

PHILOSOPHY 412: Epistemology

Location: Scott Hall 115

Time: 1:10-2:30 MW

Course Number: 0115976

Instructor: Dr. Matthew McGrath

Office: 541 Gateway Transit Building

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Prerequisites: 01:730:201 and two additional courses in philosophy.

Description:

This course examines the main topics of epistemology, the nature, scope and structure of knowledge and of epistemic justification. We will discuss in detail leading theories of epistemic justification, including “internalist” theories, which require for justified belief the availability to the believer of reasons or grounds, and “externalist” theories, which take justified belief to be linked closely to the ability to arrive at true beliefs. We will also examine several issues much discussed in recent epistemology, including, (i), the nature of epistemic norms – what does it mean to say you *ought* to believe something? Is this *ought* explainable in terms of goals, or values, and if so, which goals or values? (ii) the debate over whether knowing how to do something (e.g. riding a bike) is reducible to knowing facts, and (iii), questions about how one can be treated unjustly in a distinctively epistemic way – if one’s testimony is disbelieved purely because of bias or prejudice, is one being harmed in one’s capacity as a knower?

Core Curriculum Goal:

- Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.

Learning goals:

- Gain an understanding not only of the basic issues in epistemology but of several issues much discussed in contemporary epistemology, and apply this understanding to ordinary experience.
- Gain familiarity with and practice in the art of philosophical argumentation, orally and in writing.
- Practice close reading of philosophical texts, aiming at distilling the main conclusions and lines of argument.
- Enhance skill in philosophical writing, both expository (explaining one or more authors’ positions and arguments) and argumentative (presenting one’s own position and supplying argument for it).

Reading Material for the Course: M. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice* (OUP), available at the Rutgers Bookstore. Other readings will be provided.

Work for the Course:

Two Short Assignments: 2p 5% each.

Papers: Paper #1 (3-5p) 20%, Paper #2 (6-8p) 30%

Midterm: 20%

Quiz: 10%

Attendance and Participation: 10%.

Policies:

1. Use of electronic devices is strongly discouraged. You may not use cell phones or tablets in class. You may use laptops only for course-related purposes. If you are distracting those around you, you will have one warning. After this, you will be asked not to bring a laptop to class.

2. Be courteous and respectful to other student and to the professor. I encourage discussion but only constructive discussion. We want all students to feel welcome to contribute.

3. If you will miss a test and have an approved excuse (with relevant proof), please let me know in advance.

4. I will grant extensions on papers and assignments only for university approved excuses (with relevant proof) and only when the request is made at least one day before the paper or assignment is due.

5. Late papers and assignments.

- two thirds of a letter grade value will be subtracted for each day late, up to a C after three days.

- However, you may turn your paper or assignment at any time even after seven days (up to the end of the semester) and be eligible to receive a grade up to a D+ (which is much better than a 0).

6. Writing assignments and papers: use 1" margins all around and double-spaced 12 point font. Do not use an excessively large font.

7. Students with disabilities, please get in touch with me the first week of class to discuss your accommodations. (See syllabus statement.)

8. Do not make plans to miss class during the week before spring break. Sorry, but I will not accommodate your travel plans.

9. Plagiarism issues. Fully cite all sources you use. Do not paraphrase sources, except when the information is common factual information (such as names, dates). Do not show your paper to other students in the class. You are welcome to discuss the issues with them, of course. Please see my syllabus statement on Turnitin.

Tentative Schedule of Readings

Wk 1: W 1/23: introduction, Gettier problem.

Reading: Gettier, "Is Knowledge Justified True Belief?"

Part 1: *Epistemic justification*

Wk 2: 1/28-1/30: Evidentialism or Pragmatism? Clifford vs. James

Readings: Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," and James, "The Will To Believe"

Wk 3: 2/4-2/6: New Pragmatism: Rinard

Reading: Rinard, "Equal Treatment for Belief"

Assignment #1 due Friday 2/8

Wk 4: 2/11-2/13: Reliabilism.

Reading: Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?"

Wk 5: 2/18-2/20: Evidentialism

Reading: Conee and Feldman, "Evidentialism," "Internalism Defended"

Paper #1 due Sunday 2/24

Wk 6: 2/25-2/17: Epistemic consequentialism

Reading: Berker, Goldman

Wk 7: 3/4-3/6: Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Value

Readings: Sosa, McGrath

Wk 8: 3/11: Review for Midterm

3/13: Midterm

Spring break

Part 2: *Knowledge*

Wk 9: 3/25-3/27: Knowledge and the Possibility of Error

Reading: Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge"

Recommended reading: Cohen, "Contextualist Solutions to Epistemological Problems."

Wk 10: 4/1-4/3: Knowledge and Assertion

Reading: Williamson, "Knowing and Asserting."

Wks 11-12: 4/8-4/10, 4/15-4/17: Knowing How vs. Knowing That.

Readings: Ryle, ch. 2 of *The Concept of Mind*; Hawley, "Success and Knowing How," and Stanley and Williamson, "Knowing How"

4/15: Quiz, covering material from weeks 9-11

Part 3: *Epistemic Injustice*

Wk 13-14: 4/22-4/24, 4/29-5/1: M. Fricker

Reading: Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*; and TBA.

4/26: Short Assignment #2

Wk 15: 5/6: Peer Review of papers.

Disability Statement: Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.

Statement as a Responsible Employee: Rutgers faculty are committed to helping create a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. Rutgers has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The University strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the University. Please be aware that all Rutgers employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as advocates, counselors, clergy and healthcare providers as listed in Appendix A to [Policy 10.3.12](#)) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the University. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence, or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the University's Title IX Coordinator. If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can find a list of resources in Appendix A to University Policy 10.3.12. For more information about your options at Rutgers, please visit endsexualviolence.rutgers.edu

Turnitin: Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com (directly or via learning management system, i.e. Sakai, Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle) for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Students who do not agree should contact the course instructor immediately.

