fri, 4/26 (this is the main set of comments you will receive from me on your paper).
 - Final submission. *Due Tues, 4/30, 8pm*. Finally, you will have an opportunity to revise the paper in light of my comments (and your own further thinking), before submitting the final version. I will send you your grade with some briefer comments by the end of that week.
- 50% of grade*. Note: provided that you complete the first three steps of the paper-writing process in full and by the due dates specified above, your grade for your paper will be determined solely by the fourth step, i.e. by the final submission. Thus, the other stages of the process represent a risk-free way to try out your ideas and to get feedback on them before making the final submission.

Honor Code

As should go without saying in a class at this level, UNC's honor code, available at honor.unc.edu, applies to all class assignments.

Commitments & Accessibility

- I am very happy to meet with you at any time to discuss assignments 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.
- I am committed to making class fully accessible regardless of disabilities. 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 learning environment 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

You aren't required to purchase any books for this class, and all the readings will be on Sakai. However, we'll be reading four of the six chapters from David Christensen's *Putting Logic in its Place* over the course of the class, so if you like having physical books, that would be a good one to buy.

Schedule of Readings

All readings are required unless otherwise stated.

1/9 Some necessary background: binary belief vs. credence

- David Christensen, *Putting Logic in Its Place*, ch. 2

1/16 Evidentialism about reasons for belief

- Thomas Kelly, “The Rationality of Belief (and Some Other Propositional Attitudes)”
- Nishi Shah, “A New Argument for Evidentialism”

1/23 Defenses of pragmatic reasons for belief

- Andrew Reisner, “The Possibility of Pragmatic Reasons for Belief and the Wrong Kind of Reasons Problem”
- Stephanie Leary, “In Defense of Practical Reasons for Belief”
- Susanna Rinard, “Against The New Evidentialists”

1/30 Pragmatic encroachment

- Jeremy Fantl & Matthew McGrath, “Evidence, Pragmatics, and Justification”
- Mark Schroeder, “Stakes, Withholding, and Pragmatic Encroachment”
- *Recommended:* Dorit Ganson, “Evidentialism and Pragmatic Constraints on Outright Belief”

2/6 Moral encroachment (and racial generalizations)

- Sarah Moss, “Moral Encroachment”
- Renee Bolinger, “The Rational Impermissibility of Accepting (Some) Racial Generalizations”
- Rima Basu & Mark Schroeder, “Doxastic Wronging”

2/13 Binary belief vs. credence revisited

- Lara Buchak, “Belief, Credence, and Norms”
- Julia Staffel, “How Do Beliefs Simplify Reasoning?”

2/20 The normative role of logic: some initial challenges

- Lewis Carroll, “What the Tortoise Said to Achilles”
- Gilbert Harman, *Change in View*, pp. 1-20

2/27 Further challenges to the normativity of logic: the preface paradox

- David Christensen, *Putting Logic in its Place*, chs. 3-4
- *Recommended:* Alex Worsnip, “Belief, Credence, and the Preface Paradox”

3/6 Defenses of the normativity of logic

- John MacFarlane, “In What Sense (if any) Is Logic Normative for Thought?”

- Hartry Field, “What is the Normative Role of Logic?”

[3/13 *No class – Spring break*]

3/20 Coherence requirements beyond deductive logic: probabilism, anti-akrasia

- David Christensen, *Putting Logic in its Place*, ch. 5
- Sophie Horowitz, “Epistemic Akrasia”

3/27 More on coherence and akrasia

- Alex Worsnip, “The Conflict of Evidence and Coherence”
- Maria Lasonen-Aarnio, “Enkrasia or Evidentialism? Learning to Love Mismatch”

4/3 Epistemic instrumentalism

- Richard Foley, *Working Without a Net*, pp. 3-30
- Thomas Kelly, “Epistemic Rationality as Instrumental Rationality: A Critique”
- *Recommended*: Hilary Kornblith, “Epistemic Normativity”

4/10 Epistemic consequentialism

- Selim Berker, “Epistemic Teleology and the Separateness of Propositions”
- Daniel Singer, “How To Be An Epistemic Consequentialist”
- *Recommended*: Julia Driver, “The ‘Consequentialism’ in Epistemic Consequentialism”

4/17 Irrelevant influences on belief

- Roger White, “You Just Believe That Because...”
- Katia Vavova, “Irrelevant Influences”

4/24 Epistemic permissivism

- Roger White, “Epistemic Permissiveness”
- Nathan Ballantyne & E.J. Coffman, “Uniqueness, Evidence, and Rationality”
- Miriam Schoenfield, “Permission to Believe: Why Permissivism Is True and What It Tells Us About Irrelevant Influences on Belief”