

## **Philosophy 132: Epistemology**

Fall 2019  
Solis 110  
Mon/Wed/Fri 11:00am – 11:50am

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Office Hours: Mondays, Noon to 2:00pm

### What This Course is About

Epistemology is the study of knowledge, and related concepts like belief, justification, and rationality. In this course we'll look at many specific epistemological questions, including the following. When is it rational to trust our gut feelings? Should the fact that other people disagree with some of our beliefs make us less confident in them? What should we believe when experts in a field disagree? Why do people end up believing demonstrably false things, and what can we do about it? Can our beliefs themselves ever harm others, or only the actions those beliefs lead to? Are our beliefs under our control? How is belief related to other cognitive attitudes, like faith or imagination?

### Course Goals

This course has two goals. First, it's meant to introduce you to some of the arguments philosophers about these questions. By the end of the course, you'll have a clearer idea of what you think about these issues, which questions are still unsettled, and what we would have to do to answer them. You'll also have a sense of who the philosophers making these arguments are. Three times during the course, you'll have an opportunity to meet with the philosophers we're reading and discussing.

Second, this course is meant to help you develop your philosophical skills, so that you can apply them to other things you're thinking about – whether in epistemology, in other areas of philosophy, or in everyday life. Specifically, you'll practice explaining others' reasoning, assessing the strength of arguments by considering objections to them, and constructively building on others' ideas

### Details and Policies

#### **Readings**

All of the course readings will be available on Canvas. Most of your grade in this class is connected to discussion in some way (for example, some assignments ask you to explain how discussion changed your thinking, while others ask you to build on ideas that came up during discussion, or make an argument that builds on it). So, it's very important that you have done the readings and come to class ready to discuss them. The readings are difficult, so it's likely that you'll need to reread parts of them and to jot down questions as you go. For details about what to read when, see the *Course Schedule*.

#### **Attendance**

Attendance is required. Because so much of the work in this class is connected to discussion, the assignments only work if everyone is committed to attending. You can miss three days with no questions asked (maybe you're sick, maybe you're balancing the demands of another class, maybe you just need a mental health day – it's up to you). After those three, your overall course grade will start to go down by two points for each additional absence. For the same reasons, it's important that you be on time for class. I reserve the right to treat cases of extreme lateness like absences. If you think you will need an exception to the attendance policy (e.g. because of a long-term illness), please discuss it with me during the first week of class.

## **Laptops and Tablets**

It's okay with me if you use your laptop or tablet during class to take notes or to look back at the readings. However, you should know that research about how people learn suggests that you'll remember things better if you take notes by hand and that, if you get distracted and check Facebook, other students sitting near you end up doing worse in the class. So, I recommend taking notes on paper if that's a viable option for you.

## **Email**

If you have questions about this course, the best thing to do is to come see me during office hours (or, if you can't make it to office hours, we can work out an appointment to meet at another time). However, you can also get in touch with me by email. When you do so, please allow for 48 hours to receive a reply (you'll probably get one sooner, but you might not – this means that if you are asking questions about an upcoming assignment, you shouldn't do it right before the assignment is due). Please also check your own email for announcements about the course, and reply to emails from us the same way we'll do for you.

## **Grading Policies**

Your grade in this course will be determined by the following factors:

- 30% Reading Responses
- 20% Final Argument Analysis
- 15% Midterm Argument Analysis
- 10% Peer Comments on Final Argument Analysis
- 10% Discussion Follow-Up
- 10% Participation
- 5% Course Preview

For details about how to do these assignments and how they'll be graded, see the *Assignment Guide*.

## **Accessibility and Accommodation**

Your well-being and success in this course are important to me. I recognize that different students have different needs, and what works for some may not work as well for others. So, I encourage everyone to talk to me about how I can be supportive. I also encourage students with relevant needs to avail themselves of the resources available at the Office for Students with Disabilities (contact information below).

## **Academic Integrity**

I take academic integrity seriously, and I expect you to do the same. So, in the work you do for this course, it's important to be up front about which ideas are your own, and which you are building on from other people. If you're ever not sure whether something is okay, you are welcome to talk with me about it, or to consult the UCSD Policy on Integrity of Scholarship available here: <https://academicintegrity.ucsd.edu/process/policy.html>

## **Further Resources**

College can be hard, for both academic and non-academic reasons. You should know that if times are ever tough, you're not in this alone. The following are some helpful campus resources you should feel welcome to reach out to.

### *Writing Hub*

Website: <https://commons.ucsd.edu/academic-support/writing/for-undergraduates.html>

Phone: 858-246-2117

Email: [writinghub@ucsd.edu](mailto:writinghub@ucsd.edu)

### *Student Health Services*

Website: <https://wellness.ucsd.edu/studenthealth/Pages/default.aspx>

Phone: 858-534-3300

Email: [studenthealth@ucsd.edu](mailto:studenthealth@ucsd.edu)

### *Counseling and Psychological Services*

Website: <https://wellness.ucsd.edu/caps/Pages/default.aspx>

Phone: 858-534-3755

Email: Secure online messaging is available through the website.

### *Sexual Assault Resource Center*

Website: <https://care.ucsd.edu>

Phone: 858-534-5793

Email: [sarc@ucsd.edu](mailto:sarc@ucsd.edu)

### *Office for Students with Disabilities*

Website: <https://osd.ucsd.edu>

Phone: 858-534-4382

Email: [osd@ucsd.edu](mailto:osd@ucsd.edu)

### *Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion – Community Centers*

Website: <https://diversity.ucsd.edu/centers-resources/community-centers.html>

Contact information for centers serving specific groups is available on the website.

### *Campus Spiritual Communities*

Website: <https://students.ucsd.edu/sponsor/ethics-spirit/contacts.html>

Contact information for communities with particular religious affiliations is available on the website.

### *Basic Needs*

Any student who has difficulty accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, can get help here.

Email: [foodpantry@ucsd.edu](mailto:foodpantry@ucsd.edu), [basicneeds@ucsd.edu](mailto:basicneeds@ucsd.edu)

Phone: 858-246-2632

## *Course Schedule*

Friday 9/27

No Reading

**Course Previews due on Canvas by 10:00am**

Monday, 9/30

Read: Bertrand Russell, *Problems of Philosophy*, Chapters 1-2

Wednesday, 10/2

Read: Susanna Rinard, "Reasoning One's Way out of Skepticism"

Friday, 10/4

Read: Tom Kelly & Sarah McGrath, "Is Reflective Equilibrium Enough?"

Monday, 10/7

Read: Tamar Gendler, "Thought Experiments Rethought—and Reperceived"

Wednesday, 10/9

Read: Peter Railton, "The Affective Dog and Its Rational Tale"

**All students must have submitted one Reading Response by this point**

Friday, 10/11

No Reading

**First Discussion Follow-Up due on Canvas by 10:00am**

Monday, 10/14

Read: David Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News"

Wednesday, 10/16

Read: Tom Kelly, "Peer Disagreement and Higher-Order Evidence"

Friday, 10/18

Read: Jennifer Lackey, "A Justificationist View of Disagreement's Epistemic Significance"

Monday, 10/21

No Reading

Guest Lecture: Michele Palmira, "How to Solve the Puzzle of Peer Disagreement"

Wednesday, 10/23

Read: Alvin Goldman, "Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?"

Friday, 10/25

Read: Zach Barnett, "Belief-Dependence: How Do the Numbers Count?"

Monday, 10/28

Read: Tamar Gendler, "The Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias"

**Midterm Argument Analysis due on Canvas by midnight**

**All students must have submitted their second Reading Response by this point**

Wednesday, 10/30

No Reading

**Second Discussion Follow-Up due on Canvas by 10:00am**

Friday, 11/1

Read: C. Thi Nguyen, "Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles"

Monday, 11/4

Read: Regina Rini, "Fake News and Partisan Epistemology"

Wednesday, 11/6

Read: Karen Frost-Arnold, "Trustworthiness and Truth: The Pitfalls of Internet Accountability"

Friday, 11/8

Read: Sarah Stroud, "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship"

Monday, 11/11 – Veterans Day, No Class

Wednesday, 11/13

Read: Rima Basu, "What We Epistemically Owe to Each Other"

Friday, 11/15

Read: Georgi Gardiner, "Evidentialism and Moral Encroachment"

Monday, 11/18

Read: William Alston, "The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification"

Wednesday, 11/20

Read: Richard Feldman, "The Ethics of Belief"

Friday, 11/22

Read: Pamela Hieronymi, "Responsibility for Believing"

**Draft of Final Argument Analysis due on Canvas by midnight**

Monday, 11/25

Read: Amy Flowerree, "Agency of Belief and Intention"

**Details about Extra Credit Q&A with Amy Flowerree will be announced in class**

Wednesday, 11/27 – Thanksgiving Break, No Class

Friday, 11/29 – Thanksgiving Break, No Class

Monday, 12/2

Read: Liz Jackson, "The Nature and Rationality of Faith"

**Details about Extra Credit Q&A with Liz Jackson will be announced in class**

Wednesday, 12/4

Read: Jennifer Church, "Perceiving People as People: An Overlooked Role for the Imagination"

**Peer Comments on Final Argument Analysis due by midnight**

Friday, 12/6

No Reading

**Third Discussion Follow-Up due on Canvas by 10:00am**

Tuesday, 12/10

**Final Argument Analysis due by 2:30pm**

**Participation Reflection due by midnight**

## *Assignment Guide*

This document lists all of the assignments for this course, along with some explanations of how to approach doing them, why I'm asking you to do them, and what you can expect about grading.

### **Course Preview**

#### How to do this assignment

To complete this assignment, start by reading the *Syllabus*, the *Course Schedule*, and this *Assignment Guide*. Then, on Canvas, submit answers to the following questions.

1. What is the attendance policy?
2. How will your participation grade be calculated?
3. Do you have any questions about the assignments or course policies? If so, what are they?
4. What are you hoping to get out of this course?
5. Is there anything about this course that you think will be especially challenging for you? If so, how can I help you with it?

#### Why we're doing this assignment

There are two reasons for checking in like this. First, it's a way for me to make sure that we're on the same page about what I'll expect from you and what you can expect from me before the course gets started. Second, it gives me a chance to get to know you. If you have concerns about particular policies or assignments, we can start talking about how to address them.

#### How you'll be evaluated

This assignment is a freebie – if you do it, you'll get full credit. The only ways to not get full credit are (a) to not submit it on time, or (b) to answer these questions without reading the course materials. I'll set aside class time on the first day to discuss any questions or concerns about the course that come up, and make adjustments if needed.

## Reading Responses

### How to do this assignment

There are three Reading Responses due throughout this course. You can do them on any reading you like, but you can't save them all for the end – there are checkpoints throughout the course that require you to be making progress on them (see the *Course Schedule* for details). To do a Reading Response on an article, start by briefly explaining what conclusion the philosopher you're reading is trying to convince you of. Then, briefly explain the reasoning that supports that conclusion. It's okay if you don't go into all the details, just focus on the big picture argument. After you have explained the argument, explain one question you have about it. For example, you might ask about a part of the argument that is unclear and say why you're not sure what the philosopher means, or you might ask about a step in the argument that you think is open to challenge and say why you're not convinced. All together (explaining the argument and raising a question) this will usually take about three double-spaced pages, but it's okay if you write a little more or a little less. Reading Responses should be submitted on Canvas by 10:00am on the day of class where we'll be discussing the article you chose (that way, I can read through them before class).

After submitting on Canvas, there is one more thing to do before your Reading Response is complete. Within one week of submitting your original Reading Response, post a follow-up to Canvas explaining whether and how your thinking about the reading has changed after our discussion in class. For example, you might think about whether your question has been answered, whether you now understand the argument differently than you did initially, or whether you now have different questions about the argument. It's okay if your answer is sometimes that your thinking hasn't changed (for example, maybe your Reading Response raised an objection to an argument and you don't think any replies that came up in class are convincing) but in those cases it's important to explain why not. Once you post your follow-up, your Reading Response is complete.

### Why we're doing this assignment

There are several reasons for doing Reading Responses. First, they will help you get more out of the readings. Philosophy papers are often dense and complicated, so keeping track of the big picture as you go can help you understand them. Second, they will help us make progress evaluating these arguments in class. By thinking about what's unclear or potentially open to objection ahead of time, we'll know where to start when we get together as a group. Finally, Reading Responses will help you prepare for your Argument Analysis assignments. Those assignments ask you to go into more depth in assessing an argument, so the Reading Responses give you a chance to practice and to start thinking about what you might want to work more on later.

### How you'll be evaluated

There are three criteria I'll use to grade your Reading Responses. First, I'll consider how well you explained the argument in the reading you chose. An A-level explanation clearly lays out how the argument works, identifying the premises the philosopher starts off with and explaining how those lead to the conclusion they're meant to support. A B-level explanation more or less tracks the argument, but misunderstands something subtle about it, like missing an important step or confusing a response to an objection for part of the main argument. A C-level explanation misses something more basic, like analyzing the style of the article instead of the argument, or misidentifying what the conclusion of the argument is.

Second, I'll consider how well the question you raise engages with the argument you explained. An A-level question demonstrates thinking about how the argument works, where it might be unclear, how it might be challenged, or how it's related to other things you know about. A B-level question demonstrates less careful thinking about the argument or doesn't explain the relevance of the question, while a C-level question is off-topic or does not take the author's argument seriously.

Finally, I'll consider how responsive your follow-up is to class discussion. An A-level follow-up makes progress

based on what happened in class, for example by considering and responding to ideas from classmates. A B-level follow-up shows awareness of what happened in class, but not much further thinking about it. A C-level follow-up ignores or misrepresents points from class.

Because the Reading Responses are meant to prepare you for class, and because I will adjust my plan for class based on reading them, they will not be accepted late. If you do not think you can make a deadline for a Reading Response, your best bet is to do a Reading Response on a different paper.

## Discussion Follow-Ups

### How to do this assignment

Throughout this course, there will be three Discussion Follow-Up days. On the first day of class, I will ask everyone to sign up for one of those days. To prepare for your day, start by choosing one point from class that you would like us to discuss further. For example, you might have an idea for an objection to an argument that we talked about, a reply to an objection, or question about how an argument applies to a different context. Once you have a point in mind, write a brief explanation of why we were talking about that point in class, what has been said so far, and why you would like to talk more about it. All together, this will probably take about two double-spaced pages, but it's okay if you write a little more or a little less. Submit your Discussion Follow-Up to Canvas by 10:00am on the day you signed up for. In class that day, we'll discuss as many students' Discussion Follow-Ups as we have time for.

### Why we're doing this assignment

There are two reasons for doing this assignment. First, it's often the case that there is more to say about an argument than we will have time to explore in class. There might be objections that we don't consider, replies to objections that we don't investigate fully, or ways of revising the argument to make it clearer or more careful. So, by reserving time to follow-up, we can make sure that we think through the ideas that most interest you. Second, this assignment will help you follow discussion more closely. Philosophical progress often happens by building on what others say. Thinking about your classmates' ideas might change your mind about something, or by arguing against them you might get come to understand your own views more clearly. In order to do a Discussion Follow-Up, you'll need to have taken some notes on what ideas came up during discussion, so that you'll be able to think about which of them you would like to discuss more.

### How you'll be evaluated

I'll use two criteria when grading your Discussion Follow-Ups. First, I'll consider how closely connected your follow-up is to the discussion we had in class. An A-level Discussion Follow-Up focuses on something that came up during our conversation, with a clear explanation of how the point came up and why it's relevant. A B-level Discussion Follow-Up focuses on something that came up in discussion, but is a little sketchy on the details of why we were talking about it or how it's relevant to course topics. A C-level Discussion Follow-Up ignores or misunderstands points from class.

Second, I'll consider how much original thinking went in to your Discussion Follow-Up. An A-level Discussion Follow-Up brings new ideas for us to consider, showing how they build on or challenge ideas that came up in class. B-or-C-level Discussion Follow-Ups make a point about something that came up in class, but don't show much further thinking about it.

Because Discussion Follow-Ups will be used in class, they will not be accepted late.

## Argument Analysis

### How to do this assignment

You'll do two Argument Analysis assignments during this course. To do one, start by choosing any argument that's relevant to this class (it could be one from a reading, one made by one of your classmates, or one from me). Then, follow these steps:

1. Write a brief explanation of any context someone would need to have to understand the argument you chose. For example, you might consider questions like what question it's trying to help us answer, how it's related to other arguments we've considered, and whether there are any technical terms in it that need to be explained.
2. Write a brief explanation of how the argument works. What are its starting premises, and how do they lead to the conclusion they're meant to support?
3. Decide what you think the best objection to this argument is, and explain that objection. Which step in the argument is it an objection to, and what reasons do we have for doubting that step?
4. Decide what you think the best reply to this objection is, and explain that reply. What should a defender of this argument say in response to the objection?

All together, this will probably take about five to six double-spaced pages, but it's okay if you write a little more or a little less.

### Why we're doing this assignment

When we discuss an argument in class, there is often unfinished business. Maybe there was more than one way of reconstructing the argument and we only considered one version of it, or maybe there are objections we didn't consider or replies we thought of but didn't spend time developing. This assignment gives you a chance to dig deeper by focusing on a particular argument you're interested in, investigating some of those possibilities, and seeing how well they stand up to scrutiny. This is the same kind of thinking professional philosophers do when writing the kinds of articles we read for this class.

### How you'll be evaluated

There are four criteria that I'll use when grading these assignments. First, I'll consider the quality of the argument, objection, and reply you develop. A-level arguments have premises that are plausible and conclusions that are well-supported. B-level arguments might rely on premises that are more contestable or make hastier inferences, while C-level arguments might rely on premises that beg the question or make inferences that are unsupported.

Second, I'll consider the clarity with which you explain your argument, objection, and reply. A-level explanations are concise and could be understood by someone who wasn't in class with us. B-level explanations might be wordy or leave something important unclear. C-level explanations might be hard to follow or misrepresent the arguments they're explaining.

Third, I'll consider the intellectual charity of your objection and reply. In this assignment, no matter what you ultimately think about the issue you're writing about, you'll end up arguing on behalf of someone who disagrees (in the objection if you agree with the original conclusion, or in the reply if you agree with the objection). An A-level Argument Analysis focuses on the most plausible version of that position. A B-level Argument Analysis might set up a weak objection in order to reply to it more easily. A C-level Argument Analysis might misrepresent what other philosophers have argued.

Finally, I'll consider the philosophical contribution made by your Argument Analysis. A-level Argument Analyses develop ideas that go beyond what we did in class, for example by improving an argument we considered, developing a new objection to one, suggesting a new reply, or identifying the implications an argument has for a question we haven't considered. B-level Argument Analyses suggest ideas that go beyond what came up in class, but don't develop them as thoroughly or clearly. C-level Argument Analyses mostly summarize, for example by starting with an argument we've already discussed, considering an objection to it we spent a lot of class time on, and recapitulating a reply we discussed as well.

Both the Midterm and Final Argument Analyses can be submitted late. However, 1/3 of a letter grade will be deducted for each day that they are late (for example, from an A- to a B+).

## Peer Comments on Final Argument Analysis

### How to do this assignment

When you're working on your Final Argument Exploration, you'll submit a draft prior to the finished version. In this assignment, I'll pair you with two of your classmates, and you'll give those two feedback on their drafts. In order to complete this assignment, answer the following questions about each draft.

1. What is the most original or thoughtful point made in this draft? How could your classmate build on it or support it further?
2. What's the best objection you can come up with to that point? What strategies might your classmate try for responding to it?
3. Were any parts of this draft hard for you to follow? If so, what information could be added to make them clearer?

After answering these questions, use the Canvas messaging system to send your answers to your classmates **and** to me.

### Why we're doing this assignment

Research into how people learn suggests that commenting on other students' writing is one of the best ways to improve your own writing skills. Doing so has two advantages. First, you get feedback from new sources, and so you end up with decisions to make about how to incorporate it. For example, if a classmate suggests a way of clarifying a point you're making, you'll then have the opportunity to think about whether that's really the point you're trying to make. Reflecting on this helps you develop your ideas, even if you end up disagreeing with your classmate. Second, giving feedback to others helps you get clearer on what's involved in a good writing. Explaining what's working or not working in another person's writing makes it easier to think critically about your own. Both of these things make you more self-aware about your writing, which makes it easier to apply the skills you're practicing here in other contexts.

### How you'll be evaluated

Your grade for your comments will be based on two criteria. First, I will consider how substantive your comments are. A-level comments focus on the ideas in your classmates' drafts, offering new ideas about how they could be developed. B-level comments are more vague or hasty, while C-level comments don't address your classmates' ideas (for example, by focusing only on details like spelling and formatting).

Second, I'll consider how constructive your comments are. A-level comments provide your classmates with specific steps they can take to improve their Argument Explorations, like suggestions for clarifications or ideas for new arguments. B-level comments point out things that could be improved but don't offer much help in improving them, for example by raising an objection but not suggesting a way to respond to it. C-level comments don't provide suggestions for improvement, or provide suggestions that don't build on the ideas the draft already has in it.

Because your classmates will need time to revise after taking your comments into account, late Peer Comments will not be accepted.

## Participation Reflection

### How to do this assignment

When you're taking notes for this course, keep track of contributions made by classmates that you think are particularly insightful or that you think help make discussion go well. For example, maybe some of your classmates make interesting arguments, ask questions that lead to interesting ideas, or are particularly good at clarifying other students' contributions.

At the end of the course, look back at those notes and send me an email mentioning some of your classmates who you think made especially valuable contributions to this class and what you think they did well. These could be students whose contributions you valued while we were talking as a whole class or when you were working in smaller groups. In that same email, say a little about what you think your own strengths and weaknesses as a discussion participant are. No one else will see these reflections, so you can be honest, both about yourself and your classmates.

While doing this assignment (and while participating in class), remember that being a good discussion participant is not the same as just talking a lot. I want to know who you think brought us interesting ideas to talk about, who showed they were listening to others, and who helped us understand the arguments we're discussing. So, for example, someone who talks so much that others don't get a chance, or who ignores things that others say wouldn't count as participating well.

### Why we're doing this assignment

This assignment serves two purposes. First, it will help me be more fair when I assign participation grades. Being able to compare what I think about how discussion has gone with what you think can help me make sure that everyone who deserves credit for their contributions gets it. Second, this assignment will improve the quality of our discussions. For students who are used to lecture courses, it's easy to fall into the habit of only really listening to the professor. But the point of this class is thinking through the arguments we consider together, so this assignment will help make sure that we stay focused on that.

### How you'll be evaluated

You won't get a grade on your Participation Reflection specifically, but I will take them into account when assigning participation grades. Your participation grade will be based on my assessment of your contributions to discussion, what I hear from your classmates (though this can only help you), your in-class writing, and group work.

If you're not usually comfortable speaking in class, don't worry. I don't expect everyone to be the most talkative person in the room. Coming prepared, doing the in-class assignments, taking group work seriously, and speaking up occasionally are sufficient to get an A on your participation grade. If speaking up in class is a serious concern for you, please talk with me about it within the first full week of class so that we can come up with a fair accommodation together.