

PHIL 335: Theory of Knowledge
UNC Chapel Hill, Philosophy, Fall 2019
Syllabus

Instructor: Prof. Alex Worsnip (aworsnip@unc.edu)

Class Meetings: Tues & Thurs, 3:30-4:45pm, Caldwell Hall 105

Office Hours: Wed 10:30-11:30am, Thurs 2-3pm, or by appointment, Caldwell Hall 202A

Course Description

This class is a survey of epistemology, or the theory of knowledge. The material of the class is organized into three broad sections. The first investigates the nature of knowledge – asking, in general: what does it take to know something? The second investigates arguments for skepticism – the view that we can't know much of anything at all – and some prominent responses to those arguments. The third turns to the questions about the *point* and *role* of knowledge: does it *matter* whether we know things? And how, if at all, is knowledge connected to our practical and ethical concerns?

Prerequisites, Target Audience and Course Goals

This course is designed for students who have taken at least one prior philosophy class, but presupposes no background in 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 also aims to develop students' philosophical reading and persuasive writing skills: to help them 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 writing.

Requirements/Assessment

Participation (*15% of total grade*). You will receive **two** participation grades, one for the first half of the semester and another for the second half, each of which will be worth 7.5% of your overall grade for the class. Your participation grade will be based on:

- (i) *Attendance* (including punctuality). I will take attendance at the start of every class meeting. Missed classes will be factored into your participation grade, unless you have a University Approved Absence, involving one of the following:
 - Authorized University activities
 - Disability, religious observance, or pregnancy, as documented by Accessibility Resources & Service (ARS) or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC)
 - Significant health condition and/or personal or family emergency as approved by the Office of the Dean of Students, Gender Violence Service Coordinators, or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC).

- (ii) *Alertness/Attentiveness*. You should (obviously) be fully awake. You should not be on your computer, tablet or phone during discussions.
- (iii) *Regularity of participation in discussions*. This doesn't mean that you have to talk in every class meeting, and you don't get extra points for sheer quantity of contributions. But you should be participating in discussions with some regularity (as a guide, aim to contribute something to the discussion at least once per two class meetings). **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*).**
 - To help make participation easier, we'll use the "traffic light system" described [here](#).
- (iv) *Respectfulness of participation in discussions*. You should be respectful to me and, most importantly, 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.
- (v) *Preparedness*. Your participation should reflect having done the reading and having thought about the material. You can demonstrate this by referring to specific ideas from the readings in your comments, and by answering when I ask the class to recall something from a reading.
 - Note: you will not be graded on the philosophical quality of your contributions. Class discussions are a place to speak freely and try out ideas without fear of judgment. Also, asking questions, including clarificatory questions, can be a great way to participate.

Pop Quizzes (*10% of total grade*). Occasional, unannounced pop quizzes will be administered at the start of some class meetings. Quizzes are designed to check that you completed the reading and to test basic comprehension of its main points. We'll use PollEverywhere software for the quizzes.

- Each quiz will consist of 4 multiple-choice questions. If you get 4 right, you get an A (100%). If you get 3 right, you get a B (85%). If you get 2 right, you get a C (75%). If you get 1 right, you get a D (65%). If you get 0 right, you get an F (50%). If you aren't present, you get a 0 (unless you have a Universal Approved Absence as described above).

Reading Responses (*25% of total grade*). 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. Reading responses should be written as if your reader is an intelligent non-expert who has not read the article that you are responding to, and do the following:

- Pick one *specific* argument or claim or point from the reading that interests you and that you would like to discuss, and stay focused on that point.
- Explain exactly as much of the article/author's argument as is necessary to set up your criticism – no more, no less.
- Raise a criticism, problem or worry for the author's argument or view, and explain it in detail, offering reasons in support of it.
- Consider how the author might reply to your criticism.
- Evaluate whether the reply succeeds, or whether the criticism stands.

- (So, ultimately, you can end up agreeing with the author or disagreeing with him/her. But either way, you should consider a *possible* criticism of his/her view on the way.)

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. The first reading response will be worth 5% of your grade; the remaining two responses will be worth 10% of your grade each.

Longer Papers (*50% of total grade*).

- Midterm Paper: 1500-2000 words (\approx 5-6 double-spaced pages). Due Wed, 10/16 at 5pm. *20% of grade*.
- Final Paper: 2000-2500 words (\approx 6-8 double-spaced pages). Due Thurs, 12/12 at 4pm. *30% of grade*.

Prompts will be provided for both papers. I'll also distribute a grading rubric for the papers.

- Note: in this class, the final paper fulfills the role of the final exam. As per UNC regulations, it is due at the time that the final exam would have taken place. However, 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.

Further Policies

Policies For Submission of Written Work.

- All written work should be submitted via the Assignments function on Sakai.
- For the longer papers, to facilitate anonymous grading, please don't include your name anywhere on your paper or in the file name. Use your UNC PID instead. For reading responses, include your name (so that I have the opportunity to work your contribution into our class discussion).
- *Extensions & Late Penalties*.
 - For reading responses:
 - No extensions will be granted, since the nature of the assignment involves completing the work *without the benefit of attending class first*.
 - Late submissions will lose 1/3 of a letter grade immediately, and a further 1/3 of a letter grade every 24 hours thereafter. **Additionally, if you submit your paper after class begins, you will receive a maximum grade of C.**
 - In the case of a genuine emergency that prevents you from submitting on time, have the Office of the Dean of Students contact me on your behalf, then arrange with me to do a makeup assignment (rather than submitting the original assignment late).
 - For longer papers:
 - If you have a good reason and make a reasonable extension request **in advance of the deadline**, I may grant your request. However, I will not grant

- (i) extensions requested after the deadline; (ii) very lengthy extensions; (iii) more than one extension on one paper; or (iv) extensions that get in the way of my ability to submit your final grades in a timely manner.
- Late submissions (without an extension) will lose 1/3 of a letter grade immediately, and a further 1/3 of a letter grade every 24 hours thereafter.
- You are more than welcome (indeed, encouraged) to meet with me while working on assignments. This is free advice that almost always improves your grade. You can come to my scheduled office hours, or set up an appointment via email.

Policies about Grades.

- The grade boundaries for the course are as follows: A = 93% or higher, A- = 90-93%; B+ = 87-90%, B = 83-87%, B- = 80-83%, C+ = 77-80%, C = 73-77%, C- = 70-73%, D+ = 67-70%, D = 63-67%, F = less than 63%. Note: these boundaries should be interpreted so that 93.0% is an A, but 92.99% is an A-, and similarly for each other boundary.
- In addition to communicating them to you directly, I'll post all grades for the course on the Gradebook feature of Sakai, and you can track your running average as the course progresses.
- 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, applies to all class assignments. Violations of the honor code will be taken very seriously and will be reported to the Student Attorney General. 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 gotten 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 constitutes academic dishonesty, err on the side of caution and talk to me before you submit the assignment to clarify the policies.

Polling & Electronic Devices.

- We will periodically use PollEverywhere software in class, for pop quizzes and other purposes. To prepare for this:
 - Sign up for a PollEverywhere account at poll.unc.edu if you don't already have one. You can also find answers to FAQ about the software there.
 - Join the PollEverywhere group for our class by clicking [here](#).
 - Bring a device (laptop, tablet or phone) to every lecture so that you can participate in any quizzes and other polls. You can participate either through a web browser, through the mobile app, or by text message.
 - Important: to receive credit for pop quizzes, you must be identifiable when you answer, which means that you must be either logged in to your

PollEverywhere account, or participate by text from a number linked to your account. Other polls will typically be anonymized.

- Let me know if you have any questions or concerns. We will do a test of the software before the first quiz to sort out any issues.
- When we are not using PollEverywhere, use of electronic devices is prohibited (unless they are required for class participation due to a special accommodation).

Accessibility & Equity.

- I am committed to making class fully accessible, and to providing accommodations for those who need them. If I can do anything to help make class more accessible to you, please let me know, or have UNC Accessibility Resources & Service (ARS) 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.
- I am a Safe Zone Ally, trained and certified by the university LGBTQ center. I am available to meet during office hours or by appointment to offer support.
- I encourage you to make use of the following campus resources as appropriate:
 - Accessibility Resources & Service (ARS): ars.unc.edu
 - Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): caps.unc.edu
 - LGBTQ Center: lgbtq.unc.edu

Schedule of Readings

All readings will be posted in the Resources folder on Sakai.

Date	Topic	Readings
Part One: What is Knowledge?		
Tues 8/20	Introduction/JTB & Gettier Problems I	Edmund Gettier, 'Is Knowledge Justified True Belief?'
Thurs 8/22	JTB & Gettier Problems II	Linda Zagzebski, 'The Inescapability of Gettier Problems'
Tues 8/27	Catchup/Discussion	[No new reading]
Thurs 8/29	Externalist Analyses I	Alvin Goldman, 'A Causal Theory of Knowing'
Tues 9/3	Externalist Analyses II	Alvin Goldman, 'Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge' (pp. 771-780, 790-1)
Thurs 9/5	Externalist Analyses III	Robert Nozick, <i>Philosophical Explanations</i> , pp. 172-180
Tues 9/10	Catchup/Discussion	[No new reading]
Thurs 9/12	Against Analysis	Timothy Williamson, <i>Knowledge and its Limits</i> , selections
Part Two: Skepticism & Responses		
Tues 9/17	Skepticism I	Nagarjuna, <i>The Dispeller of Disputes</i> , sections 31-51
Thurs 9/19		<i>No class – I am away giving a talk</i>
Tues 9/24	Skepticism II	Al-Ghazali, <i>Deliverance from Error</i> , paras. 5-17

Thurs 9/26	Skepticism III	Rene Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> , Meditation I
Tues 10/1	Catchup/Discussion	[No new reading]
Thurs 10/3	Moorean Responses	G.E. Moore, 'Proof of an External World'
Tues 10/8	Evidentialist Responses	Ned Markosian, 'Do You Know That You Are Not A Brain in a Vat?'
Thurs 10/10	Closure-Denying Responses	Robert Nozick, <i>Philosophical Explanations</i> , pp. 197-211
Tues 10/15	Catchup/Discussion	[No new reading]
Thurs 10/17		<i>No class – Fall break</i>
Tues 10/22	Self-Defeat Responses	Susanna Rinard, 'Reasoning One's Way Out of Skepticism'
Thurs 10/24	Inductive Skepticism	David Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> , sec. 4
Tues 10/29	Entitlement Responses	Crispin Wright, 'Warrant for Nothing', selections
Thurs 10/31	Catchup/Discussion	[No new reading]
Part Three: The Role and Point of Knowledge		
Tues 11/5	The Role of Knowledge	Edward Craig, <i>Knowledge and the State of Nature</i> , selections
Thurs 11/7	Epistemic Injustice	Miranda Fricker, <i>Epistemic Injustice</i> , section 1.3
Tues 11/12	Catchup/Discussion	[No new reading]
Thurs 11/14	Knowledge Norms: Assertion	Timothy Williamson, 'Knowing and Asserting'
Tues 11/19	Knowledge Norms: Action	John Hawthorne & Jason Stanley, 'Knowledge & Action'
Thurs 11/21	Catchup	[No new reading – review Hawthorne & Stanley]
Tues 11/26	Pragmatic Encroachment	Jeremy Fantl & Matthew McGrath, 'Evidence, Pragmatics, and Justification'
Thurs 11/28		<i>No class – Thanksgiving break</i>
Tues 12/3	Moral Encroachment	Rima Basu, 'Radical Moral Encroachment: The Moral Stakes of Racist Beliefs'
Thurs 12/12, 4pm	Catchup/Discussion/ Final Roundup	[No new reading]