**Phil 220: Theory of knowledge**

Instructor: David Sorensen

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Office hours: Skype: Fridays 11-12am, On campus, by appointment

Meeting time: M/W, 1:10-2:20  
Meeting place: Scott Hall (SC), Room 221

This course will be a comprehensive introduction to epistemology. Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that investigates the nature of knowledge, justification, understanding, and other related concepts. Throughout the course, we will read and discuss a wide range of essays, both historical and contemporary. Here are some of the questions that we will raise and try to answer:

* Can we know anything? If knowledge is possible, are there any limitations to what we can know?
* How do we know that the world, as it appears to us, reflects reality rather than some illusion (e.g. the Matrix)?
* Can we know that a world external to our own minds exists, or are we just limited to knowledge of our own mental states (e.g. beliefs, desires, perceptions)?
* What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for having knowledge?
* When are laypeople justified in accepting the testimony of experts? Which experts should we trust?
* Can we know whether God exists?
* Is moral knowledge possible? If so, how are moral beliefs justified? Are they justified on the basis of consensus, authority, or intuition?

**Course Requirements**

**1.** Course readings:

**(a)** Textbooks:

1) Epistemology: Contemporary readings (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), ed. Michael Huemer

2) Epistemology: A contemporary introduction to theory of knowledge, Third edition (Routledge, 2010): By Robert Audi

**(b)** Supplementary readings available on Canvas (go to “pages” and then “readings and homework”, or visit the “Files” section)

**1)** You are expected to read the assigned articles and chapters **before** the class session the readings are scheduled for. However, I recommend doing the readings both before and after the class session, as the material may at times be difficult, or unclear the first time reading it. After lecture and in-class discussions, the material should be much easier to understand. The tests will assume that you have understood the readings. If you do not understand them, please send me an email or schedule an appointment with me during office hours.

**(c)** Powerpoints will be made available on Canvas (typically) the day before class. I recommend skimming the slides before class and carefully reviewing them before exams.

**2.** Course evaluation:

**(a)** Exams: There will be one midterm comprised of multiple choice, true or false, short answer, and essay questions.

**(b)** Homework assignments: Canvas quizzes (based on lecture and readings), reading questions, short writing assignments, discussion posts

**(c)** Paper: There will be one (6-8 page double spaced) paper due at the end of the semester. The paper will be an argumentative essay where you will defend and/or criticize a specific epistemological thesis.

**Grade breakdown:**  
Homework: 25%  
Midterm: 25%  
Final paper: 25%

Final exam: 25%

**Expectations of students:**

Students are expected to carefully read the syllabus, regularly attend class, do the readings, keep notes, and complete all course assignments. Students should also regularly check your email (every day), and log onto Canvas to check for course updates or revised deadlines. If any problems arise, you should contact me ASAP.

**Attendance policy:**

Attendance will be taken daily, but I will not count it towards your grade. However, it is in your best interest to attend every class.

**Classroom conduct:**

1. Please show up on time. I will not repeat information for those who are late.
2. Please raise your hands if you’d like to contribute to the discussion or have questions/comments
3. No talking over other students
4. Discussion will consist of comments, questions, and objections, not speeches
5. Respect other students, even if you disagree with their views
6. Be mindful of how your comments may affect others
7. Don’t play on your phone or disrupt the class

Policy on electronic devices: Laptops will be permitted only for notetaking or reading course materials (e.g. assigned readings, syllabus). Phones may be used for research purposes when permission is granted.

**Unexplained absences and late work:**

If you are unable to make it to the midterm or final exam, you need to let me know in advance.

For example, if you do not show up for the midterm, and then email me two weeks later asking to make it up, I will probably not allow you to make it up. Similarly, a failure to submit the final paper on time, without contacting me, will likely result in an automatic “F” for that assignment.

**Detailed schedule of topics/readings (tentative)**

**A**= Audi textbook  
**H**= Huemer anthology

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| Date | **Topic** | **Readings(s)** |
| 9/4 | Course introduction | Syllabus |
| 9/9 | Philosophy: key terms and methods | Introduction (A) [Pryor articles](http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/vocab/index.html) (E) |
| 9/11 | Meditations I and II | Descartes (H) |
| 9/16 | Perception: Indirect realism | Ch 2: Pgs. 38-54 (A)  John Locke (H) |
| 9/18 | Perception: Idealism and Skepticism | Berkeley (H)  Hume (H) |
| 9/23 | Perception: Sense Data Theory | Pgs. 32-46 (A) Russell (H) Recommended: SEP article on Sense Data |
| 9/25 | Perception: Direct Realism | Reid (H)  Austin (H) |
| 9/30 | Memory | Ch. 3 (A)  Russell (H) |
| 10/2 | Rationalism | Ch. 4 91-103 (A) Kant (H)  Russell (H) |
| 10/7 | Empiricism | Ch. 4 103-125 (A)  Ayer (H) |
| 10/9 | Midterm exam |  |
| 10/14 | Testimony | Ch. 5 (A) Locke (H)  Hume (H) |
| 10/16 | Testimony | Reid (H)  Coady (H) |
| 10/21 | Social epistemology: Expert Testimony and Disagreement | Goldman (E)  Elga (E) |
| 10/23 | Skepticism about induction | Hume (H) Russell (E) |
| 10/28 | Responses to Hume on induction | Goodman (H)  Foster (H) |
| 10/30 | Epistemic regress problem | Ch. 9: 184-193 (A) Sextus Empiricus (H) Oakley (H) |
| 11/4 | Coherentism and Foundationalism | Ch. 9: 194-213 (A)  Bonjour (H) Alston (H) |
| 11/6 | Analysis of knowledge | Ch. 8: 243-248 (A) Ayer (H) Gettier (H) |
| 11/11 | Responses to Gettier I | Lehrer and Paxon (H) Clark (H), Goldman (H) |
| 11/13 | Virtue epistemology | TBA |
| 11/18 | Skepticism | Descartes (H) Bostrom (E)  Ch. 13: 333-343 (A) |
| 11/20 | Skepticism II | Dretske (H) Klein (H) |
| 11/25 | Skepticism III: Problem of the Criterion | Ch. 14 (recommended)  Chisholm (H)  Moore (H) |
| 12/2 | Skepticism IV | Ch. 5 Skepticism and the Veil of Perception (E) |
| 12/4 | Scientific knowledge | Ch. 12: 298-208 (A) |
| 12/9 | Religious knowledge | Excerpts from “Knowledge of God”: Tooley and Plantinga (E) |
| 12/11 | Moral knowledge | Ch. 11: 308-319 (A)  Ethical Intuitionism: Ch. 5 (E) |

**Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy**: *Principles of academic integrity require that every Rutgers University student:*

* *properly acknowledge and cite all use of the ideas, results, or words of others*
* *properly acknowledge all contributors to a given piece of work*
* *make sure that all work submitted as his or her own in a course or other academic activity is produced without the aid of unsanctioned materials or unsanctioned collaboration*
* *obtain all data or results by ethical means and report them accurately without suppressing any results inconsistent with his or her interpretation or conclusions*
* *treat all other students in an ethical manner, respecting their integrity and right to pursue their educational goals without interference. This requires that a student neither facilitate academic dishonesty by others nor obstruct their academic progress*
* *uphold the canons of the ethical or professional code of the profession for which he or she is preparing.*

*Adherence to these principles is necessary in order to insure that:*

* *everyone is given proper credit for his or her ideas, words, results, and other scholarly accomplishments*
* *all student work is fairly evaluated and no student has an inappropriate advantage over others*
* *the academic and ethical development of all students is fostered*
* *the reputation of the University for integrity in its teaching, research, and scholarship is maintained and enhanced.*

*Failure to uphold these principles of academic integrity threatens both the reputation of the University and the value of the degrees awarded to its students. Every member of the University community therefore bears a responsibility for ensuring that the highest standards of academic integrity are upheld.*

**Disability services:** The Office of Disability Services works with students with a documented disability to determine the eligibility of reasonable accommodations, facilitates and coordinates those accommodations when applicable, and lastly engages with the Rutgers community at large to provide and connect students to appropriate resources (e-mail: https://ods.rutgers.edu/, phone: (848) 445-6800). Students with disabilities requesting accommodations must follow the procedures outlined at https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/applying-for-services. Please give your letter of accommodation to me as soon as possible, and we will coordinate the accommodations privately.