

Phil 503: Knowledge and Evidence

Fall 2016

Mondays 2:30–5:00 in HUM 227

Instructor: Brian Miller

Email: briantmiller@rice.edu

Office: Humanities 204

Office hours: by appointment

Course Description

This course is focused on Timothy Williamson's *Knowledge and its Limits*, which is perhaps the most important work of epistemology in the last several decades. Williamson draws on recent developments in the philosophy of mind and philosophy of language as he argues for a number of surprising theses: that knowledge cannot be analyzed into parts (e.g. J+T+B); that knowing is a mental state; that epistemic access to one's own mental states is far more limited than is generally acknowledged; that an agent's evidence consists in all and only those propositions that the agent knows; and that knowledge is the norm of assertion. Our particular focus will be upon the relationship between knowledge and evidence.

Course Objectives

We will closely read Timothy Williamson's *Knowledge and its Limits* and some secondary literature. The objectives are:

1. Better understand how recent developments in the philosophy of mind and philosophy of language are shaping recent epistemology
2. Write and present an original paper with the eventual goal of conference presentation and publication

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. Pay close attention to your abstract: this is your opportunity to advertise your work to potential readers!

Essay with abstract: 70%

Students will present each of their papers to the class at our final meeting (Nov 28). 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 (this is also short), and should be modeled after standard conference or colloquium talks.

Presentation: 10%

For each course meeting (except the last) there will be one primary reading that we discuss. Students will write an abstract of not more than 150 words for each of these primary readings, due before the meeting in which that reading is discussed. (No abstract due for our first meeting.)

Abstracts of primary readings: 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 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. However, we will be spending a lot of quality time with Timothy Williamson's *Knowledge and its Limits*, so if you prefer to read a hard copy you can find one at Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss_2?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=knowledge+and+its+limits

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.

Very Tentative Schedule

8/22 Syllabus, overview of the project of *Knowledge and its Limits* (KAIL)

Primary reading KAIL Ch. 0 – Introduction

Optional background reading SEP article: [Externalism About Mental Content](#)

Optional background reading SEP article: [The Analysis of Knowledge](#)

Optional background reading Greco, Feldman – Is Justification Internal?

8/29 Knowledge as a Mental State 1

Primary reading KAIL Ch. 1 – A State of Mind

Optional background reading SEP article: [Externalism About Mental Content](#)

Optional background reading SEP article: [The Analysis of Knowledge](#)

Optional background reading Greco, Feldman – Is Justification Internal?

9/5 LABOR DAY – NO CLASS MEETING

9/12 Knowledge as a Mental State 2

Primary reading KAIL Ch. 2 – Broadness

Optional Reading Kim – Psychological Supervenience

9/19 Knowledge as a Mental State 3

Primary reading KAIL Ch. 3 – Primeness

Optional reading Jackson – Primeness, Internalism, Explanation (plus Williamson's respons)

Optional reading Fricker – Is Knowing a State of Mind? The Case Against (plus Williamson's response)

9/26 Cognitive Homes

Primary reading KAIL Ch. 4 – Anti-Luminosity

Optional Reading KAIL Ch. 5.1 – Knowing that one Knows

10/3 Cognitive Homes?

Primary reading Steup – Are Mental States Luminous? (plus Williamson's response)

Optional Reading Conee – The Comforts of Home

10/10 MIDTERM RECESS – NO CLASS MEETING

10/17 Skepticism

Primary reading KAIL Ch. 8 – Scepticism

Optional reading Schiffer – Evidence = Knowledge: Williamson’s Solution to Skepticism (plus Williamson’s response)

10/24 Evidence 1: E=K

Primary reading KAIL Ch. 9 – Evidence

10/31 - Evidence 2 – E=K?

Primary reading Littlejohn – How and Why Knowledge is First

Optional reading Comesana, McGrath – Perceptual Reasons

11/7 Evidence Formalized

Primary reading KAIL Ch. 10 – Evidential Probability

Optional reading Kaplan – Williamson’s Casual Approach to Probabilism (plus Williamson’s response)

11/14 Evidence 4

Note: Susanna Schellenberg visits 11/18!

Primary reading Schellenberg – Phenomenal Evidence and Factive Evidence

Optional reading Pautz – What is my evidence this is a cup?

11/21 The Knowledge Norm of Assertion

Primary reading KAIL Ch. 11 – Assertion

Optional reading Goldberg – The Knowledge Account of Assertion and the Nature of Testimony

11/28 Presentations

No assigned reading

Papers are due a few days before I have to submit final grades to the university, but certainly not before our scheduled final-exam-period-during-which-there-will-be-no-final-exam time.