

PHIL 383: Knowledge and Reality
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
Spring 2016

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Time: M/W 1-4
Location: MH 1427
Office Hours: M 4-6pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will be an intermediate level introduction to metaphysics and epistemology. Each meeting we explore a different core idea. The first two sessions, on logic and probability, provide the analytic foundation for the rest of the material. We then have four sessions in metaphysics (time, identity, causation, and consciousness) followed by four sessions in epistemology (perception, belief, justification, and skepticism). The last two sessions apply what we have learned to some very big questions (the rationality of faith) and some very important social questions (the nature of blame and responsibility).

The goal of the course is to sharpen your tools for philosophical analysis by engaging with some of the most interesting ideas in metaphysics and epistemology. I hope (and expect) that this will be useful both in your future coursework and outside the university. In order to prepare you to engage with and understand these papers, the lectures will cover a range of related tools, including probabilistic reasoning, the logic of conditionals, Bayesian epistemology, and expected utility theory.

There is an advisory prerequisite of one previous course in philosophy. If you do not meet this requirement, the first two sessions will be especially valuable to you.

MATERIALS

I will post all readings to the Canvas site. No textbook is required. Should you want additional background, I recommend Feldman (2003): *Epistemology*. It is concise and accessible.

ASSIGNMENTS

- Participation (15%),
- Two homework assignments (20%), due on 5/25 and 6/13.
- Two Quizzes (15%), due on 5/9 and 5/16.
- Short paper (20%), (1600 words) due 6/8.
- Final exam (30%), in class (2 hours) on 6/20.

SCHEDULE

- 5/4 **Introduction**
Required. Hacking (2001): *Probability and Inductive Logic*, Chapter 1
 Skyrms (1999): *Choice and Chance*, 4th ed., Chapter 1

Optional. [The Pink Guide to Philosophy](#), de Bres
 [Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper](#), Pryor
- 5/9 **Probability**
Required. Hacking (2001): *Probability and Inductive Logic*, Chapter 6

Optional. Ross (2010): *A First Course in Probability*, 2.1-2.3, 3.1-3.3
 Fermat-Pascal Correspondence
 Ekert (2008): Complex and Unpredictable Cardano
- 5/16 **Time**
Required. Lewis (1976): “The Paradoxes of Time Travel”

Optional. Maudlin (2002): “Remarks on the Passage of Time”
 Heinlein (1959): “All You Zombies”

 Futurama, “Roswell That Ends Well”
- 5/11 **Identity**
Required. Williams (1975): “The Self and the Future”
 Parfit (1984): *Reasons and Persons*, Chapter 10

Optional. Lewis (1976): “Survival and Identity”
 Nguyen (2012): “Keeler’s Theorem”

 Futurama, “The Prisoner of Benda”
- 5/18 **Causation**
Required. Lewis (1986): “Causation”
 Paul (2000): “Aspect Causation”
- 5/23 **Consciousness**
Required. Nagel (1974): “What is it Like to Be a Bat?”
 Churchland (1989): *A Neurocomputational Perspective*, 3.3-4, 4

 Ex Machina
- 5/25 **Perception**
Required. Siegel (2016): “How is Wishful Seeing Like Wishful Thinking?”
- 5/30 **Memorial Day**
No Class.
- 6/1 **Belief**
Required. Ramsey (1926): “Truth and Probability” (Excerpts)
- 6/6 **Alief**
Required. Gendler (2008): “Alief and Belief”
- 6/8 **Skepticism**
Required. Bostrom (2003): “Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?”

 The Matrix
- 6/13 **Faith**
Required. Buchak (2011): “Can it be Rational to Have Faith?”
- 6/15 **Blame**
Required. Thomson (1986): “Liability and Individualized Evidence”
- 6/20 **Final Exam**

ATTENDANCE AND READING

Engaged participation is an important component of this class and I expect everyone to contribute meaningfully to class discussion. This does not mean I will reward those who speak most, however. And it does not mean you cannot do well on the participation component if you're less comfortable speaking up. Learning to articulate your thoughts in a professional, courteous and persuasive manner is an invaluable skill and a goal of this course is to improve your ability to do this.

While the readings are not long, they can be very difficult. As a result, you should plan to spend a fairly significant amount of time reading and re-reading the material.

SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS AND LATE POLICY

All papers must be submitted electronically – in Word or PDF format – no later than 11:59PM on the day they are due.

Homework should be submitted in hard-copy in class on the day on which it is due.

Quizzes will be on Canvas.

If you anticipate needing more time on an assignment, you should contact me in advance. Otherwise, late assignments will be penalized by one-third of a letter grade for each day they are late.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you think you need accommodation for a disability, please let me know as early as possible. As soon as you make me aware of your needs, we can work with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to help us determine appropriate accommodations. SSD (734.763.3000, ssd.umich.edu) recommends accommodation through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide through a VISA form will be treated as private and confidential.

PLAGIARISM

Written work submitted for a grade in this course must be your own. You are responsible for making sure that none of your work is plagiarized. You should cite the sources you rely on, and err on the side of caution where necessary. Feel free to consult me if you are not sure of the appropriate format for quotations or references.

You should also be familiar with the academic integrity policies of the College of Literature, Science & the Arts at the University of Michigan, available [here](#). Violations of these policies will be reported to the Office of the Assistant Dean for Student Academic Affairs.