

Philosophy 419: Epistemology

Course Information

Term & Year: Winter 2023
Prerequisites: PHIL 210 or equivalent and one intermediate course in philosophy
Course Time: T & R 11:30-13:00
Course Location: LEA 15

Instructor Information

Instructor: Professor Michael Blome-Tillmann
Office: Leacock, 9th floor
Office Hours: W 09:00-11:00 on Zoom (<https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/87672223875>)
In person: by appointment
Email: michael.blome@mcgill.ca

Course Description

This course is a survey of central issues in analytic epistemology and offers an overview of both classical and present-day topics. It is divided into five substantive units (not including the introductory material covered in the first week):

- Unit 1. The Analysis of Knowledge
- Unit 2. Scepticism, Closure, and Transmission
- Unit 3. The Semantics of 'Knowledge'-Attributions
- Unit 4. Evidence and Justification

Typically, we will spend 2-3 weeks on any given unit. Individual topics may include the following:

- 1) *Is Knowledge Justified True Belief?*
- 2) *Causal and Reliabilist Theories of Knowledge*
- 3) *Counterfactual Theories of Knowledge*
- 4) *Arguments for Scepticism*
- 5) *Epistemic Contextualism*
- 6) *Epistemic Impurism*
- **Midterm Exam: February 23rd, 2023** ---
- 7) *Coherentism and Foundationalism*
- 8) *Induction*
- 9) *Legal Standards of Proof*
- 10) *E=K*
- 11) *Closure and Transmission Failure*

This schedule is tentative and subject to change.

The course presupposes knowledge of propositional and first order predicate *logic* (Prerequisite: Introduction to Deductive Logic 1). Knowledge of *probability theory* is desirable but not necessary.

Learning Outcomes

After taking this course students will:

- Be familiar with key philosophical problems and positions in contemporary epistemology
- Be able to identify key theses and argument structures in epistemological texts
- Be able to differentiate between epistemological positions and compare their claims and assumptions
- Be able to express their own epistemological theses in writing and argue for it in a clear and concise manner
- Be able to critically evaluate epistemological arguments, both others' and their own

Format

There will be two lectures per week, although as much time as possible will be devoted to discussion. Normally, the first class of each week will involve a presentation of the relevant literature and the second will consist of a mixture of lecturing and discussions. Students are required to *prepare short presentations* for their tutorial groups (see below).

Office hours: I will hold office hours on Wednesdays from 09:00-11:00 on Zoom (<https://mcgill.zoom.us/j/87672223875>) and in person by appointment during/after class.

Assessment

Attendance and Participation: 10%.

Midterm Exam: 30% (February 23rd, 2023).

Final Essay: 60%.

Additionally, each student must prepare a short presentation together with a group of fellow students. Failure to participate in a group presentation will result in the deduction of 6% from the final course grade.

Final Essay: About 3,000 words. Focuses on detailed evaluation of an argument. Students are asked to offer a critical analysis of their own. Based on a particular argument in a particular reading. Explain the argument and criticize it or develop it further. Be clear about exactly what you are objecting to—which premise, or premises, are you going to deny? Or why do you think the conclusion doesn't follow from the premises? You should also consider possible objections to your response—that is, what might the original author say in response to you, and what is your response to that? You should introduce, explain, and evaluate various authors' views as they pertain to your chosen question, but your own framing and organization is central. Make sure to cite everything you're relying on.

Group presentation: Students must prepare a short presentation together with a group of fellow students. Group presentations will be assessed for credit only, as outlined above.

Students are asked to read Jim Pryor's excellent guidelines on how to read and write philosophy: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html> and <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

Extensions

Late submissions will be downgraded at a rate of 1/3 of a grade per day (e.g. from A- to B+, C to C-), including weekend days/holidays. Evidence of a consistent lack of preparation (including non-attendance without a medical excuse) results in a deduction of up to 5% from the final course grade. Requests for extensions will be considered (but not automatically granted) only when requested at least 24 hours before the paper is due and substantiated at the time of request by a doctor's note documenting illness. Extensions will not be more than seven days.

MyCourses

The webpage for this course is located at <https://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses/>. It will be used to post the syllabus, readings, lectures, and periodic announcements. You must check the course webpage regularly. If you have technical problems with MyCourses, contact ICT customer support at: <http://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses/students/help/>.

IMPORTANT: *papers must be submitted on MyCourses as MS Word documents.* Submissions by email or in hard copy or other file formats will not be considered.

Textbooks

This course does not use a textbook, but many of the articles we shall read can be found in the following anthology (henceforth 'Bernecker and Dretske (2000)'):

- Bernecker, S. and Dretske, F. (eds.), *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology* (OUP, 2000).

For useful introductory reading see:

- Nagel, Jennifer, *Knowledge – A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: OUP: 2014.

Always read up on the topics discussed in class on the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* and the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

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” (see McGill’s guide to academic honesty for more information). (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)

Submissions to this course will be automatically checked for plagiarism by means of Turnitin, Urkund, or equivalent/related software.

Plagiarism

“Plagiarism” means the representation of another’s work, published or unpublished, as one’s own or assisting another in representing another’s work, published or unpublished, as his or her own. (a) No student shall represent another person’s work, published or unpublished, as his or her own in any academic writing, such as an essay, thesis, research report, project or assignment submitted in a course or a program of study, or represent as his or her own the work of another, whether the material so represented constitutes a part or the entirety of the work submitted. (b) No student shall contribute any work to another student with the knowledge that the latter may submit the work in part or whole as his or her own. Receipt of

payment or other forms of compensation for work contributed shall be cause for presumption that the student had such knowledge.

Copyright and Intellectual Property

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No audio or video recording of any kind is allowed in class without the explicit permission of the instructor.

Inclusivity and Accessibility

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.

In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any 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.

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