

PHIL 240 Introduction to Epistemology (section 001) Winter Term I (Fall 2017) Syllabus

Lecture: Mondays and Wednesdays from 9: a.m. – 10:00 a.m. in Iona 301

Discussion Sections: (you *must* register in one of these)

L01 Friday 13:00-14:00 in Math 202 L02 Thursday 13:00-14:00 in Buch D313 L03 Friday 11:00-12:00 in Buch D213
L04 Friday 14:00-15:00 in Math 202 L05 Thursday 12:00-13:00 in Buch B306

Professor: Chris Stephens

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Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. or by apmt.

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Connect Course Site: <http://elearning.ubc.ca/connect/>

Teaching Assistants: TBD

Course Description

Phil 240 is an introduction to philosophical issues about the nature of knowledge and evidence (epistemology). In our everyday lives, we often claim that we know or have good reasons to believe many things – that Vancouver is near the Pacific Ocean, that $2 + 2 = 4$, that Orcas are mammals, that the sun will rise tomorrow, and so on. But what is it that distinguishes knowledge from mere opinion? There is a long history of attempts to describe what it is that all cases of knowledge have in common. We will spend some time examining this history, with an eye to figuring out what knowledge is, and how we might go about obtaining it.

In addition to thinking about what knowledge is, we will also worry about whether (or to what extent) we have knowledge. Philosophical skeptics doubt or deny that we have knowledge or justification of various sorts. Some deny that we know anything at all, while other skeptics maintain that you don't have *very much* knowledge. We will spend a lot of time thinking about arguments for and against various kinds of philosophical skepticism. How can you tell that you're not dreaming as you read this, or that you're not currently in a Matrix? Are our beliefs about the future justified? How?

We will also spend some time doing applied epistemology. Epistemological issues arise in a number of areas of philosophy. We'll examine some of these, including design arguments for the existence of God. We'll think about cases where *ignorance* seems to help one make *better* decisions. We'll also look at the relationship between psychology and epistemology. Finally, we'll think about some epistemological issues about the nature of democracy. In what sense might diversity within a group help the group come to better epistemic decisions?

This course aims to provide the student with an introduction to various epistemological concepts (knowledge, justification, evidence, skepticism, rationality, etc.) and theories about the nature of knowledge. Although we will examine works by historically important figures such as Plato, Descartes and Hume, the primary focus of this course will be on assessing philosophical arguments and theories for their correctness.

The course also aims to help you develop your critical thinking and writing skills. Besides being a subject, philosophy is also a way of thinking, of asking questions and evaluating the answers to them. In examining your views about epistemological issues, it is important to develop and refine your ability to ask questions and critically examine the arguments offered by various thinkers. Because reasons (arguments) are offered for positions in nearly every subject, the rewards that you may reap from cultivating critical thinking and writing skills extend far beyond the scope of this course.

Texts Note: The University Bookstore has copies of the two books and the Coursepacket listed below. The rest of the readings are (or will be) available on-line (check the UBC Connect site). Please purchase the books ASAP in case more copies are needed.

(1) Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge: a very short introduction*, Oxford University Press.

(2) Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, Hackett Publishing Co.

(3) UBC Bookstore *Coursepacket* that includes

1. *Labyrinths of Reason*, by William Poundstone. Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1988. p. 3-15.
2. "Dream or Reality?" from *5000 B. C. and other Philosophical Fantasies*, by Raymond Smullyan. St. Martin's Press, New York. 1983. p. 125-141.
3. "Can I know that I am not dreaming?" by David and Jean Beer Blumenfeld, in *Descartes: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, ed. By Michael Hooker. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978. p. 234-255.
4. *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge, 2nd edition*, by John L. Pollock and Joseph Cruz. Rowan and Littlefield, 1999. p. 2-7.
5. "On Induction" from *The Problems of Philosophy*, by Bertrand Russell. Oxford University Press, 1997. p. 60-69.
6. *Choice & Chance: an introduction to inductive logic, 3rd edition*, by Brian Skyrms. Wadsworth Publishing Co. 1986. p. 30-46.
7. *Skepticism & Naturalism: some varieties*, by P.F. Strawson. Columbia University Press; New York, 1985. p. 10-29.

8. "The Recognition Heuristic: how ignorance makes us smart," from *Simple Heuristics that Make Us Smart* by Gerd Gigerenzer, Peter Todd and the ABC Research Group. Oxford University Press, 1999. p. 37-58.
9. "Relativism, Rationalism and the Sociology of Knowledge," by Barry Barnes and David Bloor, from *Rationality and Relativism*, ed. By Martin Hollis and Steven Lukes. The MIT Press, 1982. p. 21-47.

Course Requirements and Marking Formula

(1) Best 10 out of 11 Group Exercises (1% each)	10%
(2) 2 (4-5 page double-spaced) Papers (25% each)	50%
(3) Final Exam	40%

Marking Scale

90-100% A+	85-89% A	80-84% A-
76-79% B+	72-75% B	68-71% B-
64-67% C+	60-63% C	55-59% C-
50-54% D	0-49% F	

Each of these course requirements is explained below.

Group Exercises

In your discussion sections you will regularly break into small groups and each group will complete an exercise. Each member of a given group (who is present) will receive the same mark on the assignment. Your best 10 (out of 11) group exercises count toward your final group exercise grade. Your final group exercise grade can be affected by the performance evaluations of the other members of your group. Note: *Your discussion sections the first week are cancelled.* Also, please bring a copy of the relevant week's readings to your discussion section. On some weeks your group exercise will consist of peer reviewing one another's papers.

Papers

Each student is required to write two papers (approximately 1,500 words each). The topics for the first paper will be posted the first week of the course (on the Connect site). In addition to my suggestions, please read the relevant parts of *A Rulebook for Arguments* for tips on how to write a good paper. Note that rough drafts of the first paper are due in your discussion section on Sept. 28th or 29th (depending on the day of your discussion section.) You should bring *three* copies of your draft to your discussion section. Although the drafts are not graded per se, *failure to turn in a draft for any of the papers will result in a 10% deduction from the mark you receive on the final version of that paper.* I will pass out information on the second paper topics (and post them on the Connect site) by Oct. 16th (the day the first papers are due). Late papers are marked down 5% per day late. Since papers are due *in class*, emailing me the paper on the afternoon or evening of the day it is due counts as one day late. Sliding it under my office door just after lecture: one day late.

Final Exam

Each student is required to take the final examination. The final exam is designed to test your comprehension of the material that has been covered in class and in the readings. It will likely consist of a combination of short answer and essay questions. I will hand out a review sheet at least a week before the last week of classes.

Attendance and Make up Policy

There is no official requirement that you attend lectures. However, it is difficult to do well unless you attend regularly. If you do miss class, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed. Please contact another student, me, or your TA. Although I will post the overhead slides that I use in lecture, these are not a substitute for taking notes. On some days I won't use any slides at all, and on some days, important information will be discussed or written on the board that is not on any slides. Remember also that the group exercises take place in your discussion sections, so if you miss discussion section you run the risk of missing a group activity. If you miss a group activity and you do not have a University-sanctioned excuse, you will receive a "0" for that assignment.

In general, I expect students to be consistently well prepared for class by having read (and thought about) the material. These readings are not to be passively consumed - I welcome (and expect) questions and challenges in class. I also hope that students will drop by my office frequently to discuss what we're doing or just to say "hello" and let me know how the course is going. If you are unable to come to my office hours, please feel free to set up an appointment. You are also encouraged to discuss any problems you may have with the teaching of the course.

Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact me personally as soon as possible so we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and to facilitate your educational opportunities.

Finally, please note that cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses and will result in an "F" for the course. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic misconduct, please check with me or the University guidelines.

Schedule of Readings, Subjects, and Assignments (subject to possible change)

RB (*A Rulebook for Arguments*; Weston) **CP** (*Course Packet*)

OL (On line at : <http://elearning.ubc.ca/connect/>) **K** (*Knowledge: a very short introduction*; Nagel)

Week	Lecture Dates	Subject & Assignments	Readings
1	Sept 6	Intro: True opinion vs. Knowledge	NO DISCUSSION SECTIONS WEEK 1 RB Weston, ch. 1, II (<i>No discussion sections week 1</i>) K ch. 1 of Nagel's book.
<i>Note: No discussion sections week 1</i>			
2	Sept 11, 13	Relativism: Ancient & Contemporary	OL <i>Theaetetus</i> (excerpts) CP Barnes and Bloor; OL Carroll
3	Sept. 18, 20	Ancient Skepticism & Agrippa's Trilemma	OL Sextus Empiricus <i>Outlines of Pyrrhonism</i> (excerpts) K ch. 2 Nagel
4	Sept. 25, 27	Foundationalism	OL Descartes' <i>Meditations</i> esp. I, II & III K ch. 3 Nagel
Drafts of First Paper due in discussion section on Sept. 29th/30th – please bring three copies			
5	Oct. 2, 4	Skepticism - Dreaming	CP Poundstone; CP Blumenfelds
6	Oct. 11	Replies to Skepticism: common sense	OL Moore; OL Pollock
Note: No class Monday Oct. 9 th (<i>Thanksgiving Holiday</i>)			
7	Oct. 16, 18	Replies to skepticism: externalism Replies to skepticism: externalism	K , ch. 4, 5 Nagel; OL Nozick K ch. 7 Nagel
Final Version of First Paper Due Oct. 16th in class.			
8	Oct. 23, 25	Problem of Induction	OL Russell; OL van Cleve CP Skyrms; CP Strawson
9	Oct. 30, Nov. 1	Induction wrap up Probability & Epistemology Design Arguments	OL Paley's Natural Theology (excerpts) OL Sober "The Design Argument"
10	Nov. 6, 8	Design wrap up; Begin Pragmatism	OL Clifford "The ethics of belief" OL James "The will to believe"
Drafts of Second Paper due in discussion section on Nov. 9th or 10th – please bring two copies			
11	Nov. 13	Prudential vs. Evidential reasons	Pragmatism wrap up: no new readings.
Note: No class Wednesday, November 15 (Remembrance Day) but we still have discussion sections this week! Final Version of Second Paper due Nov. 17th or 18th (in discussion sections)			
12	Nov. 20, 22	Psychology & Epistemology Epistemic Intuitions	OL Nichols, Stich and Weinberg K ch. 8 Nagel CP Gigerenzer
13	Nov. 27, 29	Epistemology & Democracy	OL Anderson "Epistemology of Democracy"

Final Exam: Time and Date, TBA (between Dec 5.th and Dec. 20th) Please do not take this course if your travel plans will prohibit you from taking the final exam.