

PHIL 503: Seminar in Epistemology
Fall 2017

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Course Description

In this course we will examine a number of questions about evidence. For example, what sort of thing is it (ontologically speaking)? One popular proposal is that all evidence is propositional. Suppose that's right: what's required in order for proposition e to be part of my evidence? Must I believe it? Believe it with justification? Are all evidence propositions true? Does $e=k$, as Timothy Williamson famously argues? It is commonly held that knowing is a binary state: for any proposition e , either I know e or I don't. But if $e=k$, and knowledge doesn't come in degrees, then the having of evidence doesn't come in degrees either. Is that a problem for Williamson's view? But why think that knowledge doesn't come in degrees? New question: am I always in a position to know what my evidence is – is my evidence 'luminous'? Or are we cognitively homeless? New new question: can evidence undermine the rational support for a belief? New new new question: are there any diachronic norms of rationality?

Course Objectives

The objective of this course is to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of evidence.

Attendance Policies

I will not be taking attendance, but if you find yourself missing a seminar meeting without a very good reason you might want to reconsider your priorities.

List of Required Texts

All texts will be provided electronically via Canvas: canvas.rice.edu.

Evaluation

Each student will write one essay of around 6000 words and include an abstract of not more than 150 words, due December 6 by the end of the day. Pay close attention to your abstract: this is your opportunity to advertise your work to potential readers!

Essay with abstract: 80%

Students will present each of their papers to the class at our final meeting (Nov 29). If we don't have time for all of the presentations then we will schedule an additional meeting. Presentations should last approximately 15 minutes (this is short – part of your job is to be concise), followed by 15 minutes of questions from the room, and should be modeled after standard conference or colloquium talks.

Presentation: 20%

Rice Honor Code

Rice takes its honor code very seriously. All work completed in this course is subject to the Rice Honor Code pledge, which reads:

On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid on this assignment.

So what's authorized?

Citation Cite anything you'd like.

Extent of collaboration I encourage you to discuss relevant materials with anyone you'd like, and in particular I'd encourage you to discuss them with myself and with your colleagues in the seminar. I encourage you to solicit feedback on your written work and on your presentations from anyone you'd like. Philosophy is a collaborative enterprise. But write your own essays and abstracts.

Multiple submission The resubmission any of your own work by that has been used in identical or similar form in fulfillment of any academic requirement at this or another institution is prohibited. Nonetheless, overlap between what your present time-slice is thinking and that of some past you-slice is inevitable. If you're unsure, talk to me about it.

Notes Sharing class notes with other students in the class is generous, and I encourage it.

Sources All types of sources are permitted in your research. Cite appropriately.

If you're unclear about any of this, please talk to me about it.

Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. Instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Honor Council, and maximum penalties will be sought. For information regarding what constitutes plagiarism, see: honor.rice.edu or talk to me.

Students with Disabilities

1. Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.
2. Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in this course is encouraged to contact me after class or during office hours. Additionally, students will also need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.
3. If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact me to discuss your needs. Additionally, you will need to register with the Disability Support Services Office in the Allen Center.

4. Just as university policy requires me to accommodate all documented disabilities, it prohibits me from accommodating any undocumented disabilities. It also prohibits me from retroactively imposing accommodations. For example, if your disability is first documented halfway through the semester I will not be able to make grade changes or other accommodations for any work completed earlier in the semester. To avoid these issues please be sure to document your disability with Disability Support Services as early as possible.

Syllabus Subject to Change!

This syllabus is subject to change. Reasonable notice will be given. Any changes will be announced in class and/ or posted to Canvas.

Course Materials

All readings will be made available through Canvas.

Helpful Resources

Jim Pryor (NYU) has a helpful guides for reading philosophy and another for writing philosophy. They can be found at:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

and

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Phones and The Laptops

You are welcome to use your laptop, tablet or phone to take notes or to consult the day's readings. If you must do other things with your devices — text, email, check Facebook — then please sit in back so that you don't distract the more serious students. If your device usage is disruptive then you will be asked to put that device away or to leave.

Tentative Schedule:

The following schedule will be revised as we go along. Any changes will be announced in class and/or via Canvas. Please complete the readings for the date listed.

Date	Topic	Readings
8/23	Introduction	Kelly - Evidence
8/30	Harvey!	
9/6	e=k	KAIL ch 9
9/13	Experience as evidence	Turri - Ontology of epistemic reasons
9/20	False evidence?	Littlejohn - No evidence is false; Comensana, McGrath - Perceptual reasons
9/27	Having evidence	Schroeder - What does it take to "have" a reason? Schroeder - Having reasons
10/4	Graduated having	Joyce - Timothy Williamson on evidence and knowledge (with Williamson's response) Joyce - How probabilities reflect evidence
10/11	Probabilistic mental states	Morrison - Perceptual confidence
10/18	Probabilistic mental states	Moss - Probabilistic knowledge (selection)
10/25	Luminosity	KAIL ch 4
11/1	Luminosity	Berker - Luminosity regained? Srinivasan - Are we luminous?
11/8	Undermining	Lasonen-Aarnio - Higher order evidence and the limits of defeat
11/15	Epistemic akrasia	Horowitz - Epistemic Akrasia
11/22	Diachronic norms	Hedden - Time-slice rationality; Optional: Podogorski - A reply to the synchronist
11/29	Presentations	none