

## **PHILOSOPHY 15: KNOWLEDGE & ITS LIMITS (T/R 9:30-10:50, CTR 214)**

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**Sections:** Monday (2pm, HSS 2321) and Wednesday (12pm, Solis 110)

**I. Introduction.** This course is an introduction to “epistemology,” or the study of knowledge. Why study knowledge? One reason is that it’s often crucially important to be able to tell the difference between “knowing” and other states of judgement like opinions, beliefs, and hunches. A scientist’s conclusions, for example, have to be more than just unsupported opinions. In the law courts, we suppose that judgements are made based on knowledge of the facts, not on mere hunches or beliefs. Engineers must know that a bridge will be structurally sound before it’s even built. In these contexts, we can ask, “do you really know that?” And in order to answer this question we need to know more about where knowledge comes from and what it means to really know something. Aside from such practical issues, humans have long wondered whether we can be sure that the world is as it appears to us. On dark melancholic nights we may even wonder how we can know that we exist at all—that we’re not simply a computer simulation, or living in the “Matrix.” Even if we can set these worries aside, we should still wonder whether and when we can ever trust our own judgement, let alone the judgement of others. We will cover some traditional and contemporary debates about the nature of human knowledge. These will include: (1) A lightning speed jaunt through historical philosophical approaches to the sources and limits of knowledge; (2) Skepticism about knowledge; (3) The nature of justification; and (4) The role of the brain in knowing.

**II. Texts.** All readings will be available online via the course’s TED page: [ted.ucsd.edu](http://ted.ucsd.edu). I have excerpted historical texts mostly from Jonathan Bennett’s truly excellent updated translations and commentary, the full versions of which are accessible here: <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/>

### **III. Course Requirements.**

(1) Section Participation: Evaluated by your TA (10%)

(2) Exam 1: 15%

(3) Exam 2: 25%

(4) Exam 3: 25%

(5) Final Examination: 25%

*All exams are “closed book”*

*The final exam will be comprehensive, the others will cover everything since the previous exam.*

### **IV. What’s Expected of You:**

- I expect you to put a serious amount of effort into understanding the readings. They can be difficult for those new to philosophy, and you have to be persistent. This means more than simply reading them all the way through. You must do your best to understand them, engage them, and challenge them. Read slowly, with a pen in your hand to make notes as you go. Be sure to have read the assigned readings before you come to class. Read things over again. Talk to your peers outside of class. Come to office hours and ask questions in class and section. Ask questions in the forum on the TED page, I will answer them if I can.
- I expect you to come to exams and office hours well prepared. The best way to do this is to start early and talk things through with small groups of your fellow students outside of class.
- I expect that you’ll do your work honestly. We want to read your considered views about the material in your papers, not things that you’ve copied from others, and not simply a rehash of everything you got down into your notes. Plagiarism is trying to pass off other people’s ideas and words as your own. I can’t force you not to cheat, of course. Only you can make that decision, but remember that you are essentially defined by your actions. Cheating, even if you think you can justify it to yourself, makes you a cheater. What kind of a person do you want to be?
- I expect you to participate. “Participating” means showing up to lecture and section, and being actively engaged when you’re there. It also includes asking questions in class when you have them, coming to see me or the TAs during office hours, or asking questions over email or on the TED page. Ask for help when you’re confused. These issues are challenging and confusing. One must be persistent.

DATE	ASSIGNED READING (please read the indicated text(s) before lecture. Changes may occur so stay tuned)
T 4/3	Introduction: Studying human knowledge
R 4/5	<b>Class Cancelled</b>
T 4/10	Rationalism: Selections from Descartes ( <i>Principles</i> I §43-47), Spinoza ( <i>Ethics</i> II §40-43), and Leibniz (“Primary Truths,” and “Preface” of <i>New Essays</i> )
R 4/12	Empiricism: John Locke, Selections from <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> , and David Hume, Selections from <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> (from §II-IV).
T 4/17	Kantianism: Selections from Kant’s <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> , “Transcendental Aesthetic.”
R 4/19	<b>Exam 1:</b> Please bring an <b>unmarked</b> blue book. That means don’t put your name on it or mark it up in any way in advance.
T 4/24	Skepticism I: Plato, <i>Theaetetus</i> : “Man is the measure of all things” (142a-154a; 156c6-157c2; 157e-160e); Michael Williams, “Agrippa’s Trilemma”
R 4/26	Skepticism II: Selections from René Descartes, <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i>
T 5/1	Skepticism III: Christopher Grau, “Bad Dreams, Evil Demons, and the Experience Machine: Philosophy and <i>The Matrix</i> ”
R 5/3	Against Skepticism: G.E. Moore, “Proof of the External World”
T 5/8	<b>Exam 2:</b> Please bring an <b>unmarked</b> blue book. That means don’t put your name on it or mark it up in any way in advance.
R 5/10	The Conceptual Analysis of Knowledge: Plato, <i>Theaetetus</i> (200d5-210a); Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”
T 5/15	Justification I: René Descartes, “Meditations on First Philosophy” (first para. of “First Meditation” and first para. of “Second Meditation”); Michael Huemner, “The Architecture of Knowledge”; and Sextus Empiricus, “The Five Modes”
R 5/17	Justification II: Laurence Bonjour, “The Structure of Empirical Knowledge”
T 5/22	The Problem of Induction: David Hume, Selection from <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i>
R 5/24	The Problem of Induction: Nelson Goodman, “The New Riddle of Induction”
T 5/29	Other Forms of Justification: Robert Audi, “Scientific, Moral, and Religious Knowledge”
R 5/31	<b>Exam 3:</b> Please bring an <b>unmarked</b> blue book. That means don’t put your name on it or mark it up in any way in advance.
T 6/5	The Empirical Study of Knowledge: W.V.O. Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized”
R 6/7	The Empirical Study of Knowledge: Paul Churchland, <i>Plato’s Camera</i> , “Introduction”
T 6/12	<b>FINAL EXAM</b> 8:00 AM - 10:50 AM. Please bring an <b>unmarked</b> blue book. That means don’t put your name on it or mark it up in any way in advance.

## **V. The Fine Print:**

**1. Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty.** Using another person's ideas in your own writing without citing them is plagiarism. For example, if you copy text from an internet site, even if you change the wording, and do not cite the source, you are plagiarizing. Failing to cite others when you use their ideas, even though you've put it in your own words, is like presenting them as your own. If you have any questions about what counts as fair use, please ask me or your TA. Academic dishonesty is turning in work that is not entirely your own. This may include plagiarizing, but it also includes letting others write parts of your papers for you or simply mooching off of the group you're working with. Plagiarism and academic dishonesty are morally wrong, illegal, and against the school's honor code. When in doubt: cite it. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe.

**2. Computers in the Classroom.** Some of you use computers to take notes. Some of you use your computers in class to look at Facebook, etc. Some of you do both. It's super-distracting for people behind you if you are messing around on the internet while they're trying to pay attention. So here are the rules for computers in the classroom: (1) Only use them for taking notes in a word-processing type program. (2) Whether you use them to take notes or not, sit in the back so that no one has to be behind you. This is a fail-safe. If you're just taking notes you'll be closer to the power outlets. If you're such a hopeless wanton wreck that you can't go an hour and twenty minutes without the internet, at least you'll be sitting against the wall so that other people don't have to be distracted by your lack of self-control.

**3. Late Papers.** Don't turn in your papers late. It's unfair to you and the instructors. It's unfair to you because, chances are that working past the deadline will cut into other tasks you need to do and won't really improve the assignment that much. It's unfair to the instructors because it doesn't give them as much time to respond to your work. If you are really in a bind, **please let us know BEFORE the due date**. If you do this, I will allow you to turn in the paper late with a 1/3 grade penalty per day past the deadline. If you do not do this, I will not accept it and you will receive no credit for the assignment.

**4. Disabilities.** Please let me know of any disabilities as soon as possible so that I can make whatever accommodations I need to.