

Phil 4311: Theories of Knowledge
Fall 2019, University of Texas, El Paso
Class Meets: M, W 12:00—1:20 p.m., Miners Hall 201

Contact Information

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Office: Worrell 202
Office Hrs: T 12:00–2:00 p.m.,
& by appointment.

Course Description

Epistemology is the subdiscipline of philosophy concerned with knowledge (episteme). The field is of particular importance because it touches on issues of both practical and theoretical interest: What is knowledge? How is knowledge possible? Why care about knowledge? In this class, we will pursue these topics with an eye toward a larger issue – the nature of understanding (noetology, from noesis).

Required Materials

Required Texts

- Zagzebski, Linda. 2009. *On Epistemology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth
- Neta & Pritchard (Eds.). 2009. *Arguing About Knowledge*. NY: Routledge
- A course packet available electronically on Blackboard.

Optional

- *A good stiff cup of java!*

Course Objectives

- To develop a critical understanding of Epistemology.
- To develop an ability to clearly express and defend not only your own opinions on these matters, but also the views and arguments of those with whom you disagree.

Requirements and Expectations

This course is an upper division philosophy course. Students will be expected to have academic skills commensurate with its level including: the ability to read complex primary source material, the ability to write clear, well-constructed essays, and the ability to engage in articulate and respectful discourse. In addition, I expect all students to be prepared and attentive in class. This means coming to class having done reading assignments and having thought about their significance, and while in class being an active listener and contributor. Although I will not take attendance, I do expect you attend every class meeting. You are responsible for all material and announcements made in class, whether you are present or not. No late assignments will be allowed without a University excuse.

PLEASE NOTE: If you have or suspect you have a physical, learning, or psychological disability and require accommodations, please contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services located in the Union Bldg East, room 106 (747-5148).

Evaluation:

- **Five Short Critical Papers (10% of total grade each):** You will write one 2-3 page expository-cum-critical paper for each section. Papers will be due two weeks from the completion of the section material except the final paper, which will be due on the final day of classes.
- **Midterm and Final Exams (20% of total grade):** In class short answer exams.
- **Participation (10% of total grade):** I will keep a weekly list of class participation by students. Students are expected to contribute one substantive point or question (as judged by me) each week. There are 15 weeks of content for the class, but you will only need 13 participation points for full credit.

The grading scale for this class is given below:

A	B	C	D	F
>89.5%	>79.5%	>69.5%	>59.5%	≤59.5%

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a concern for everyone. By joining the UTEP community every student agrees to abide by the Scholastic Dishonesty Policy. Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable to another person.

Cheating

- Copying from the test paper of another student
- Communicating with another student during a test
- Giving or seeking aid from another student during a test
- Possession and/or use of unauthorized materials during tests (i.e. Crib notes, class notes, books, etc)
- Substituting for another person to take a test
- Falsifying research data, reports, academic work offered for credit

Plagiarism

- Using someone's work in your assignments without the proper citations
- Submitting the same paper or assignment from a different course, without direct permission of instructors

Collusion

- Unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments

Class Schedule: The following is a detailed schedule of classes. The schedule, however, is flexible. I will freely amend it as time, interest and comprehension dictate.

OE = *On Epistemology*

AK = *Arguing About Knowledge*

CP = Course Packet.

M Aug. 26 Introduction

1: Epistemic Value & What We Care About

- W Aug. 28 Caring and Epistemic Demands
 > **OE**, pp. 1-13
- M Sept. 02 **Labor Day. No Classes**
- W Sept. 04 Caring and Social Context: Lying and Bullshit
 > **OE**, pp. 13-19
 > **AK**, Clifford, "The ethics of belief"
- M Sept. 09 Caring and Social Context: Lying and Bullshit
 > **OE**, pp. 19-22
 > **CP**, Frankfurt, "On bullshit"
- W Sept. 11 Discussion on Writing a Philosophy Paper

2: Skepticism

- M Sept. 16 Pyrrhonism and the Epistemic Regress Argument
 > **OE**, pp. 25-31
- W Sept. 18 Coherentism, and Infitism
 > **OE**, pp. 32-38
 > **AK**, Klein, "Human knowledge and the infinite regress of reasons"
- M Sept. 23 Foundationalism
 > **AK**, Sosa, "The raft and the pyramid"
 > **AK**, Bonjour, "Toward a defense of empirical foundationalism"
- W Sept. 25 Cartesian Skepticism [**First Essay Due**]
 > **OE**, pp 38-44
 > **AK**, Descartes, *Meditation I*
- M Sept. 30 Responses I: Anti-Closure
 > **OE**, pp. 44-46
 > **AK**, Moore, "Certainty"
- W Oct. 02 Responses II: Externalism/Reliabilism
 > **OE**, pp. 46-49
 > **AK**, Goldman, "What is justified belief?"
 > **CP**, Foley, "What's wrong with reliabilism"
- M Oct. 07 Responses III: Contextualism
 > **OE**, pp. 50-54
 > **AK**, Lewis, "Elusive knowledge"
- W Oct. 09
 > **OE**, pp. 55-64
 > **AK**, Bouwsma, "Descartes's evil genius"

- M Oct. 14 Review
 W Oct. 16 Midterm

3: Trust and the Intellectual Virtues

- M Oct. 21 Self-Trust
 > **OE**, pp. 71-87
 W Oct. 23 Trust in Others
 > **OE**, pp. 87-97
 M Oct. 28 Reasonable Disagreement
 > **OE**, pp. 97-102
 > **CP**, Moffett, “Reasonable disagreement and rational group inquiry”

4: What Is Knowledge?

- W Oct. 30 The Value Problem [**Second Essay Due**]
 > **OE**, pp. 105-114
 > **AK**, Plato, excerpt *Meno*
 > **AK**, Kvanvig, excerpt *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*
 M Nov. 04 The Gettier Problem
 > **OE**, pp. 114-124
 > **AK**, Ayer, “The problem of knowledge”
 > **AK**, Gettier, “Is knowledge justified, true belief?”
 W Nov. 06 Credences
 > **AK**, Kaplan, “Decision theory as philosophy”
 > **AK**, Elga, “Self-locating belief and the Sleeping Beauty Problem”
 M Nov. 11 Credit Theories of Knowledge [**Third Essay Due**]
 > **OE**, pp. 124-129
 > **CP**, Lackey, “Knowledge and credit”

5: Epistemic Good and the Good Life

- W Nov. 13 The Desirability of Truth
 > **OE**, pp. 131-141
 M Nov. 18 Understanding
 > **OE**, 141-149
 W Nov. 20 Understanding, Cont’d
 > **CP**, Bengson and Moffett, “Conceptions, understanding and wisdom”
 M Nov. 25 The Good Life [**Fourth Essay Due**]
 > **OE**, pp. 149-152
 W Nov. 27 Catch-Up
 M Dec. 02 Catch-Up
 W Dec. 04 Review [**Fifth Essay Due**]
 F Dec. 13 Final Exam – 1:00-2:20 p.m.