

Introduction to Epistemology

Instructor Information

Instructor

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Email

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Office Hours

WAG 319 | TBA

General Course Information

Course Place and Time

WAG 321

T/R 12:30-2:00pm

Course Description

In this course we will try to characterize knowledge and other related notions like truth, justification, belief, and confidence. What is knowledge? If I say that Sophia *knows* that Professor Plum killed Mr. Green, what kind of state am I attributing to Sophia? If I say that Jorge had an *unjustified* belief that the weather would be fair, what exactly am I saying about his belief? What does it take for a belief to be justified? We will also study various skeptical theses that claim we lack knowledge. Do we really know all the things that we think we know? Or might we be massively deceived? The course will start with an introduction to logic and argumentation. Alongside our study of these theories and debates we will take time to individually cultivate some virtue.

Course Objectives

- Find, clarify, and evaluate arguments
- Understand the major theories of knowledge and justification
- Reflect on and cultivate a virtuous character
- Interpret philosophical texts
- Write analytical and argumentative papers on philosophical themes
- Devise philosophical arguments in the context of group discussion and debate
- Experience the joys of philosophical wonder

Course Materials

Required Texts

- Feldman, R. *Epistemology*. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003).

Course Evaluation

Attendance: 5%
Participation: 5%
Logic Assignment: 5%
Virtue Project Part I and II: 10%

Paper #1: 20%
Paper #2: 25%
Paper #3: 30%

Grading Scheme

Percentage grades determine letter grades as follows:

<u>Letter</u>	<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Letter</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
A	100-93	C	77-73
A-	93-90	C-	73-70
B+	90-87	D+	70-67
B	87-83	D	67-63
B-	83-80	D-	63-60
C+	80-77	F	60-0

Attendance: 5%

You will get the most out of this class through consistent attendance! In order to motivate you to attend, you will only be allowed 3 absences without penalty. Each additional absence will incur a penalty of 2% off the final grade, up to 5% points.

Participation: 5%

You will get the most out of this class through consistent participation! The more participation there is, the more the whole class benefits. Your participation will be evaluated through in-class reading quizzes and in-class lecture quizzes. These quizzes will not be very hard, but will require attentive reading of the assignments and attentive participation in class. Your 6 lowest quiz grades will be dropped.

Virtue Project Part I: 5%

Reflect on your own character and some virtue that you would like to nurture in your own life. I suggest looking at the optional reading “Thirteen Virtues” by Benjamin Franklin for inspiration. The virtue you choose can be one that Franklin discusses but need not be. Inventiveness, charity, curiosity, generosity, intellectual humility, open-mindedness, intellectual resilience, hopefulness, empathy, patience, grit, honor, kindness, friendship, self-control, courage, and gratitude are some of many other virtues. Choose a virtue you are comfortable sharing about in a Virtue Journal (see Virtue Project Part II). Write 150-200 words (1) naming the virtue of your choice, (2) describing it in your own words, (3) describing a little about why you chose that virtue, and (4) describing some practice, method, or strategy that you will employ for 12 weeks this semester in order to cultivate that virtue in your life. Be realistic and keep it simple! This assignment will be given full credit, 75% credit, or no credit. Include a Word Count.

Virtue Project Part II: 5%

For 12 weeks keep a Virtue Journal. Once a week briefly record in a document how that week went with respect to your desired virtue development. Did you forget to think about it? Did you notice a lot of moments of vice? Did your practice seem to bear some fruit? Was practicing for your chosen virtue easier than before? Your Virtue Journal should have 12 *dated* entries. The final entry should be a bit longer and comment on the 12 weeks overall rather than just the 12th week.

For example:

Intellectual Courage Journal

3rd Week: Sep. 27th

This week I did better remembering to think about intellectual courage. I noticed more opportunities to be intellectually courageous and found myself more assertive in class discussion when I thought something important was being missed.

4th Week: Oct. 4th

This week I had three major opportunities for intellectual courage... I didn't really take the first one but...

Logic Assignment: 5%

Read Coffman's "Finding, Clarifying, and Evaluating Arguments" and complete the worksheet "Logic Set" posted in Files on Canvas in the Logic Folder. This assignment will test your understanding of the concepts in Coffman's paper. You must submit this assignment on Canvas, but unlike all the other assignments, scans of hand written work are permitted.

Paper #1: Analyses of Knowledge Survey: 20%

See Prompt on Canvas for further details. Write 750-1000 words surveying analyses of knowledge. Include a Word Count. The paper should have four (and only four) labeled sections (no Introduction or Conclusion):

- I. Traditional Analysis of Knowledge
- II. A Gettier Problem
- III.A Modification to the Traditional Analysis
- IV. A Different Modification to the Traditional Analysis

Paper #2: Theory of Justification Evaluation: 25%

See Prompt on Canvas for further details. Write 1000-1250 words evaluating whichever theory you think is the best theory of justification. Include a Word Count. The paper should have five (and only five) labeled sections:

- V. Introduction
- VI.A Theory of Justification
- VII.Objection
- VIII.Response
- IX.Evaluation

Paper #3: Epistemological Issue Evaluation: 30%

Write 1250-1500 words on either skepticism, permissivism, or disagreement. Pick an issue and explain two opposing positions on that issue. State which position you prefer and provide the argument for that position. Give what you take to be the strongest objection to that argument. Finally, evaluate whether that objection is successful or whether the position stands, making clear your own view on the issue. The paper should follow the style of the previous papers and include labeled sections focused on each part of the paper. Include a brief introduction stating the thesis of the paper and a roadmap. Also include a brief conclusion. Include a Word Count.

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

See Course Evaluation above.

Technology Policy

Sometimes tech hurts. Research shows that using laptops, tablets, and phones in class is bad for both you and your classmates.

- You don't learn as much
- You don't remember as much
- You take bad notes
- You perform worse on tests
- You distract others & they perform worse on tests¹

Unless you have requested and received permission to do so, the use of phones/laptops/tablets is prohibited except for the use of Canvas—taking Canvas quizzes/surveys, referencing Canvas readings. If your phones/laptops/tablets are out for any other purpose, you will be asked to put them away. If a problem persists, points may be deducted from your Participation grade at my discretion.

Late Work Policy

Assignment grades will be penalized 5% if submitted within the first 24 hours after they are due, 10% if submitted within 24-48 hours after they are due, 15% within 48-72 hours, etc. This penalty is doubled for Paper #3.

Rewrite Policy

If you receive a grade of less than 85% on Paper #1 or #2, you may revise the paper (based on my feedback) and resubmit it for a maximum grade of 85%. The paper will be regraded and is not guaranteed to receive a higher grade. If the paper is worse it will receive a lower grade. Whatever grade is assigned for a rewrite becomes the final grade for that paper assignment. You have two weeks from the time your initial grade is returned to you to submit a rewrite. There are no rewrites for Paper #3 because there is not sufficient time at the end of the semester.

¹ <http://dailynous.com/2018/08/15/discourage-laptops-class-slides-can-show-students/>

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is the practice of intentionally or unintentionally using someone else's writing without properly acknowledging the source. **Plagiarism will not be tolerated.** I regularly discover someone plagiarizing. Do not plagiarize! Again, you plagiarize when:

- You do not make clear exactly what you borrow from a source.
- You do not make clear exactly what the source is from which you borrow.²

If you submit plagiarized work on any assignment you will receive a provisional grade of F for the class and will be referred to the Office of the Dean of Students for disciplinary action.

Further Information

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities. See <https://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>.

Advice on Reading and Writing Philosophy

Reading philosophy is difficult. It is a slow process of sustained intellectual effort. Give yourself ample time to complete the readings. You will benefit by first reading Jim Pryor's "Guidelines on Reading Philosophy," found in Files on Canvas in the Guidance and Study Aids folder. Writing philosophy is also difficult. Good argumentative writing is concise, clear, simple, and well-structured. You will benefit by reading Jim Pryor's "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper," found in the Files folder on Canvas.

Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments
Week 1	Overview and introduction	Russell - "The Value of Philosophy" Feldman - Ch. 1 Franklin - "Thirteen Virtues" (optional)	
Week 2	Logic, arguments, and reasoning	Coffman - "Finding, Clarifying, and Evaluating Arguments"	Virtue Project Part I
Week 3	What is knowledge?	Feldman - Ch. 2 Plato - Selection from <i>Theaetetus</i>	1st Virtue Journal Entry
Week 4	Challenging the traditional account	Feldman - Ch. 3 Gettier - "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"	2nd Journal Entry Logic Assignment

² Lewis Vaughn, *Writing Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2006), 99.

Date	Topic	Reading	Assignments
Week 5	What makes a belief justified?	Feldman - Ch. 4	3rd Journal Entry
		Locke - Selection from <i>Essay</i>	
Week 6		Feldman - Ch. 5	4th Journal Entry Paper #1
Week 7		Zagzebski - "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems"	5th Journal Entry
Week 8	What are intellectual virtues good for?	Battaly - "Virtue Epistemology"	6th Journal Entry
Week 9	Can we know anything?	Descartes - Selection from <i>Meditations</i> Feldman - Ch. 6	7th Journal Entry Paper #2
Week 10		Moore - "Proof of an External World"	8th Journal Entry
Week 11		Feldman - Ch. 7	9th Journal Entry
Week 12		Vogel - "Cartesian Skepticism and IBE"	10th Journal Entry
Week 13	Can evidence be permissive?	Kelly - "Evidence Can Be Permissive" White - "Evidence Cannot Be Permissive"	11th Journal Entry
Week 14	Can we disagree rationally?	Schoenfield - "Permission to Believe" Christensen - "Disagreements as Evidence"	12th Journal Entry Virtue Project Part II
Week 15	Are there uniquely <i>epistemic</i> injustices?	Fricker - "Powerlessness and Social Interpretation" Gendler - "On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias"	
Finals Week			Paper #3