

PHIL 419: Epistemology

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Class Room: LEA 14

Class Hours: Wed & Fri 13:05 - 14:25

Office Hours: Fri 15:00 - 16:00 LEA 936

Course Description

What is the nature of the self and how can we have any knowledge of the self? What is the self insofar as it is an agent of knowledge, the objects that it knows and by which means does the self know them? Can we be sure that our knowledge is infallible? Can we defend the infallibility of our knowledge? What is the nature of the faculties of perception and inference through which we gain knowledge of ourselves and the external world? This course will examine these questions by reading texts in the tradition of Indian epistemology (*pramāṇa-śāstra*) in the early Classical period (~150 AD – ~540 AD). We will survey some of the major positions in epistemology during this period and occasionally draw connections to the Western philosophical tradition. Prior to studying these texts, we will read the Upaniṣads to understand some of the foundational questions of the tradition, namely knowledge of self, knowledge of the external world and the relation between knowledge, the good life and liberation. We will then read the Nyāya school on what they take to be the project of epistemology: providing insight on the sources of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) and their objects (*prameya*). We will subsequently read skeptical challenges posed by the Madhyamaka Buddhist tradition, who argue against the possibility of this kind of epistemological project. We will then return to the Nyāya school, examining their defense of the *pramāṇa* theory against Madhyamaka skeptical challenges. We will finally turn to the Buddhist Dignāga, and his commentator Dharmakīrti. In his analysis of two major *pramāṇa*, perception and inference, he radically alters the landscape of not only epistemology in India, but argumentation and debate as well. The course has five units:

1. Early Indian Theories of Knowledge
2. Introduction to Nyāya Pramāṇa Theory
3. Madhyamaka Skepticism
4. The Nyāya defense of Pramāṇa Theory
5. Dignāga on Perception and Inference

Course Objectives

The aim of the course is to introduce you to a period of Indian philosophy rich in debate about the nature of knowledge. You will be able to understand primary philosophical texts translated from Sanskrit (the texts in their original languages will be provided for those that can read them). You will also be able to identify key ideas and positions in important philosophical texts written in Sanskrit. Lastly you will be able to make meaningful connections to Western philosophy.

Readings

All readings will be posted on myCourses.

Assessments

1. *Attendance/Participation*: You will be evaluated on your consistent class attendance and active engagement with the material. I will take attendance each class after the first class. You are allowed 4 unexcused missed classes after which you will lose .5% for each class missed. You can show regular active engagement through asking/answering questions during lectures, through email, or during office hours. (10%)
2. *Reading Assignments*: Reading assignments will (1) provide a summary of a main argument from the reading (200 - 250 words) and either (2a) pose a question or a critical comment that follows from this argument or (2b) draw meaningful connections to the Western tradition (300 - 500 words). You are expected to submit 2 reading assignments (500 - 750 words each) for any 2 weeks that you choose. You may submit a third assignment, and only your best two grades will count towards the final grade. You will not receive written feedback on your third submission. Once the topic is covered in class, the reading assignment is due 1 week later on Sunday. (10% each; 20% total)
3. *Mid-term Paper*: You will be provided with a selection of 3 questions and will be asked to write a paper (1500 - 1750 words) in response to 1 of these questions. Due on 10/13. (30%)
4. *Final Paper*: You will be expected to write a final paper (2000 - 2500 words). You will choose your own topic that aims to be an original contribution to the topics covered in the course. Due on 12/15. (40%)

Policies

Extensions, exceptions, accommodations, and late penalties

Extensions and exceptions can be offered on request. To request an extension, exception, or accommodation please contact me via email and provide a reasonable excuse. Assignments that have been submitted late without an extension or exception will be penalized 10% per day.

Email policy

Please allow 24 hours for a response from me. If you don't hear back within 48 (business) hours, you can send a follow up. Check this syllabus and the course site for answers to your questions before you email me.

Policy statement: Language of submission

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Student Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives. (Approved by Senate on 21 January 2009)

Policy statement: Academic integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures. (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003) (See McGill's guide to academic honesty for more information.)

Statement of Inclusivity

As the instructor of this course I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, do not hesitate to discuss them with me and the Office for Students with Disabilities, 514-398-6009.

Land Acknowledgement

McGill University is on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous peoples whose presence marks this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

Academic Freedom

Academic freedom is central to McGill University's mission of advancing learning through teaching, scholarship and service to society. The scholarly members of the university have the freedom to pursue research and artistic creation and to disseminate their results, without being constrained by political or disciplinary orthodoxies, monetary incentives or punitive measures as a result of their academic pursuits. They may exercise this freedom in the service of both the university and the wider society. When scholarly members of the university participate in public forums and debates, they should represent their views as their own. The exercise of academic freedom requires collegial governance with the full participation of scholarly members.

Additional note

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Schedule

Unit 1: Early Indian Theories of Knowledge

Week 1: 08/26 - 09/01

NO READING

Optional Podcast:

Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 5. "Do it Yourself: Indra's Search for the Self in the Upaniṣads" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/upanisads-self>.

Week 2: 09/02 - 09/08

Primary Text:

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan & Charles A. Moore, *A Source Book in Indian Philosophy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957): 42-50, 64-96. [Kaṭha Upaniṣad, Chāndogya Upaniṣad, Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad, Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad, Maitrī Upaniṣad]

Secondary Reading:

Jonardon Ganeri, 'Hidden in the Cave: The Upaniṣadic Self', in *The Concealed Art of The Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press): 13-38.

Optional Podcast: Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 7. "Brian Black on the Upanisads" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/upanisads-black>.

Optional Western Philosophy Reading:

Plato & M. J. Levett, & Myles Burnyeat, 'Theaetetus', in *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. Edited by John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 1997): 157-234.

Unit 2: The Nyāya Pramāṇa Theory

Week 3: 09/09 - 09/15

Primary Text:

Matthew Dasti & Stephen Phillips, *The Nyāya-sūtra: Selections with Early Commentaries*. (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 2007): 11-39. [Chapter 1]

Secondary Reading:

B. K. Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986): 21-45. [Chapter 1]

Optional Podcast:

Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 31. "Where There's Smoke There's Fire: Gautama's Nyāya-Sūtra" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/nyaya-sutra>.

Optional Western Philosophy Reading:

Edmund L. Gettier, 1963, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?", *Analysis*, 23(6): 121–123.

Week 4: 09/16 - 09/22**Primary Text:**

Matthew Dasti & Stephen Phillips, *The Nyāya-sūtra: Selections with Early Commentaries*. (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing, 2007): 40-59. [Chapter 2]

Secondary Reading:

B. K. Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986): 69-93. [Chapter 3]

Optional Podcast:

Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 32. "What You See Is What You Get: Nyāya on Perception" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/nyaya-perception>.

Optional Western Philosophy Reading:

Alvin I. Goldman, 1967, "A Causal Theory of Knowing", *The Journal of Philosophy*, 64(12): 357–372.

Unit 3: Madhyamaka Skepticism**Week 5: 09/23 - 09/29****Primary Text:**

Mark Siderits & Shōryū Katsura, *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* (New York: Wisdom Publications, 2013): 17-42, 71-97, 153-162. [Chapters 1, 2, 7, 8 and 15]

Secondary Reading:

Mark Siderits & Shōryū Katsura, *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* (New York: Wisdom Publications, 2013): 1-10. [Introduction]

Optional Podcast: Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 45. "Motion Denied: Nāgārjuna on Change" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/nagarjuna-change>.

Optional Western Philosophy Reading:

Sextus, Julia Annas & Jonathan Barnes, *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 146-150, 161-166, 170-172. [Book III: iv-v, ix-x, xiv-xv]

Week 6: 09/30 - 10/06**Primary Text:**

Jan Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes: Nāgārjuna's Vighraha-vyāvartanī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 19-22, 26-35. [VV 1-6, 21-51]

Secondary Reading:

Jan Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes: Nāgārjuna's Vighraha-vyāvartanī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 43-94. [Commentary on VV 1-6, 21-51]

Optional Podcast: Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 44. "It All Depends: Nāgārjuna on Emptiness" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/nagarjuna-emptiness>.

Optional Western Philosophy Reading:

Sextus, Julia Annas & Jonathan Barnes, *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 67-92. [Book II: i-ix]

Week 7: 10/07 - 10/13**Primary Text:**

Jan Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes: Nāgārjuna's Vighraha-vyāvartanī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 22-26, 35-41. [VV 7-20, 52-70]

Secondary Reading:

Jan Westerhoff, *The Dispeller of Disputes: Nāgārjuna's Vighraha-vyāvartanī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 94-133. [Commentary on VV 7-20, 52-70]

Optional Podcast:

Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 47. "Jan Westerhoff on Nāgārjuna" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/nagarjuna-westerhoff>.

Optional Western Philosophy Reading:

Sextus, Julia Annas & Jonathan Barnes, *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 188-205, 126-130. [Book III: xxi-xxiii, Book II: xvii-xx]

Week 8: 10/14 - 10/20

Reading Week: NO CLASS

Unit 4: The Nyāya defense of Pramāṇa Theory

Week 9: 10/21 - 10/27

Primary Text:

Matthew Dasti & Stephen Phillips, *The Nyāya-sūtra: Selections with Early Commentaries* (Indianapolis, MN: Hackett Publishing, 2017): 60-73. [Chapter 3]

Secondary Reading:

B. K. Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986): 46-68. [Chapter 2]

Optional Podcast:

Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 35. "Ujjwala Jha and V.N. Jha on Nyāya" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/nyaya-jah>.

Optional Western Philosophy Reading:

Barry Stroud, "The Problem of the External World", *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984): 1-38.

Week 10: 10/28 - 11/03

Primary Text:

Matthew Dasti & Stephen Phillips, *The Nyāya-sūtra: Selections with Early Commentaries* (Indianapolis, MN: Hackett Publishing, 2017): 74-94. [Chapter 4]

Secondary Reading:

Matthew Dasti, "Nyāya's Self as Agent and Knower", in *Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew Dasti & Edwin F. Bryant (New York: Oxford University Press): 112-136.

Optional Podcast:

Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 34. "The Truth Shall Set You Free: Nyāya on the Mind" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/nyaya-mind>.

Optional Western Philosophy Reading:

Laurence Bonjour, 1978, "Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 15 (1), 1-13.

Week 11: 11/04 - 11/10

Primary Text:

Matthew Dasti & Stephen Phillips, *The Nyāya-sūtra: Selections with Early Commentaries* (Indianapolis, MN: Hackett Publishing, 2017): 175-200. [Chapter 9]

Secondary Reading:

B. K. Matilal, 'Introducing Indian Logic', in *The Character of Logic in India* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998): 1-30. [Chapter 1]

Optional Podcast:

Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 33. "Standard Deductions: Nyāya on Reasoning" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/nyaya-reasoning>.

Optional Western Philosophy Reading:

Jonathan Vogel, 2008, "Epistemic Bootstrapping ", *The Journal of Philosophy*, 105 (12), Epistemic Norms. Part One, 518-539.

Unit 5: Dignāga and Dharmakīrti on Perception and Inference**Week 12: 11/11 - 11/17****Primary Text:**

Hattori, M, (1968). *Dignāga, On Perception*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 23-31. (Chap 1.1).

Secondary Reading:

Amber Carpenter, *Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2014): 169-189. [Chapter 8: I-II]

Optional Podcast:

Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 55. "Doors of Perception: Dignāga on Consciousness" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/-dignaga-consciousness>.

Optional Western Philosophy Reading:

Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Robert Brandom, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997): 1-32. [Intro-ii]

Week 13: 11/18 - 11/24**Primary Text:**

Hattori, M, (1968). *Dignāga, On Perception*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 32-41. (Chap 1.2-1.3).

Secondary Reading:

B. K. Matilal, 'Dinnāga: A New Era in Logical Thinking', in *The Character of Logic in India* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998): 88-107. [Chapter 4]

Optional Podcast:

Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 53. "Follow the Evidence: Dignāga's Logic" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/-dignaga-consciousness>.

Optional Western Philosophy Reading:

Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Robert Brandom, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997): 32-85. [iii-ix]

Week 14: 11/25 - 12/01**Primary Text:**

Vincent Eltschinger, John Taber, Michael Torsten Much & Isabelle Ratié (2018). *Dharmakīrti's Theory of Exclusion (apoha)*. Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies: 27-103. (Translation).

Secondary Reading:

Vincent Eltschinger, John Taber, Michael Torsten Much & Isabelle Ratié (2018). *Dharmakīrti's Theory of Exclusion (apoha)*. Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies: 1-26. (Introduction).

Optional Podcast:

Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 52. "Under Construction: Dignāga on Perception and Language" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/dignaga-perception-language>.

Optional Western Philosophy Reading:

Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Robert Brandom, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997): 85-118. [x-xvi]

Week 15: 12/02 - 12/09

REVIEW SESSION

Optional Podcast:

Peter Adamson and Jonardon Ganeri, hosts, 61. "What Happened Next: Indian Philosophy After Dignāga" History of Philosophy without any gaps: India (podcast), <https://historyofphilosophy.net/after-dignaga>.