

Phil 1111: Can You Believe It?
Cornell University
Spring '17

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Course Description

You probably take yourself to know a few things, like what day it is, what policy should be passed, basic arithmetic, etc. But how? What justifies your beliefs? In this introductory epistemology course students will grapple with a variety of answers to these questions, and apply their findings to a range of pressing issues. Topics include the ethics of belief, theories of what counts as evidence, skepticism, and implicit bias.

Rationale

This is a course in how to write philosophy. Throughout the course you will complete assignments, both in class and at home, that develop philosophical writing skills. Learning to write philosophy requires reading and understanding philosophy. Conversely, reading and understanding philosophy requires learning to reproduce arguments and theories in writing. You will develop these interdependent skills through group work, short in-class assignments, and essays completed in stages.

Writing instruction will be broken into two categories. Some assignments will focus on developing content. To develop the content of your essays, you will learn to identify, reproduce, and analyze the structures of arguments. Other writing assignments will improve your grammar and style.

Learning Outcomes

1. Produce philosophical writing that meets the field of philosophy's expectations regarding structure, argumentation, and evidence.
2. Produce writing that is based on a careful analysis of the text, implementing logical tools presented early in the semester.
3. Handle secondary sources appropriately, properly citing in MLA format.
4. Develop effective preparatory writing strategies such as flow charts, outlining, drafting, and collaboration.

Evaluation

- *Writing Assignments: 80%*
You will complete five major writing assignments for this course, often in stages. The first assignment will be short, and worth 7% of your grade. The second assignment will be a bit longer, worth 13% of your grade. Each of the final three assignments will be a 5-7 page argumentative paper, worth 20% apiece.
- *Participation: 20%*
Your participation grade will be determined by the extent to which you are actively engaged in the course. Brief written assignments between essays will count towards your participation grade, as will your contributions to class discussion.

Grading Policies

1. Extensions can be granted on papers, but you need to talk to me a few days in advance. If you do not make arrangements beforehand, late papers will be downgraded by 1/3 letter grade per day.
2. To pass this class, you must complete all five major writing assignments.
3. Missing class without an excuse (e.g., a doctor's note) will lower your participation grade.

Notes on Academic Integrity

1. Each student in this course is required to adhere to Cornell's Academic Integrity Code: <http://cuinfo.cornell.edu/aic.cfm>. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the Code, and what constitutes a violation of it. All work submitted must be the student's own, and all sources must be properly cited.
2. Each of the five major assignments will be submitted to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. Further, all papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of Turnitin.com service is subject to the usage policy posted on the Turnitin.com site.
3. Students are not permitted to buy or sell any course materials, online or otherwise. This includes handouts, paper topics, homework questions, etc. Such behavior constitutes academic misconduct.

Course Materials

Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace, 11th Edition, by Williams and Bizup (henceforth 'W&B')

Other readings will be available through the Blackboard site.

Tentative Schedule of Readings

January 26

No reading

1 The Dangers of Belief

January 31

W&B, "Correctness"

Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"

February 2

James, "The Will to Believe"

Trial Assignment Due

February 7

W&B "Using Sources"

Zagzebski, "Epistemic Value and What We Care About"

2 The Problem of Skepticism

February 9

Descartes, *Meditations* 1 and 2

Pollock, "Brain in a Vat"

Optional: Stroud, "The Problem of the External World"

February 14

W&B "Concision"

Cohen, "Contextualism and Skepticism"

February 16

Chalmers, “The Matrix as Metaphysics”

First stage of first assignment due

February 21

No class

February 23

W&B “Cohesion and Coherence”

First Essay Due Friday, February 24th

3 Is Justification Internal?

February 28

Greco, “Justification Is Not Internal”

March 2

Feldman, “Justification Is Internal”

4 Pyrrhonian Skepticism & the Structure of Justification

March 7

W&B “Actions”

Sextus Empiricus, selection

Zagzebski, “The First Stage of the Skeptical Attack: The Infinite Regress of Reasons”

March 9

BonJour, “Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?”

March 14

W&B “Characters”

Alston, “What’s Wrong With Immediate Knowledge?”

Optional: Haack, “A Foundherentist Theory of Empirical Justification”

March 16

Review

Bring outline of second essay to class

5 Naturalizing Knowledge

March 21

W&B “Motivation”

Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized”

March 23

Kim, “What is Naturalized Epistemology?”

Second Essay Due In Class (bring paper copy)

March 28

Kornblith, “The Metaphysical Status of Knowledge”

6 Feminist Epistemology and Objectivity

March 30

Code, “Experience, Knowledge, and Responsibility”

April 4

Spring break

April 6

Spring break

April 11

Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and A Defense”, pages 51-58

April 13

Anderson, “Feminist Epistemology: An Interpretation and A Defense”, finish

April 18

Martin, “The Egg and the Sperm”

7 Fake News, Fraudulent Science

April 20

Discussion of examples of “fake news”

W&B “Shape”

Third essay due Friday, April 21, 6pm

April 25

Hardwig, “The Role of Trust in Knowledge”

April 27

Fricker, “Against Gullibility”

8 Skepticism and Implicit Bias

May 2

Mooney, “The Science of Why Cops Shoot Young Black Men”

Singal, “Psychology’s Favorite Tool for Measuring Racism Isn’t Up to the Job”

Optional:

Take the Weapons Implicit Association Test (Weapons IAT) (link on BB)

Devlin, “AI programs exhibit racial and gender biases, research reveals”

May 4

Saul, “Scepticism and Implicit Bias”

May 9

W&B “Elegance”

Antony, “Bias: Friend or Foe? Reflections on Saulish Skepticism”