

Syllabus  
Phil412 – Epistemology  
Spring 2018  
Instructor: Laura Callahan  
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Tuesdays and Fridays, 11:30-12:50  
Murray Hall 113

### Setting expectations: two important facts about this course

This is an *upper-level* course, in *analytic, non-logic philosophy*.

First, because this is an upper-level course, I will be expecting you to demonstrate truly advanced critical thinking and writing skills. The readings for this course are in no way dumbed-down or simplified; they are the very things that professional philosophers read in doing their research. I will expect that you are willing to put in time and effort to try to understand them and also think critically about them. And I will be asking you to demonstrate all this critical thinking via not only your class participation but also a good deal of *writing*. You will be expected to write two 250-word summaries most weeks, covering each of the two reading assignments for that week. You will be expected to write professional commentary on each other's work. In addition, you will need to write two papers offering original philosophical arguments: one shorter paper about 3,000 words long and one paper about 5,000 words. In total, 90% of your grade for this course will be based on these different writing assignments. (These will take the place of a traditional final and midterm.)

Second, because this is a non-logic course in analytic philosophy, it may seem quite different than almost all the other courses you've taken so far (unless, of course, you have already taken many such courses). On the one hand, there will not be a lot of "right answers." The issues we're going to be talking about are controversial, and philosophers differ amongst themselves as to what to think about them. You are going to have a lot of freedom, in class and in writing your papers, to come up with and defend your own views about epistemological issues. You should feel free to disagree with the authors we read, with myself, and with your classmates. On the other hand, this is not a course in which "anything goes," in the sense that all you have to do is give your opinions about things. Whenever you give an opinion in this course, you should expect also to have to defend that opinion. You will be assessed, in your writing and in various class participation activities, on the basis of how well and carefully you defend the positions you take – whatever those positions are. You should expect other people in the class – including me – to disagree with you and forcefully challenge your ideas.

### Ground rules

Sharp, critical argumentation and disagreement are essential to philosophy and philosophical progress. Aggressive behavior, on the other hand, is only detrimental to our collective philosophical project and will not be tolerated. I take my responsibility to ensure that everyone in the class can participate very seriously. I will tolerate no:

- Speaking over others or raising of one's voice;
- Attacks on persons (e.g., "You're nuts! You think xyz? How could you think that?") as opposed to attacks on positions (e.g., "But xyz can't be right, because pqrs...")

We will talk more about ground rules on the first day of class, and you will have the opportunity to write additional ground rules you would like to abide by as a group.

### Material to be covered

Most generally: this class will be concerned with *knowledge* and with *what to think* about things. These are arguably the two central topics in epistemology. Our readings will lead us through the following four questions, in order:

- *What, if anything, do we know?* Here we will start with the father of contemporary epistemology: Descartes. We will look at skeptical arguments in general and the possibilities for refutations of skeptical arguments.
- *What is knowledge, anyway?* Notice that some of the ways of “rescuing” knowledge from the skeptic involve conceiving of knowledge as requiring something less – and more achievable – than we might have thought knowledge required. Here we will examine different ways of thinking about what knowledge requires. We will consider the justified-true-belief account of knowledge, in light of an important wrinkle – the “Gettier case”, then compare currently held theories about what knowledge is: foundationalist, coherentist, virtue-theoretical, and knowledge-first.
- *Why does knowledge matter?* Once we have a handle on what knowledge requires, we might face the following puzzle: before we start doing epistemology, it seems intuitively that knowledge is a good thing, but it’s not clear that knowledge as *philosophers* think about it is such a good thing, or that it’s even the kind of thing we should be trying to get. We’ll hear from authors who are skeptical of the importance of knowledge as well as authors who think even philosophers can see knowledge as valuable, if they just think of it the right way.
- *How, then, should we go about forming opinions or thinking about things?* The final part of the course will allow us to ask questions not exactly about knowledge, but about forming opinions or views more broadly. We will talk about rationality and degrees of belief or confidence in addition to outright beliefs and knowledge. We will also talk about disagreement, taking others’ word, and understanding.

### Weekly rhythm

There will be reading for each class. You will usually be expected to turn in a ~250 word summary of each reading assignment via Sakai by the time class starts, on the day it is to be discussed. (When there are two readings assigned for a single class, you just need to summarize both readings together for a total of ~250 words.)

On a few days, instead of writing a summary of the reading, I will ask you to do work to prepare for turning in your papers for the class. You will have a partner for working on each of your papers. You may either choose your own partners or request that I assign them – we’ll decide together as a class. You will have to send this partner (and me) an outline and/or an early draft for your paper. You’ll then have to write comments on the other person’s outline/draft and send them to your partner (and me). (This will help you with your papers, and it will also give you practice commenting on others’ work, which is one of the central tasks of a philosopher.) Your outlines/drafts and comments will count toward your “other writing and participation” score, along with your summaries.

Class itself will differ from week to week. There will be a combination of powerpoint lectures (from me), whole-group discussion, team-based discussion, team quizzes, partner workshopping of papers, and team presentations. You will be assigned to a team randomly on the first day of class. You will not need to do anything in teams outside of class. But during class I may ask your team, e.g., to work up a presentation defending or attacking some view discussed in our reading for the week.

I will also administer six surprise quizzes throughout the semester, which you will take together in your teams. These quizzes will be based solely on the reading for the day. I will take the four highest quiz scores for your team, to assign each of you individually a quiz grade, which will be worth 10% of your grade for the class.

The rest of the work for the class will be writing papers. You will be asked to write one -3,000-word paper and one -5,000-word paper. I will give you suggestions for topics or questions you might want to write on, but you should also feel free to write on other questions that come up in our reading or in class. I will be happy to talk with you about your papers, and I will be happy to look at outlines and rough drafts if you would like additional feedback prior to handing in your papers. The 5,000-word “final” paper will be due on the last day of finals week, so in many ways this paper will take the place of a traditional final exam.

### Academic Integrity

You are expected to be familiar and to comply with the university’s academic integrity policy, available at: [https://slwordpress.rutgers.edu/academicintegrity/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2014/11/AI\\_Policy\\_2013.pdf](https://slwordpress.rutgers.edu/academicintegrity/wp-content/uploads/sites/41/2014/11/AI_Policy_2013.pdf).

Especially important for this course: you may not *plagiarize*. The above-linked university policy defines plagiarism as “the use of another person’s words, ideas, or results without giving that person appropriate credit.” The university policy continues: “To avoid plagiarism, every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or appropriate indentation and both direct quotation and paraphrasing must be cited properly according to the accepted format for the particular discipline or as required by the instructor in a course. Some common examples of plagiarism are:

- Copying word for word (i.e. quoting directly) from an oral, printed, or electronic source without proper attribution.
- Paraphrasing without proper attribution, i.e., presenting in one’s own words another person’s written words or ideas as if they were one’s own.
- Submitting a purchased or downloaded term paper or other materials to satisfy a course requirement.
- Incorporating into one’s work graphs, drawings, photographs, diagrams, tables, spreadsheets, computer programs, or other nontextual material from other sources without proper attribution.

I will be on guard for any such infractions (including, e.g., using Turnitin), and I am duty-bound to report all infractions of this policy to the university. Depending on the nature and severity of the infraction, you may be given 0 credit for a paper, and you may even receive an automatic failing grade for the course.

### Format for papers and summaries

All your written work for the class should be (i) in a legible font and size (such as, e.g., Times New Roman or Arial, 12pt), (ii) double-spaced, and (iii) submitted electronically, via Sakai.

You do not need to cite the papers you are summarizing, in your short summaries. But you should use some standard format (such as MLA, or APA) for in-text citations and for your bibliography on both of the long papers for this course. Failure to appropriately cite your sources is a violation of academic integrity – see above.

The word lengths are all approximate guides. You do not need to write exactly 250 words for a summary, or 3,000 or 5,000 words for a paper. You will need special permission from me if your papers will fall outside the following ranges:

2,000-3,500 words (for the shorter paper)

4,000-5,500 words (for the longer paper)

### Absence and Late Policy

Acceptable reasons for missing class or turning in assignments late include illness, mental health issues, family emergencies, etc. If you are going to miss class, please e-mail me beforehand and explain why you are missing. (For illness, I may request a doctor's note.) Similarly, if you are going to turn in a paper late, please e-mail me and explain. **\*\*NB: I will *not*, under any but extreme circumstances, except late *final* papers.\*\*** I will not take isolated individual absences into account in calculating the team quiz scores. But if you miss class regularly and do not contribute to your team's quiz-taking, I reserve the right to take away your individual quiz points.

### Readings

I have attempted to select readings that vary rather widely, to give you some sense of the range of different styles that are to be found in epistemology. You will read authors from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries; you will read authors thinking about different questions in different traditions; and you will read authors who differ in, e.g., nationality and sex.

Most readings will be available in electronic format on our Sakai site. But there is one book you need to purchase:

Zagzebski, Linda (2009) *On Epistemology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

This book should be available through the bookstore and is also available through Amazon (currently \$13.52 for a paperback, or \$16.99-\$19.99 as an e-textbook, depending on whether you rent or buy).

### Grades

Your grade for the course will be determined as follows:

10% - Team quiz grade

25% - 3,000-word paper

30% - Other writing and participation

35% - Final (5,000-word) paper

The following grades are available to earn: A ( $\geq 91\%$ ), B+ ( $\geq 88\%$ ,  $< 91\%$ ), B ( $\geq 81\%$ ,  $< 88\%$ ), C+ ( $\geq 78\%$ ,  $< 81\%$ ), C ( $\geq 70\%$ ,  $< 78\%$ ), D ( $\geq 60\%$ ,  $< 70\%$ ), F ( $< 60\%$ ).

### Instructor availability

My regular office hours will be Fridays 1:30-3:30. My office is in the philosophy department, at the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of 106 Somerset St. When you enter the floor, walk around to the right. My office is on your right, just past the mailboxes.

I will also be available to you via e-mail at [l.callahan@rutgers.edu](mailto:l.callahan@rutgers.edu). I expect you to reach out whenever you have a question. I am very happy to set up additional on campus in-person, Skype, or phone meetings on an individual basis.

**However, note that I do not regularly check e-mail between the hours of 8:00pm and 6:00am.** So – if you wait until the night a paper is due to finish it, and you find you have a question, do not expect that I will be able to answer you.

### Tentative schedule

This schedule and pace are subject to change, depending on class interests and the perceived difficulty of various parts of the material.

Weeks starts	Week	Broad topic	Day	Narrow topic	Reading	Work due
16-Jan	1	Introduction	Tuesday		Zagzebski introduction (pp. 1-9)	
		What do we know?	Friday	Descartes & skepticism	Descartes Meditation I	Summary 1
22-Jan	2	What do we know?	Tuesday	Descartes & skepticism	Descartes Meditation II	Summary 2
			Friday	Descartes & skepticism	Rinard - Reasoning One's Way Out of Skepticism	Summary 3
29-Jan	3	What do we know?	Tuesday	Varieties of skepticism and responses	Zagzebski Chapter 2: pp. 25-38	Summary 4
			Friday	Skepticism, knowledge, and justification	Zagzebski Chapter 2: pp. 38-54	Summary 5
5-Feb	4	What is knowledge?	Tuesday	Gettier & JTB theory	Gettier - "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"	Summary 6
			Friday	Gettier & JTB theory	Zagzebski Chapter 5,	Summary 7

					Sections I and III	
12-Feb	5	What is knowledge?	Tuesday	Internalism and Externalism about justification	Bonjour - "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge"	Summary 8
			Friday	Knowledge First Epistemology	Williamson - "Knowledge First Epistemology"	Summary 9
19-Feb	6	What is knowledge?	Tuesday	Coherentism vs. Foundationalism	Huemer - "Foundations and Coherence"	Summary 10
			Friday	NO CLASS - summaries still due by 11:30	Sosa - "The Raft and the Pyramid"	Summary 11
26-Feb	7	What is knowledge?	Tuesday	Coherentism vs. Foundationalism and virtue theories	Battaly - "Virtue Epistemology"	Outline/draft 1 due to partner
			Friday	Discussing paper outlines/drafts and comments		Comments 1
5-Mar	8	Why does knowledge matter?	Tuesday	The value problem	Zagzebski Chapter 5, Sections II and IV; Pritchard - "The Value of Knowledge," sections 1 and 2	
			Friday	The value problem and credit/virtue solutions	Pritchard - "The Value of Knowledge," sections 3-7	Paper 1 due, midnight
12-Mar	Spring break					
19-Mar	9	Why does knowledge matter?	Tuesday	The value problem, contd.	Hyman - "The Road to Larissa"; Craig	Summary 12
			Friday	Rejecting the value problem	Kaplan - "It's Not What You Know That Counts"	Summary 13

26-Mar	10	What, then, should good epistemic agents do?	Tuesday	Bayesianism and rationality	Foley - "The Epistemology of Belief and the Epistemology of Degrees of Belief," sections I-III	Summary 14
			Friday	Bayesianism and rationality	Foley - "The Epistemology of Belief and the Epistemology of Degrees of Belief," sections IV and V	Summary 15
2-Apr	11	What, then, should good epistemic agents do?	Tuesday	Disagreement	Feldman - "Reasonable Religious Disagreements"	Summary 16
			Friday	Disagreement	Kelly - "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement"	Summary 17
9-Apr	12	What, then, should good epistemic agents do?	Tuesday	Taking others' word: testimony	Lackey, "Testimonial Knowledge"	Summary 18
			Friday	Taking others' word: trust	Hieronymi, "Reasons of Trust"	Summary 19
16-Apr	13	What, then, should good epistemic agents do?	Tuesday	Evidentialism and pragmatism	James - "The Will to Believe," sections I and VII-X	Summary 20
			Friday	Beyond knowledge: understanding	Grimm - The Value of Understanding	Summary 21
23-Apr	14	What, then, should good epistemic agents do?	Tuesday	Understanding and variety across domains	Zagzebski Chapter 6	Outline/draft 2 due to partner
			Friday	Discussing paper outlines/drafts and comments		Comments 2
30-Apr	15	Regular classes end; Final paper (~5,000 words) due at noon on Wednesday, May 9				

7-May	16	
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