



PHL 310: Knowledge and Reality

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Office Hours: Mondays 11-1, Tuesdays 2-4, and Thursdays by appointment

Course Summary

On its face, it seems obvious that there are certain propositions we can know – for instance, that I am reading this syllabus right now or that I have hands. But can we discount the possibility that we are being deceived by an evil demon, or being stimulated by a neuroscientist in a laboratory, or are imprisoned in the Matrix? That we can't definitively answer these questions should worry us. To avoid the despair of skepticism we'll explore what conditions (if any) make knowledge possible and what sources of knowledge we can depend on (if any). We will consider some powerful arguments for skepticism that threaten to undermine our common sense assumptions, and we'll end by exploring whether some evidence is available to some knowers and not others based on features of their social identity – a view associated with standpoint epistemology. Major topics will thus be:

- (1) The Analysis of Knowledge,
- (2) Sources of Knowledge,
- (3) Skepticism, and
- (4) Standpoint Theory.

Course Goals

The primary goal of this course is to give you the tools to engage carefully and reflectively with the world through philosophy. As a discipline, philosophy's goal is to gain knowledge (of the world and ourselves). At the same time, it aims to understand the conditions that make knowledge possible, and is thus *self-reflective*.

One way to equip you with tools to do philosophy is to read the works of people who have taken up this task before you. Therefore, we'll read a wide selection of philosophers to train ourselves to think along with them. There are three things I want you to be able to do by the end of the course:

1. Critically analyze claims, their underlying assumptions and their implications
2. Generate questions, explanations, conjectures, hypotheses, alternative ideas and possible solutions in response to contemporary issues in epistemology
3. Effectively and concisely communicate complex ideas in your writing.

Course Information

Class Times: T/Th, 9:30 – 11:00 AM

Class Location: WEL 3.402

Required Texts: All required readings will be available on Canvas

		Tuesday	Thursday	Assignment
		1/17	1/19	
Part 1: The Analysis Of Knowledge	Week 1	Introductory Meeting; No Reading Assigned	Gettier, E. "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"	
		1/24	1/26	
	Week 2	Goldman, A. "A Causal Theory of Knowing"	Goldman continued	
		1/31	2/2	
	Week 3	Lehrer, K. and Paxson, T. "Knowledge: Undefeated justified true belief"	Lehrer and Paxson continued	
		2/7	2/9	
	Week 4	Zagezebski, L. "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems"	Jim Pryor "Guidelines on Writing Philosophy", and excerpts from <i>They Say, I say</i>	First paper assignment distributed
		2/14	2/16	
Part 2: Sources of Knowledge	Week 5	Grice, H.P. "The Causal Theory of Perception"	Grice continued	
		2/21	2/23	
	Week 6	Lackey, J. "Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission"	Russell, B. "On Induction"	
		2/28	3/2	
	Week 7	Peer Review Session	Harman, G. "The Inference to the Best Explanation"	Peer Review Session

		3/7	3/9	
Part 3: Skepticism	Week 8	Huemer, M. "Three Sceptical Arguments" and Pollack, J. "A Brain in a Vat"	Putnam, H. "Brains in a Vat"	First Paper Due March 7
		3/14	3/16	
	Week 9	Spring Break; No Class		
		3/21	3/23	
	Week 10	Nozick, R. "Knowledge and Skepticism"	Course review/crib sheet	
		3/28	3/30	
Part 4: Standpoint Theory	Week 11	Pragmatic Encroachment + Contextualism <i>No Assigned Reading</i>	"Taking Subjectivity into Account" Lorraine Code + Basic Insights into Traditional Epistemology	Second paper assignment distributed
		4/4	4/6	
	Week 12	Fricker, M. "Epistemic Oppression and Epistemic Privilege"	Berenstain, N. "Epistemic Exploitation"	
		4/11	4/13	
	Week 13	Pohlhaus, G. "Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice"	Pohlhaus continued	Exam questions assigned
		4/18	4/20	

	Week 14	Peer Review Session	Haslanger, S. “Feminism and Metaphysics: Unmasking Hidden Ontologies”	Peer Review Session
		4/25	4/27	
	Week 15	Haslanger, S. “Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy: Not by Reason (Alone)”	Haslanger Continued	2 nd paper due April 25
		5/2	5/4	
	Week 16	Exam Review/ Course Wrap Up	Exam	Final Exam

Course Requirements

The final grade will be based on five components:

(1) Attendance and participation in class (5%)

- a. This is a discussion-based class and so a significant portion of your final grade will be based upon attendance and participation. Students are expected to attend all classes, to complete the assigned readings in advance, and to participate regularly in class discussion.
- b. Students are permitted one excused and one unexcused absence.

(2) Pop-Quizzes (5%)

- a. At the beginning of every week, I'll post under announcements 4-5 reading questions that you should be able to answer about the texts by the conclusion of lecture Thursday.
- b. You should use these questions to guide your reading.
- c. At random, you will have a quiz on Thursdays where I select 1-2 of the questions given at the beginning of the week for assessment.

(3) One short paper (4-5 pages, double-spaced, 12-point TNR font) (25%)

- a. To be submitted on Canvas before 11:59 PM on Tuesday, March 7.
- b. Possible topics will be made available online.
- c. Before the submission deadline, a class meeting will be dedicated to peer reviewing your most recent drafts. This draft will not be graded; however, attendance at this session is mandatory for all students. You must bring a completed draft (including your references page) to this session.
- d. The peer-review session will take place Tuesday, February 28.

(4) A longer paper (6-7 pages, double-spaced, 12 point TNR font) (30%)

- a. To be submitted on Canvas by 11:59 PM on Tuesday, April 25. The formatting requirements are the same as for the first paper.
- b. The peer-review session will take place Tuesday, April 18.

(5) One 90-minute in-class (closed book) writing exercise (35%)

- a. Conducted in class on Thursday, May 4. Bring your own bluebook.
- b. The exam will consist of five essays questions, of which you must answer three. These five questions will be selected from a pool of seven questions that I will distribute in class three weeks prior to the exam.

Course Policies

Policy on late papers

Any paper handed in after **the start of the class** when it is due will be penalized a third of a letter. An additional third will be docked every 24 hours after that.

Medical excuses for late work require written notice from your doctor to avoid penalty.

Discussion

Philosophy classrooms are places where just about any topic can come up. We grapple with some difficult ideas, not just in terms of their complexity, but also in terms of their emotional impact. Because such conversations can be difficult, I do my best to model the kind of participation I'd like to see from students: a charitable, careful, and attentive approach.

First, being "**charitable**" means interpreting other people's words in the best possible light. This is how one ought to engage philosophical texts and other students: assume that people are trying to make sense and communicate something important. Second, being "**careful**" means paying attention to your word choice and claims; when presenting claims, backing them up with evidence; avoiding sweeping generalizations; and talking about your own experience and views rather than making assumptions about other people's. Finally, being "**attentive**" means listening to what it is that people are saying and actively repeating/summarizing before going on to make a critical point or disagree.

Communication

Important announcements and assignments will be communicated to you via email, on Canvas, or in class. It is your responsibility to make sure you are up to date with the latest news. You are welcome to email me with any questions you have. However, please keep in mind that:

- a. I do not respond to emails after 9 PM, or after 5 PM the day before a test or a paper is due.
- b. Expect a delayed response to emails sent after 5 PM on Friday and before 8 AM on Monday.
- c. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, I do not answer questions that are clearly answered on the syllabus, in announcements that have been made in class, or in an assignment.

Electronic Etiquette

Phones, tablets, laptops and other electronics are not allowed in class. Numerous studies show that students learn better without using laptops in class, even if the laptops are used exclusively for notetaking.¹ Laptops and other electronics can also be distracting for other students. If you have a disability that makes it difficult for you to take notes by hand, please let me know and I will find a note-taker for you.

Useful offices on campus

Philosophy Undergrad Advisor: scs@austin.utexas.edu

Center for Teaching & Learning: <http://ctl.utexas.edu/>

Undergraduate Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

Counseling & Mental Health: <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

Division of Student Affairs: <http://www.utexas.edu/students/>

¹ <http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/the-case-for-banning-laptops-in-the-classroom>

University Policies

Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty

Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Student Judicial Services web site: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs>.

Plagiarism

If you use words or ideas that are not your own you must cite your sources. Otherwise you will be guilty of plagiarism. To learn more go to the following URL: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis_plagiarism.php.

Religious Holidays

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Students with Disabilities

Any student with a documented disability (physical or cognitive) who requires academic accommodations, should contact the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students at 512-471-6259 (voice) or 512-471-4641 (TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing), as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations.