

PHL 232: Knowledge and Reality

University of Toronto

Summer 2014

Course Instructors:

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Course Description

This course provides an introduction to two of the most central and important branches of contemporary philosophical inquiry: epistemology and metaphysics. Epistemology concerns the nature of knowledge, while metaphysics asks after the nature of reality. We cover a lot of ground in this course, and the material we cover is very difficult, so students should expect to work hard. Topics to be covered include: the structure of justification, testimonial knowledge, the nature of causation, and McTaggart's infamous argument for the non-existence of time.

Course Reading

There is no required textbook for this course. Weekly readings will be made available on Blackboard, and lecture handouts will be distributed in class.

Evaluation

Grading: We adhere to a blind grading policy. So when you submit your assignments, please only include your student number.

1. Short Papers: $2 \times 15\%$. Due: May 30th and June 11th

- *Instructions:* You will be required to write two short papers. They involve the close reading and analysis of a passage from one of the readings. We'll send out a list of passages, along with more detailed instructions, well before the assignments are due. Each paper must be no more than 600 words. Your TA has been instructed to penalize anyone who goes over the word limit. Submit

these papers on Blackboard before 11:59 p.m. (EDT) on the respective due dates. *NOTE*: all papers must be submitted in .doc format.

- *Feedback*: These papers are meant to teach you the skills you will need to write the term paper, so your TA has been instructed to provide a higher than usual number of comments. Take this feedback seriously.
- *Evaluation*: While you will receive a grade for both papers, only the *higher* grade will count. *Caveat*: if you submit only one paper, that paper's grade will only be weighted as 15% rather than 30% of your final grade (the same will happen if you submit both papers, but the lower one receives a failing grade). So submit and pass both papers.

2. Term Paper: 30%. Due June 20th

- *Instructions*: we will distribute topics for the final paper in the middle of term. These papers must be no longer than 1500 words. Anything longer will be penalised. Submit these papers on Blackboard before 11:59 p.m. (EDT) on June 20th. *NOTE*: all papers must be submitted in .doc format.

3. Final Examination: 30% Date and Location: TBA

- The final exam is cumulative and will take place during the official exam period. It is a two hour exam, and will be a mix of fill-in-the-black and short answer questions. Only material covered in lecture will be examinable.

4. Tutorial Attendance and Participation: 10%

- Tutorials are an essential component of this course. They are where you will be taught the chunks of formal logic presupposed by many of the readings in this course, and are the main place (other than office hours) where students can ask questions about course material.
- Tutorials will be held every Wednesday in *WE 74*. Thus the first tutorial will be held on May 14th. Students will be assigned either the 5-6 p.m. or the 8-9 p.m. tutorial.

Course Schedule¹

- May 12. Course Introduction and the Sceptical Argument

Reading: Logic Handout §§1-3 (on Blackboard); G.E. Moore, "Proof of an External World" (selection)

- May 14. Structure of Justification: Foundationalism and Coherentism

Reading: Ernest Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid"

- May 19. Victoria Day (no class)

- May 21. The Nature of Knowledge: Nozick on Knowledge

Reading: Logic Handout §§5-6; Robert Nozick, "Knowledge" (selection from his *Philosophical Explanations*)

- May 26. Sources of Justification: Internalism and Externalism

Reading: Logic Handout §6; Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"; Alvin Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?"; Declan Smithies*, "Moore's Paradox and the Accessibility of Justification"

¹*, indicates recommended reading. Unless otherwise noted, all other readings are required.

- May 28th. Context-Sensitivity: Contextualism

Reading: David Lewis, “Elusive Knowledge”; Keith DeRose, “Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions”; Jennifer Nagel*, “Knowledge Ascriptions and the Psychological Consequences of Changing Stakes”

- June 2. Varieties of Knowledge and Introduction to Metaphysics

Reading: Logic Handout §§4-5 & 7; Jennifer Lackey, “Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission”; Paul Benacerraf*, “Mathematical Truth”

- June 4. The Metaphysics of Causation I

Reading: David Lewis, “Causation”; David Lewis*, “Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow”

- June 9. The Metaphysics of Causation II

Reading: P.F. Strawson, “Causation and Explanation”; Sydney Shoemaker, “Causality and Properties”

- June 11. The Metaphysics of Time I

Reading: J.M.E. McTaggart, “The Unreality of Time”; J.J.C. Smart, “The Space-Time World”; Ned Markosian*, “Time”

- June 16. The Metaphysics of Time II

Reading: David Lewis, “The Paradoxes of Time Travel”; Dean Zimmerman, “The A-Theory of Time, The B-Theory of Time, and ‘Taking Tense Seriously’”

- June 18. Review

Course Business

1. *Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct.* The University of Toronto takes plagiarism (and academic misconduct more generally) very seriously. For a complete statement of the policies governing academic conduct, see the University’s *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters*. You are responsible for knowing what plagiarism is, and also for knowing the particular plagiarism penalties. Plagiarism includes (but is not limited to) the use of a thinker’s ideas or words without proper citation; the purchase of assignments; the use of internet resources without proper citation; and the submission of work written (in whole or in part) by another. Penalties for plagiarism range from a zero on the assignment to suspension from the University of Toronto. Furthermore, TAs in the Philosophy Department are known to be excellent detectors of plagiarism: *if you cheat, we will catch you*. So don’t do it.
2. *How to Avoid Plagiarising:* Most students plagiarise because they believe themselves to be without options. But no student will ever be without options in our course. If you find yourself in trouble, and tempted to cheat, contact your TA or one of the instructors *immediately*. If you haven’t *yet* cheated, a solution can always be found. In addition, the University of Toronto provides a host of resources designed to help students in academic need. All of the colleges have writing centres and friendly registrars, and the Philosophy Department has its own Essay Clinic (though you must book ahead). Students who wish to talk to someone may also contact the University’s Counselling & Psychological Services (CAPS).

3. *Late Penalties.* This will be a challenging and fast-paced course. It is highly recommended that you attend every class meeting and get your work in on time. Late penalties on assigned work are set at 1/3 of a letter grade per day, to a maximum of three days (this includes weekends/holidays), unless accompanied by a documented medical explanation or due to a family emergency. Any work outstanding beyond this point will receive a grade of 0.
4. *Your Course Contact.* Your primary contact person for this course is your T.A. You must use your 'utoronto' email account if you need to correspond with the instructors or your T.A. about this course. Course-related emails MUST have "PHL232" somewhere in the subject line. We will not answer emails that ask for information readily available on Blackboard or the course syllabus, so it is always a good idea to begin by checking there. We will also not answer emails that ask for information easily obtainable through regular class attendance. Lastly, we will not answer emails that ask substantive philosophical questions – those with such questions should bring them to office hours or to tutorial. We will respond to all other emails within two working days.
5. *Special Accommodations.* We are more than happy to assist with special accommodations for students registered with accessibility services. If you are registered with accessibility services, please don't hesitate to have your accessibility services representative get in touch with us and with your T.A.