

**PHIL 303: Theory of Knowledge**  
**Spring 2017**

MWF 10:00–10:50 in SEW 305

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Office hours: by appointment

**Course Description**

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of knowledge, reasoning, and rationality. Where ethicists are concerned with questions of what one ought to *do*, epistemologists are mostly concerned with what one ought to *believe*.

In this course we will examine the following topics:

- Is it ever rational to reason in a circle?
- Can I tell when I'm being irrational?
- What's the criteria for *knowing*?
- I know that it *looks like* I have hands, but can I know that I *really do* have hands? How?
- Can we trust our own judgments, given what psychologists tell us about implicit bias?
- When should I trust the judgment of experts rather than my own judgment? What if *I am* an expert and another expert disagrees with my judgments?
- The scientific community believes that human activity is altering the climate. But what does it mean for a *community* to believe something? What's the relationship between the beliefs of a group and the beliefs of its members? What's the relationship between the *rationality* of a group and the rationality of its members?

**Course Objectives**

The objective to this course is to introduce students to central topics in contemporary epistemology.

**Course Materials**

Required texts:

Title: Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction (1st Edition)

Authors: Alvin I. Goldman, Matthew McGrath

ISBN: 978-0199981120

Additional materials will be provided through Canvas.

## Evaluation

Student performance will be evaluated using three papers and ten pop-quizzes.

First Paper ( $\approx$ 1100 words)	Due 2/19	15% of final grade
Second Paper ( $\approx$ 1500 words)	Due 4/2	20% of final grade
Term Paper ( $\approx$ 2200 words)	Due 4/28	35% of final grade
10 Pop Quizzes	[they pop]	3% each = 30% of final grade

Papers: I will provide prompts for the papers. If you would prefer to come up with your own prompt then you are encouraged to do so, but **YOU MUST CLEAR IT WITH ME FIRST**. I'm not trying to crush your creativity here. It's just that picking a good topic for a paper — not too big, not too small, not involving some confusion — is an art in itself and I'd hate for you to get off on the wrong foot.

All papers must be submitted through Canvas. All papers will be graded blind, meaning that I will not know whose paper I am grading. For that reason, **PLEASE DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME OR OTHER IDENTIFIER ON YOUR PAPER**. Why is this important? It helps to avoid implicit bias and ensure fair grading.

Late papers will be docked 1/3 letter grade per day past the due date.

Pop-quizzes: The quizzes will be quick and typically pretty easy, provided that you are present in class, have done the reading, and are paying attention to the lecture. They will typically be a surprise, but I might tell you that one is coming up. I might even tell you what the questions will be. In order to take a quiz and receive any credit for it, you must be present when it is administered (or have a document excuse). No make-up quizzes will be offered unless you have a documented excuse!

Quizzes are graded coarsely: only full letter grades are possible (no +'s or -'s).

Grading: quizzes and papers will be assigned letter-grades. Canvas will convert letter-grades to numerical scores equivalent to the top of the ranges below (so A- becomes 94, B becomes 87, etc). Final grades are determined by the weighted average of paper and quiz grades

## Grading Scale:

Grade	Range
A+	97 – 100
A	94 – <97
A-	90 – <94
B+	87 – <90
B	84 – <87
B-	80 – <84
C+	77 – <80
C	74 – <77
C-	70 – <74
D+	67 – <70
D	64 – <67
D-	60 – <64
F	<60

**IMPORTANT:** In order to pass this course you must: be present to take at least 6 quizzes (or have a documented excuse for your absence) AND receive a D or higher each of the three papers. Even if your final score is above 60%, if you do not satisfy both of these conditions you will fail.

## Helpful Resources

Jim Pryor (NYU) has a helpful guide 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>

Tyler Burge (UCLA) offers the following words of wisdom concerning the study of philosophy:

Whatever the reader's background and interests [...] I offer this council, firmly and insistently: patience. Patience is a primary virtue in philosophy. Genuine understanding is a rare and valuable commodity, not to be obtained on the cheap. One cannot reap philosophy's rewards breathlessly, or by looking for the intellectual equivalents of sound bites. Very large claims are at issue here, claims that bear on understanding some of the matters most important to being human. Understanding requires investing time, close reading, and reflection.

## Participation

You are encouraged to ask questions and to discuss the readings. The best way to learn philosophy is by doing philosophy, and part of doing philosophy is talking about philosophy. Come to class ready to

talk and don't rely on others to carry the weight. Try answers on for size. Very often progress is made by first putting a bad answer on the table and then getting an idea of what is wrong with it and how it could be improved upon. Offering a "bad" answer doesn't make you bad at philosophy or mean you are being dumb or dense. Some of the most important works in philosophy were merely conversation starters, and some of the best and smartest philosophers have offered really "bad" answers to certain questions.

Here are some examples of fantastic questions that I've been asked:

"I don't understand what you just said. Would you please explain it again?"

"You just claimed that X, but I don't see why I should believe X. What can you say to convince me?"

"You just drew conclusion Y from premise X, but I don't see how X supports Y. What can you say to convince me?"

"I've lost the forest for the trees. Can you zoom out and tell me how this small point that we've been discussing is relevant to the larger issues?"

And here is a list of every stupid question I've ever been asked:

[blank — there are no stupid questions]

## **Attendance Policy**

Your regular attendance is expected. This expectation is reflected in your grade through the quizzes: skip a class in which we have a quiz and you'll receive a 0 on that quiz.

## **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, but be sure to cite any sources that you've consulted; plagiarism is a heinous crime and will not be tolerated.

*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 course. I encourage you to solicit feedback on your written work and on your presentations from anyone you'd like. Philosophy is a collaborative enterprise, and it's really fun to talk about. But write your own essays and be sure to document any ideas that appear in your written work that aren't yours (i.e.

cite appropriately). Collaboration on quizzes is prohibited. Placing quizzes in a test bank for future students to consult (or anything of that sort) is prohibited.

*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.

*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 the Honor Council is not forgiving. For information regarding what constitutes plagiarism, see: [honor.rice.edu](http://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.

## **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. This policy is subject to change if the presence of devices in class leads to problems.

## **Course 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.

### **Week 1:** The structure of justification

**1/9/17** Introduction

**1/11/17** The regress problem

- Epistemology: a Contemporary Introduction (ECI) 1.1 – 1.4

**1/13/17** Coherentism

- SEK 87 – 101
- optional: SEK 117 – 124

### **Week 2:** Structure of justification cont'd

**1/16/17** **MLK Holiday - no class**

**1/18/17** Foundationalism: Bonjour and Alston

- ECI 1.5 – 1.7; SEK 30 – 33; Alston – Level Confusions (selection)

**1/20/17** Foundationalism: defeaters and Inference

- ECI 1.8 – 1.9
- Optional: Audi – Inference and the Extension of Knowledge

### **Week 3:** Foundationalism; evidentialism vs. reliabilism

**1/23/17** Foundherentism?

- Haack – A Foundherentist Theory of Epistemic Justification

**1/25/17** Evidence and evidentialism

- ECI 2.1 – 2.2
- Optional: Feldman, Conee – Evidentialism

**1/27/17** Process reliabilism

- ECI 2.3 – 2.5

- Optional: Goldman – What is Justified Belief?

**Week 4:** Internalism and externalism; the analysis of knowledge

**1/30/17** Internalism and externalism 1

- ECI 2.6 – 2.7; Greco – Justification is Not Internal

**2/1/17** Internalism and externalism 2

- Feldman – Justification is Internal (plus responses)

**2/3/17** JTB and Gettier

- ECI 3.1 – 3.2; Gettier – Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?

**Week 5:** The analysis of knowledge

**2/6/17** Reliability solutions to the Gettier problem

- ECI 3.4

**2/8/17** Relevant alternatives solutions to the Gettier problem

- ECI 3.5, 3.7

**2/10/17** **Spring Recess – no class**

**Week 6:** Skepticism

**2/13/17** Cartesian skepticism

- ECI 4 – 4.1; Bonjour – Descartes Epistemology

**2/15/17** Response to skepticism 1: rejecting closure

- ECI 4.2 – 4.2.2

**2/17/17** Response to skepticism 2: Reid's a priori proposal

- ECI 4.3 – 4.4; Reid – Essays on the Intellectual Powers (selection)

**First paper due by 11:59PM on 2/19**

**Week 7:** Skepticism cont'd; Contextualism

**2/20/17** Response to skepticism 3: the straightforward a posteriori proposal

- ECI 4.5; SEP on Abduction (sections 1 and 2)

**2/22/17** Response to skepticism 4: Moore's bold a posteriori proposal

- ECI 4.6 – 4.7; Moore – Hume's Theory Examined (selection)

**2/24/17** Contextualism

- ECI 5.1

**Week 8:** Contextualism and pragmatic encroachment; perceptual justification

**2/27/17** Contextualism; pragmatic encroachment

- ECI 5.2

**3/1/17** Pragmatic encroachment

- ECI 5.2 cont'd

**3/3/17** Sellarsian dilemma

- ECI 6.1 – 6.2.1

**Week 9:** Perceptual justification

**3/6/17** The structure of perceptual justification

- ECI 6.3 – 6.4; Pryor – The Skeptic and the Dogmatist (selection)

**3/8/17** Dogmatism and cognitive penetration

- ECI 6.5 – 6.5.1

**3/10/17** Dogmatism and the speckled hen

- ECI 6.5.2

**Spring Break 3/13 – 3/17**

**Week 10:** Perceptual justification cont'd; skepticism about induction

**3/10/17** Dogmatism and easy knowledge

- ECI 6.6 – 6.7

**3/22/17** The old riddle of induction

- Russell – On Induction

**3/24/17** A response to the old riddle

- Decisions Under Ignorance [read this one first and make sure that you understand the difference between weakly and strongly dominant strategies]; Reichenbach – A Pragmatic Justification of Induction

**Week 11:** Skepticism about induction cont'd; implicit bias

**3/27/17** The new riddle of induction

- Sainsbury – “Grue” (just p. 99 - 107 – I’ve include some additional pages for reference)
- Optional: Goodman – The New Riddle of Induction

**3/29/17** What is implicit bias?

- Saul – Skepticism and Implicit Bias (selection)

**3/31/17** Implicit bias as a source of skepticism



- Antony – Implicit Bias: Friend or Foe?

**Second paper due by 11:59PM on 4/2**

**Week 12: Social epistemology**

4/3/17 Testimony: reductionism and non-reductionism

- ECI 9.1 – 9.2; Hume – Of Miracles (part 1)

4/5/17 Testimony – the interpersonal view

- ECI 9.3; Lackey – Learning From Words (selection)

4/7/17 Learning from experts

- ECI 9.5

**Week 13: Social epistemology cont'd**

4/10/17 Peer disagreement

- Kelly – The Epistemic Significance of Peer Disagreement (selection)

4/12/17 Peer disagreement

- Christensen – The Epistemology of Disagreement: the Good News (selection)

4/14/17 Peer disagreement

- Kelly and Christensen cont'd

**Week 14: Social epistemology cont'd**

4/17/17 Belief and justification aggregation

- ECI 10.2 – 10.4

4/19/17 Institutions and systems

- ECI 10.7 – 10.8.3

4/21/17 Institutions and systems

- ECI 10.7 – 10.8.3 cont'd

**Term paper due by 11:59 on 4/28**