

PHL310: Knowledge and Reality

Fall 2017

MWF 9-10am in WAG 308

Instructor: Sosseh Assaturian

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Office Hours: TBD

This course is an advanced introduction to contemporary epistemology and metaphysics. In the first half, we will focus on metaphysics, and we will deal with questions about the basic building blocks of reality. From there, we will shift our focus to epistemology, or the philosophical study of knowledge. Topics to be discussed include: What things exist? What explains the fact that apples and fire engines have the same colour? Are there facts? What is causation? Is time real? What is knowledge? How is knowledge different from true belief? Is it possible to know anything at all?

The goal of this course is to prepare you to engage with current philosophical research. To this end, the assignments are designed to help build skills like considering and summarizing arguments from the readings, as well as presenting clear and original responses to them.

Course Materials

All readings will be posted on Canvas.

Evaluation Breakdown

20% Two Short Argument Summaries (1-2 pages, 10% each)

15% Short paper (3-4 pages)

25% Longer paper (6-7 pages)

40% Two Tests (20% each)

Description of Assignments

Short Argument Summaries (10% each x2): Throughout the semester, students will complete two short papers (1-2 pages). Students must pick one argument from a list of 3-4 to summarize. The point of this assignment is to practice picking out the premises (both explicit and implicit) and conclusion of an argument, as well as explaining the logical flow. Summarizing an argument charitably is an important philosophical skill, and doing well on these assignments will ultimately help you get practice for writing papers.

Argument Summary 1

Assigned: Friday, September 8

Due: Monday, September 18

Argument Summary 2

Assigned: Wednesday, November 1

Due: Friday, November 10

Short Paper (15%): Students will choose one prompt from a list of 4 questions pertaining to metaphysics and write a short paper (3-4 pages) responding to it. We will discuss how to write a philosophy paper in more detail closer to the due date, but briefly, about half of the short paper should be a summary of the relevant argument, and the other half should be your critical evaluation of the argument.

Assigned: Friday, October 6

Due: Friday, October 27

Longer Paper (25%): Students will choose one prompt from a list of 4 questions pertaining to epistemology and write a longer paper (6-7 pages) responding to it. Roughly 1/3 of the paper should summarize the relevant argument, 1/3 should critically evaluate it, and the final 1/3 should develop objections and replies to the main response.

Assigned: Wednesday, November 8

Due: Friday, December 1

Tests (20% each x2): There will be two tests for this class—one at the end of the metaphysics unit and one at the end of the epistemology unit. The tests will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions. Practice tests will be posted in advance of the tests to help students prepare.

Test 1 (metaphysics): Wednesday, October 11

Test 2 (epistemology): Monday, December 11

There is no final exam for this class.

The short assignments and papers are to be submitted on Canvas by 5pm on the day they are due. Please do not write your name on anything you submit (including tests)—just your UT eid.

Late Assignments

Each student gets four “late days” to use however they like throughout the course. These allow you to turn in assignments late, without penalty, and without official documentation (e.g. doctor’s note) for up to a total of four days. For example, you could turn in one assignment four days late, without penalty, or you could turn in four assignments, each one day late, without penalty. One late day will excuse lateness up to 24 hours from when the assignment is due. Once your late days run out, late work will be accepted only in the event of a serious illness or unforeseen emergency, with proper documentation. It is my recommendation that you save your late days. You don’t need to tell me when you use a late day; I’ll keep track of your late days, and assume, unless you contact me, that if you turn in an assignment late, you are using a late day. The late days policy applies to the two argument summaries and two papers.

Tests are excluded from the “late days” policy. No late tests will be administered without a documented reason. Please contact me well in advance of the relevant test to make alternative arrangements.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory and will be taken in lecture. Each student gets four excused absences. Students who show a pattern of missing class beyond this (without a documented reason) will be demoted 1/3 of the letter grade earned on the assignments and tests.

Class Expectations

Plagiarism: Any assignment that exhibits plagiarism, a failure to cite sources, or any form of academic dishonesty whatsoever will be given an automatic failing grade and the student will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students. Students who are uncertain as to what constitutes academic dishonesty are encouraged to meet with me. See also: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism/index.html>

Readings: Students are expected to come to class having completed the readings for each session.

Slides: Prior to each class, the slides for the upcoming class will be made available on the Canvas page. Some key words will be missing from the slides, with the expectation that you will fill them in during the lecture. While the central arguments will be summarized on the slides, they are not exhaustive and you will be expected to take additional notes on the readings and lecture material independently.

In-class Etiquette: Research shows that taking handwritten notes is more effective, so this is my recommendation. However, to accommodate different learning styles, students are permitted to have laptops in class for notetaking purposes only. Note that if you use your laptop for purposes other than notetaking, you are not only distracting yourself from the lecture, but you’re also distracting your classmates. Please make sure your phone is on silent and put away.

Disagreement is a part of philosophy, but so is being respectful of your peers. I will do my best to foster a friendly and inclusive learning environment, and I encourage students to approach one another with patience, kindness, and a collaborative spirit, both in and outside of the classroom. Study groups are a great idea.

Special Accommodations

Accommodations need to be formally approved by the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Students with accommodations will need to provide a letter of verification from the SSD. I also encourage students to meet with me the first week of class to discuss what I can do to ensure that their learning needs are met throughout the semester. To contact SSD, see <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/accommodations-and-services>

Contact

Students must have an updated email address in UTDirect. Class announcements will be made on the Canvas page (go to <http://canvas.utexas.edu> and log in)

I am happy to set up appointments and answer questions about basic course mechanics via email but please avoid emailing me substantive questions about the material. For these, come to office hours, or better yet, bring them to class with you. I will try to respond to emails within 48 hours of receiving them. I will not respond to questions about assignments that are emailed fewer than 24 hours before they are due. This is to encourage you to start working on your assignments well in advance.

Reading Schedule

* = optional reading

Week	Date	Topic	Reading
1. Introduction & Background	W 8/30 F 9/1	Introduction & Logic Primer Logic Primer (continued)	* Ney, <i>Logic for Metaphysics</i> (pg. 1-13)
2. Universals & Particulars I	M 9/4 W 9/6 F 9/8	<i>Labour Day (no class)</i> Universals & Particulars Nominalism & Realism	no reading Lowe, pg. 347-353 Lowe, pg. 353-360
3. Universals & Particulars II	M 9/11 W 9/13 F 9/15	Trope Theory Fictionalism Concrete vs. Abstract	Loux, Chapter 2 (pg. 71-79) Loux, Chapter 2 (pg. 79-82) Lowe, pg. 366-370
4. Universals & Particulars III	M 9/18 W 9/20 F 9/22	Substratum and Bundle Theories ** Argument Summary 1 Due** Problems with Bundle Theory Substratum Theory & Problems	Loux, Chapter 3 (pg. 84-92) (same as 9/18) Loux, Chapter 3 (pg. 101-117)
5. Time	M 9/25 W 9/27 F 9/29	Time Time Time	Carroll/Markosian, <i>Time</i> (pg. 159-183) (same as 9/25) (same as 9/25)
6. Causation	M 10/2 W 10/4 F 10/6	Causation Causation Causation	Carroll/Markosian, <i>Causation</i> (pg. 20-45) (same as 10/2) (same as 10/2)

7.	M 10/9 W 10/11 F 10/13	Review **Test 1** No Class – work on papers	no reading
8. Propositions, etc.	M 10/16 W 10/18 F 10/20	Propositions Facts, States of Affairs, and Events Facts, States of Affairs, and Events	Loux, Chapter 4 (pg. 121-130) Loux, Chapter 4 (pg. 142-150) (same as 10/18)
9. Skepticism & Traditional Responses I	M 10/23 W 10/25 F 10/27	Arguments for Skepticism Knowledge as Justified True Belief Justification: Foundationalism **Short Papers Due**	Zagzebski, pg. 25-32 & 38-44 no reading Sosa, <i>The Raft and the Pyramid</i>
10. Traditional Responses to Skepticism II	M 10/30 W 11/1 F 11/3	Justification: Coherentism Correspondence Theories of Truth Coherence Theories of Truth	(same as 10/27) Russell, <i>Problems of Philosophy</i> (ch. 12) (same as 11/1)
11. Rejecting the Skeptical Challenge	M 11/6 W 11/8 F 11/10	Against Justified True Belief Against Justified True Belief Review **Argument Summary 2 Due**	Gettier, <i>Is Knowledge Justified True Belief?</i> (same as 11/15) no reading
12. Responses to Skepticism from Epistemic Externalism	M 11/13 W 11/15 F 11/17	Assessing Epistemic Externalism Assessing Epistemic Externalism Assessing Epistemic Externalism	Goldman, <i>What Is Justified Belief?</i> (same as 11/13) (same as 11/13)
13. Thanksgiving Break			
14. Semantic Externalism	M 11/27 W 11/29 F 12/1	Knowledge as Tracking Knowledge as Tracking Knowledge as Tracking **Longer Papers Due**	Nozick, <i>Knowledge and Skepticism</i> (same as 11/27) (same as 11/27)
15. Contextualism	M 12/4 W 12/6 F 12/8	Contextualism Contextualism Review	Lewis, <i>Elusive Knowledge</i> (same as 12/4) no reading
16. Final Test	M 12/11	*Test 2*	