PHIL 4300 - Epistemology
Fall 2020

M/T/R 10-10:50

Instructor: Dr. Megan Fritts
Office: 405F Stabler Hall
Office Hours: T&R 11:00 am - 1:00 pm or by appointment
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Course Description

In this course we will examine a variety of difficult and controversial philosophical questions about knowledge, including but not limited to: 1) "What does it mean to know something?"; 2) "How can we respond to the skeptic, the person who believes that we cannot know anything?"; 3) "Does all knowledge depend on the senses?", etc. This is an introductory philosophy course, and as such presupposes no background knowledge in philosophy. Selections will include some of the great philosophers of the past, such as Descartes, but most of the readings will be from contemporary thinkers.

Objectives

There are two important goals for this course. The first is to introduce you to a rich and lively tradition of philosophical theorizing, which should help you in your own thinking about these important topics. Ultimately however, developing the skills to address philosophical questions in a careful and disciplined way takes precedence over the mere acquisition of information. With that said, the second and primary goal of the course is to help you become a more precise, critical, and nuanced thinker. Toward that end, we will pay close attention to the logical structure of arguments as they arise in the texts.

Credit Hours Explanation

This course meets three times per week, and as such is equivalent to three credit hours. For each academic credit hour, UALR expects that a typical undergraduate student will spend *two hours* outside of class preparing for and studying for the class.

Classroom Etiquette

In this course we will address some emotionally-charged issues about which you may already have strong convictions. Thus, it is asked that you be respectful when challenging the arguments of your peers or the instructor. Of course, reasoned disagreement is permitted and strongly encouraged. However, I request that you direct your criticism at the ideas and arguments at issue and not at particular people.

Texts

All course readings will be posted on Blackboard. No outside purchases are required.

Grading for the Course

Your grade for this course will be determined by 1) exams, 2) one-page written homework assignments, 3) participation, 4) a term paper outline, and 5) a term paper. Grades will be posted on Blackboard. The precise weighting for graded assignments is as follows:

Exams	40% (2x 20% each)
Homework	20% (8x 2.5% each)
Term Paper	25%
Term Paper Outline	5%
Participation	10%

Exams will be open-book and purely essay-based. All exams are partly cumulative, meaning that you will need to retain some understanding of key concepts and theories from the previous unit. The core of the questions on each exam, however, will derive from material covered in that unit. A sample exam will be posted on Blackboard.

Homework will be due on the days/readings that are starred ("***") below in the Course Outline. You should submit the homework by the end of *that* day. Each homework assignment has two parts:

1. The reconstruction of a *valid* argument that is made by an author of the reading for that day. (If you do not detect a valid argument in the reading, then construct a valid moral argument using at least one premise that the author does endorse).
2. A short statement (approximately 100 words) discussing at least one premise of the argument (i.e. reasons that the premise is true or reasons that the premise is false).

The grade for homework is determined by a 4-point scale (in-between grades are also possible):

0: not turned in on time, or completely unsatisfactory

1: Not completely unsatisfactory, but still demonstrating insufficient care or understanding

2: Shows good understanding, but still with some analytical flaws (e.g. the argument is invalid)

3: Excellent

An example of a successful homework will be posted on Blackboard.

Term Papers should be 5-7 full pages double-spaced (12 pt. Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins). For the term paper, you will be asked to use the skills you have learned to write a substantive paper about some problem in epistemology. A substantive *outline* of the paper will be due before the term paper is due. Late term papers, outlines, and homeworks will be penalized 4% points for each day they are late.

Participation will be based on quantity as well as quality of contribution. You should aim to make two posts on the discussion boards per week of content (for a total of 20 posts) in order to receive an "A" for participation.

Grading Scale:

Letter	*Grade*	*Grade Points*
A	(100 - 93)	4.00
AB	(92 - 89)	3.50
B	(88 - 85)	3.00
BC	(84 - 81)	2.50
C	(80 - 77)	2.00
CD	(76 - 74)	1.50
D	(73 - 70)	1.00
F	(below 70)	0.00

Rounding up of in-between grades is not guaranteed and is always at the instructor's discretion. The only factors that determine whether a grade is rounded up are exceptional attendance or participation.

Implicit Consent

By enrolling and remaining enrolled in this class, you give your implicit consent to all of the requirements, policies, and conditions listed above. In addition, the course policies stated in this syllabus are not necessarily exhaustive. I reserve the right to impose additional or amended policies as circumstances warrant. Any substantive change will be announced both in class and on Blackboard.

COURSE OUTLINE

These dates are only approximate. If we depart from the reading schedule, an announcement will be sent out on Blackboard.

Week #1: Introduction and Methodology

8/24: Schick and Vaughn, "Evidence and Inference"

8/25: Schick and Vaughn, "Necessary and Sufficient Conditions"

8/27: Nagel, *A Very Short Introduction to Knowledge*, "Introduction"

Week #2: The Problem of Skepticism I

8/31: Reading #1 - Descartes, *Meditation I*

Reading #2 - Stroud, "The Problem of the External World", pp. 7-12.

9/1: Stroud, "The Problem of the External World", pp. 13-21 (pp. 22-25 optional)

9/3 Descartes, *Meditation II & III* (pp. 26-28 optional)

Week #3: The Problem of Skepticism II

9/7: Reading #1 - Moore, "Proof of an External World"

Reading #2 - Moore, "Certainty"

9/8: Huemer, "Direct Realism and the Brain-in-a-Vat Argument"

9/10: Chalmers, "The Matrix as Metaphysics"

Week #4: The Analysis of Knowledge I

9/14: Reading #1 - Ayer, "Knowing as Having the Right to be Sure"
Reading #2 - Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"
9/15: Feldman, "Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge", pp. 25-30
9/17: Feldman, "Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge", pp. 30-38

Week #5: The Analysis of Knowledge II

9/21: ****Exam #1****
9/22: Nagel, "The Analysis of Knowledge"*******
9/24: Nagel, "Internalism and Externalism"

Week#6: The Regress Problem and the Structure of Justification

9/28: Feldman, "Evidentialist Theories of Knowledge and Justification", pp. 49-60
9/29: Feldman, "Evidentialist Theories of Knowledge and Justification", pp. 60-70
10/1: Klein, "Is Infinitism the Solution to the Regress Problem?"

Week #7: Rational Disagreement

10/5: Shafer-Landau, "The (Un)Importance of Moral Disagreement"
10/6: Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreement", pp. 137-47
10/8: Feldman, "Reasonable Religious Disagreement", pp. 147-56

Week #8: The Ethics of Belief I

10/12: Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"
10/13: James, "The Will to Believe"
10/15: Pascal, "The Wager"

Week #9: Ethics of Belief II

10/19: Basu, "Can Beliefs Wrong?"
10/20: Basu and Schroeder, "Doxastic Wronging"
10/22: Kvanvig, "Against Pragmatic Encroachment"

Week #10: Evidence and Religious Faith

10/26: Katherine Dormandy, "True Faith"
10/27: Lara Buchak, "Faith and Rational Deference to Authority"
10/29: Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* selections.

Week #11: Testimony and Knowledge

11/2: ****Exam #2****

11/3: Nagel, "Testimony"

11/5: Fricker, "Trusting others in the sciences: a priori or empirical warrant?"

Week #12: Fake News and Misinformation

11/9: Rini, "Fake News and Partisan Epistemology"

11/10: Meyer and Alfano, "Fake news, conspiracy theorizing, and intellectual vice."

11/12: Fritts and Cabrera, "Online Misinformation and 'Phantom Patterns"'

Week #13: Philosophy of Science

11/19: Reading #1 - Ellis & Silk, "Scientific method: Defend the integrity of physics"

Reading #2 - Popper, "Conjectures and Refutations"

11/20: Kuhn, "The Route to Normal Science"

11/22: Kuhn, "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research?"

Week #14: Thanksgiving Break

NO CLASS

Week #15: Final Exam Week

12/3: Final lecture/wrap-up discussion

12/4: **Final papers due**