

## Phil 15: Knowledge and its Limits

Syllabus, Spring 2019

MWF 11-12, Center 113

Website: [TritonEd](#)

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### 1 Course Description

This course is an introductory survey of epistemology: the theory of *knowledge* and *rational belief*. We'll discuss a wide range of topics, including: whether we can really *know* anything; the possibility that we might be brains in vats; whether "knowledge" can be defined or analyzed; what makes a belief rational; whether we can always know whether we're rational; whether we can rationally expect the sun to rise tomorrow; how to reason clearly and rigorously in the face of uncertainty and disagreement; how to avoid groupthink and identify common patterns of irrational thought; and whether it's rational to believe in God.

- All readings are available for free on the course website.
- iClickers are **required** and can be purchased at the campus bookstore.

**Advice:** This class will not be an easy A or even an easy B. In order to do well in this class, you will need to attend class consistently, complete all readings before class, and most importantly, *ask questions when you're confused about something*. In order to receive a passing grade on your papers, you will need to show a strong understanding of the topics under discussion in this course and to develop your own original philosophical arguments. I strongly suggest you start work on your papers early, and outline your ideas before you begin drafting your papers.

## 2 Grading

- Syllabus familiarity quiz: 0% (but necessary for passing the course)
- Two short papers (1500–2100 words): 26% each
- Final exam: 32%
- iClicker participation and quizlets: 8%
- Discussion section participation: 8%

**Syllabus Familiarity Quiz:** To ensure that students are aware of all course requirements and policies, there is a required syllabus familiarity quiz on the course website. **Enrolled students must pass this test with a perfect score by Friday of week 2 at 5:00pm.** You may consult the syllabus while taking the test, and you may retake the test as many times as necessary to get a perfect score.

**Papers:** A week before papers are due, I'll circulate a list of paper topics. If you'd like to write on some other topic, you must explain your idea to your TA and receive permission from your TA in advance. Papers must be 1500–2100 words (approximately five pages to seven pages). I will provide a checklist explaining the requirements for each paper. For advice about writing philosophy papers, please see Jim Pryor's [Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper](#). Extensions will be granted at the discretion of your TA and must be requested at least 12 hours in advance. Without an extension, late papers will be deducted *one third of a letter grade per day* (A will become A–, B+ will become B, etc.). All papers must include a bibliography. You are not permitted to show others your paper, see other students' papers, or collaborate on your papers in any way.

**Final exam:** This course will have a closed book, closed notes final exam. It will include both short and long-answer questions; it will not involve multiple choice questions.

**In-class participation and quizlets:** In-class participation and quizlets will be conducted via iClickers. You may miss up to two lectures without losing points. If you miss more than two sessions (outside of the first session), or forget to bring your clicker, the lost points cannot be made up without documentation. Quizlet answers will receive partial credit for participation and full credit for correct answers.

**Discussion section participation:** You're expected to participate in discussion in section. Attendance is not the same as participation; regular attendance without participation in discussion will not earn any credit. Plan to speak in class (raise questions, press objections, offer clarifications, respond to others) in every session. You may miss one section without it negatively impacting your grade.

**Final grades:** There will be *no extra credit* in this course. If your final grade is 0.01% below the cutoff for a higher letter grade, we will not round up. *Special pleading will not be effective.*

## 3 Policies

**Email policies.** You should not email me or the TAs with substantive questions about course content. Instead, bring these questions to your discussion section or to office hours. You also do not need to email me or the TAs about missing a lecture, unless you have already missed two lectures and have some documented medical or other emergency that prevents you from being present. In that case, email your TA and be prepared to show documentation.

**Laptop/tablet/phone policy:** Use of laptops, tablets, and phones won't be permitted during lecture or discussion sections, except in special cases.<sup>1</sup> Please don't hesitate to contact me by email or during office hours if

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<sup>1</sup> Justification: Students who take notes on laptops show reduced comprehension, in short and medium-term examination, compared with students who take notes by hand. Undergraduates who use laptops in lecture spend 40% of their time using non-course-related

you have specific reasons why you will need to use any of these devices.

#### 4 Academic Integrity

Please familiarize yourself with [university policies](#) on cheating, plagiarism, and academic integrity. *Cheating and plagiarism need not be knowing or intentional to be penalizable.* Any form of cheating or plagiarism will be reported immediately. Penalties for academic integrity infractions include **failing the exam, failing the course, suspension, and expulsion from the university.** We will pursue the harshest available penalties.

**Exams:** Exams must be completed independently. Any form of communication with others during exams (including whispering, passing notes, etc.) counts as cheating. Consulting any resource outside of your own brain (including notes, your phone, the readings, epistemology-related tattoos, etc.) counts as cheating. Looking at another student's exam for any reason (even to check the date or your TA's name) counts as cheating. Students caught cheating will be penalized as harshly as possible.

**Papers:** Plagiarism includes mentioning any ideas that aren't your own without full citations. This includes ideas from any source, formal or informal (your roommate, blogs, Wikipedia, my slides, etc.). Full citations include *both* main text and bibliographic citation. Other academic integrity infractions include collaborating on papers with anyone; giving another student access to your paper; looking at another student's paper; having someone translate your paper for the class; etc. This list is not exhaustive. Use good judgment; ask questions.

**iClickers:** Using another student's clicker constitutes cheating. Both students will be penalized as harshly as possible.

#### 5 Accommodations

Students requesting accommodations for this course due to a disability must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities, located in University Center 202 behind Center Hall. Students are required to present their AFA letters to faculty (please make arrangements to contact me privately) and to the OSD liaison in the department in advance so that accommodations may be arranged. Contact the OSD at: (858) 534-4382, [osd@ucsd.edu](mailto:osd@ucsd.edu), or [disabilities.ucsd.edu](http://disabilities.ucsd.edu).

#### 6 Tentative schedule

This schedule is subject to change. You should complete these readings before class on the day listed. You may be quizzed on them in class.

##### Week 1 *Cartesian Skepticism*

- Mon. April 1 Introduction to the course; no readings
- Wed. April 3 Descartes, *Meditations 1 and 2*
- Fri. April 5 Stroud, "The Problem of the External World"

##### Week 2 *Against Skepticism*

- Mon. April 8 Moore, "Proof of an External World," "Four Forms of Skepticism," and "Certainty"

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software. Academic performance is inversely correlated with multitasking on laptops. Most importantly: being seated near someone using a screen to multitask impedes academic performance. See Mueller & Oppenheimer (2014), "The Pen Is Mightier Than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking," *Psychological Science*; Kraushaar & Novak (2010), "Examining the Affects of Student Multitasking with Laptops during the Lecture," *Journal of Information Systems Education*; Sanaa, Weston, Cepedab (2013), "Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers," *Computers & Education*.

Wed. April 10 Rinard, "Reasoning One's Way out of Skepticism"

Fri. April 12 DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Problem" §1, 2 (p. 1–13)

**Week 3** *Contemporary Scepticisms*

Mon. April 15 Bostrom, "Are We Living in a Computer Simulation?"

Wed. April 17 Putnam, "Brains in a Vat"

Fri. April 19 Pinillos, "Climate Change Skepticism"

**Week 4** *Foundationalism vs. Coherentism*

Mon. April 22 Chisholm, "The Myth of the Given"

Wed. April 24 Bonjour, "The Coherence Theory of Empirical Knowledge"

Fri. April 26 reread this week's readings; **paper 1 due Saturday at 5pm**

**Week 5** *Analyses of Knowledge*

Mon. April 29 Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" & Feldman, "Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge"

Wed. May 1 Zagzebski, "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems"

Fri. May 3 reread this week's readings

**Week 6** *Epistemic Externalism*

Mon. May 6 Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing"

Wed. May 8 Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?"

Fri. May 10 reread this week's readings

**Week 7** *Inductive Scepticism*

Mon. May 13 Hume, Excerpts from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

Wed. May 15 Nelson Goodman, "The New Riddle of Induction"

Fri. May 17 reread this week's readings

**Week 8** *Disagreement*

Mon. May 20 Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreements"

Wed. May 22 Kelly, "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement"

Fri. May 24 reread this week's readings; **paper 2 due Saturday at 5pm**

**Week 9** *Groupthink and Irrationality*

Mon. May 27 no class: Memorial Day Observed

Wed. May 29 Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"

Fri. May 31 Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow* excerpts

**Week 10** *Belief and Rational Choice*

Mon. June 3 Sinnott-Armstrong & Fogelin, "Choices"

Wed. June 5 Pascal, *Pensées* Section 233 & Hájek, "Pascal's Wager," §1–4

Fri. June 7 Hájek, "Pascal's Wager," §5