

Phil 318: Theory of knowledge

Instructor: David Sorensen

Email: dsorensen@drew.edu

Dates: 8/29-12/9

Meeting time: Wednesday, 7:05-9:35pm

Meeting place: Brothers College 103

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11-12pm

Office Location: S.W. Bowne, Room 112

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 mind exists, or are we just limited to knowledge of our own mental states?
- ❖ 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? Could they be justified on the basis of consensus, authority, or rational intuition?

Course Requirements

1. Course readings:

(a) Required Textbook:

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

(b) Supplementary readings available on Canvas

Reading Guidelines: 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.

2. Course evaluation:

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

(b) Papers: There will be two papers assigned. The first will take the form of a short dialogue. There will also be one long (7-10 page double spaced) paper due at the end of the semester. This paper will be an argumentative essay where you will defend and/or criticize a specific thesis. A list of suitable topics will be provided.

Assignment Grade Breakdown:

Short Dialogue: (3-4 pages): 20%

Midterm Exam: 25%

Argumentative Essay: (7-10 pages): 30%

Final exam: 25%

Grading Scale:

A 93-100

A- 90-92

B+ 87-89

B 83-86

B- 80-82

C+ 77-79

C 73-76

C- 70-72

D+ 67-69

D 65-66

F Below 65

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 **Moodle** 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 to both understand the readings and to do well on the exams.

Classroom conduct:

- 1) Please show up on time.
- 2) Please raise your hands if you'd like to contribute to the discussion or have questions/comments
- 3) No talking over others
- 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 should not be used.

Unexplained absences and missing assignments:

Under most circumstances, if you do not report to me, in advance, that you will be absent or unable to submit an assignment on time, then you will not receive full credit. Assignments and exams that are not complete by December 10th will receive zeros.

How to do well in the course:

- 1) **Take the readings seriously:** There will be lots of readings assigned in this course, some of which will be quite difficult. It is best to complete all the readings *before* attending the lecture for which they are assigned. Reading philosophy can be difficult, requiring much more time and focus than readings in other fields and genres. As a philosopher, you are also not just aiming to understand what the author is saying, but whether their claims are true. Thus, a special kind of *active* reading is required to get the most out of the assigned readings. I've provided a Canvas module with some tips and articles on active reading (in general) and also how to read philosophical papers.
- 2) **Be prepared with questions and comments**
- 3) **Regularly check Canvas** (at least once every 48 hours) for course updates, assignments, and newly added powerpoints
- 4) **Attend office hours:** If questions remain after class, or some questions were not adequately addressed, office hours allow students to have continued and more focused conversations about the course content. You do not even have to come to office hours prepared with a list of questions or comments about the course. I am happy to talk with you about any topics of interest in philosophy, science, or politics.
- 5) **Study the sample paper and complete the optional writing and reading module**

Detailed schedule of topics/readings (tentative)

H= Huemer anthology

E= Electronic reading available on **Moodle**

Date	Topics	Readings(s)
8/30	Course introduction	Syllabus
	Philosophy: key terms and methods	Introduction (A) Pryor articles (E)
9/6	Meditations I and II	Descartes (H)
	Perception: Indirect realism	John Locke (H)
9/13	Perception: Idealism and Skepticism	Berkeley (H) Hume (H)
9/20	Perception: Sense Data Theory	Russell (H)
	Perception: Direct Realism	Reid (H)
9/26	Rationalism	Kant (H) Russell (H)
	Empiricism	Ayer (H)
10/4	Midterm exam Dialogue Due October 9th	
10/11	Testimony	Locke (H) Hume (H)
		Goldman (E) Recommended: Huemer (E)
10/18	Social Epistemology: Peer Disagreement and Conspiracy Theories	Elga (E) Keeley (E)
10/25	Skepticism about induction	Hume (H)

	Responses to Hume on induction	Edwards (H) Foster (H)
11/1	The epistemic regress problem	Sextus Empiricus (H)
	Coherentism	Bonjour (H)
	Foundationalism	Alston (H)
11/7	The analysis of knowledge	Gettier (H)
	Responses to Gettier I	Lehrer and Paxon (H) Clark (H), Recommended: Goldman (H)
11/14	Skepticism	Descartes: Meditations III & VI (E)
		Ch. 5 from Skepticism and the Veil of Perception Huemer (E)
11/22	Skepticism II: The Problem of the Criterion	Chisholm (H) Moore (H)
	Peer Review Session	
11/29	Religious knowledge	Is belief in God properly basic? Plantinga (E) Darwin and the problem of natural nonbelief (E)
12/6	Moral knowledge	Ch. 11: 308-319 (A) Ethical Intuitionism: Ch. 5 (E) <i>The denial of moral knowledge</i> , Joyce (E)
12/14	Final Exam (7:30-10:00pm)	

Academic Accommodations Statement

Your experience in this class is important to me. If you have already established accommodations with the Office of Accessibility Resources (OAR), please provide me with a copy of your accommodation letter at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course.

If you have not yet established services through the Office of Accessibility Resources (OAR), but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but not limited to; mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are encouraged to contact OAR. OAR offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions.

Although a disclosure may take place at any time during the semester, students are encouraged to do so early in the semester, because, in general, accommodations are not implemented retroactively.

Students are eligible for accommodations for online courses.

Office of Accessibility Resources contact information: Director-Dana Giroux Location-Brothers College, Room 119B Phone: 973-408-3962 Email: dgiroux@drew.edu, disabilityserv@drew.edu

Academic Integrity Policy Statement

All students are required to uphold the highest academic standards. Any case of academic dishonesty will be dealt with according to the guidelines and procedures outlined in Drew University's [Standards of Academic Integrity: Guidelines and Procedures](#), which is located in the academic policies section of Drew's course catalog.

Absence Policy Statement

In addition to the course attendance policy, students should be aware of their rights and responsibilities regarding absences for legitimate reasons as described in the [Absence Policy: Student Rights and Responsibilities](#), which is located in the Academic Policy section of Drew's course catalog under Attendance.

COVID-19 Health & Safety Protocols

Masks will **not** be required in the classroom. If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms you should contact Health Services. If you test positive for COVID-19 at any point during the semester, including through an off-campus or at-home test, you must notify Health Services. They will provide support and isolation instructions, as per current guidelines and policies, and your professors will be notified of the date you may return to class. If you are a close contact you should continue to attend classes. Students who are required by Drew policy to isolate will not be penalized for their absence as long as they have notified Health Services. If you are required to isolate and it may affect your coursework or attendance, please notify those instructors right away in case there is a delay in the official notification. To the extent possible, students should submit assignments electronically, stay up to date with assignments, and

request notes from classmates. Students experiencing extended illnesses (i.e., greater than one week), due to the coronavirus, or other medical conditions, should contact the Associate Provost at cae-admin@drew.edu to discuss the best course of action. For more information on Drew's covid policies, visit [Drew's Health Services](#).

Affordable Textbook Resources

The [Gabriella D. Ramirez Textbook Lending Library](#), housed in the Drew University Library, is a student-developed resource to assist with textbook access for students who have financial constraints. For information regarding eligibility status, please review the request form located on the Lending Library [webpage](#). For questions, please contact the University Library at library@drew.edu.

Final Exam Policy Statement

The [final exam schedule](#) is visible on the Registrar's website by the beginning of each semester. Changes can occur, so check for updates prior to the start of the exam period. Students are expected to schedule travel plans for AFTER their final exams. If extenuating circumstances occur, students may submit a Final Exam Reschedule request for review by the Associate Provost. Students may not negotiate a make-up date directly with the course instructor. The deadline to submit a reschedule request is the last day of classes for the term. The following circumstances apply for requesting to reschedule an exam:

1. Two final exams scheduled at the same time, serious illness, or personal emergency (note that the student is required to present documentation to validate).
2. Three finals are scheduled in one calendar day: one of the exams should be rescheduled at the convenience of the instructor and the student.