

Philosophy 412: Epistemology

Fall 2023

Tue & Fri 12:10-1:30pm, Murray Hall 301

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Office hours: Tue & Fri 2:30-3:30pm and by appointment (office: Philosophy Department, 106 Somerset Avenue, 5th floor, Office 534)

Course description

The standard way of studying the ways in which a cognitive state amounts to knowledge is in terms of ‘epistemic justification’. The question we thereby formulate is this: in virtue of what are beliefs not just true but non-fortuitously true – i.e. ‘justified’? In this course we will first consolidate our concept of epistemic justification, then enrich our understanding of the conditions under which cognitive achievements occur by asking what other notions beyond belief and justification it might be useful to theorize about. One first question is what other epistemic goods exist beyond justification. Does experiencing a fact give us something that learning about it from testimony does not, for instance, even though both methods can epistemically justify? We might also ask what kinds of cognitive episodes deliver such different goods. Finally, we might ask how those different epistemic goods interact with, or matter for, other normative realms, such as the moral and the aesthetic.

Learning goals

- To develop an understanding of
 - the notion of epistemic justification
 - internalism and externalism about justification
 - epistemic values beyond justification
 - interactions between the epistemic and other normative realms (moral, aesthetic, practical)
- To develop the ability to critically read and respond to philosophical material, which is to say, to detect theses and arguments proposed by the authors and form our own, too.

Course requirements

Discussion board: 10%

We'll supplement in-class discussion with ten or so discussions on Canvas. A topic for discussion will be posted approximately each week, and you'll be required to contribute one comment (min. one sentence; max, one paragraph) within one week.

Presentation: 15%

Each class will begin with a ~15 min presentation by one student (or group of students, depending on class size) of the reading material. The presentation, meant to jumpstart the class, should focus on identifying the main thesis of the reading, as expressed in as few sentences as possible, and the author's main arguments to support that thesis; plus 2-3 questions and/or objections prompted by the reading. These should be presented in a short document/handout. The presenter will be challenged, at the end of the presentation, to name a random number in the range of the class roster and to respond to the question/objection/comment that the corresponding member of class will put to them, meaning that everyone should bring such a question, etc. prepared to class.

Midterm test: 15%

A short test on comprehension of materials read thus far in the course.

Midterm paper: 30%

The midterm paper (1,200 words max.) is an exercise in argument reconstruction. You can pick any paper you'd like from the course. The paper consists of three parts:

1. Lay out the paper's main argument (preferably, listing premises and conclusion).
2. Explain the context: why does this author want to argue for their argument's conclusion? What phenomenon do they think their view explains better than other views?
3. Offer an evaluation: is the argument valid/sound? Are there any unacknowledged/assumed premises that need stating?

Final project: 30%

- Option A: A 2,500-word max. paper arguing for a (positive or negative) thesis on your topic of choice.
- Or:
- Option B: A piece of philosophical but non-academic work (literary essay, podcast, short film, short story) that recognisably addresses a question related to the course material and defends an answer to it. If you choose this option, you've got to attach a short document with an argument defending that answer. If the project is audiovisual, it mustn't be longer than 7-9 min.

What's expected?

Quality-wise

Although presentations, written work and other formats all vary, when you're presenting a thesis and an argument for it, it is important that the thesis be clear and that the argument adequately support it. What 'clarity' and 'adequacy' amount to we will see throughout the course, but a useful rubric is this one, from the Rutgers Arts and Humanities Core Curriculum goals:

GOAL AHo - Student is able to... Examine critically philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production.			
OUTSTANDING	GOOD	SATISFACTORY	UNSATISFACTORY
Engages in sophisticated critical examination of philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production central to the course. Critically analyzes these philosophical or other theoretical issues and assesses the relative merits of each.	Engages in critical reading of philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production relevant to the course. Constructs persuasive arguments about these philosophical or other theoretical issues.	Satisfactorily describes philosophical and other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production through reliance on course materials. Draws some critical conclusions about these philosophical or other theoretical issues.	Fails to identify or engage philosophical or other theoretical issues concerning the nature of reality, human experience, knowledge, value, and/or cultural production. Fails to analyze or critique philosophical or theoretical issues; makes unsubstantiated assertions or substitutes opinion for analysis.

Quantity-wise

Please stick to word/time guidelines. Going over the limit will be penalised according to severity of excess: a few words/a minute is ok; 100 words or a couple of minutes is two percentage points off, etc.

A note on grades:

A weird fact about Rutgers: there are no '–' grades! The standard conversions from a 100-point scale are:

$$100 \geq A \geq 90 > B+ \geq 85 > B \geq 80 > C+ \geq 75 > C \geq 70 > D \geq 60 > F \geq 0$$

Extensions:

In case of extraordinary circumstances such as illness or family issues, extensions will be granted if requested 2-3 days before the due date.

Course schedule (subject to change)

1. September 5 Introduction
2. September 8 The structure of justification
Reading: Ernest Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid"
3. September 12 No class
4. September 15 The nature of knowledge
Reading: Robert Nozick, "Knowledge" (from *Philosophical Explanations*)

5. September 19 Scepticism
Reading: Robert Nozick, "Scepticism" (from *Philosophical Explanations*)
 6. September 22 Scepticism
Reading: James Conant, "Two Varieties of Skepticism" (sections I - VII)
 7. September 26 Sources of justification
Reading: Alvin Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?"
 8. September 29 Context sensitivity
Reading: David Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge"
 9. October 3 Morality and (assessment of) justification
Reading: Amia Srinivasan, "Radical externalism"
 10. October 6 Morality and (assessment of) justification
Reading: Zoë Johnson King, "Radical internalism"
 11. October 10 Pragmatic encroachment
Reading: Jeremy Fantl & Matthew McGrath, "Evidence, pragmatics, and justification"
 12. October 13 Moral encroachment
Reading: Sarah Moss, "Moral encroachment"
- Due: midterm paper & midterm test***
13. October 17 Aesthetic conflict
Reading: Zoe Jenkin, "Epistemic and aesthetic conflict"
 14. October 20 Different epistemic goods? Concepts
Reading: Elisabeth Camp, "Logical Concepts and Associative Characterizations"
 15. October 24 Different epistemic goods? Understanding
Reading: Paulina Sliwa, "Moral understanding as knowing right from wrong"
 16. October 27 Other epistemic goods? Perspectives
Reading: Elisabeth Camp, "Perspectives and Frames in Pursuit of Ultimate Understanding"

17. October 31 Other epistemic goods? Skills
Reading: Carlotta Pavese, “Skills as knowledge”
18. November 3 No class (details to follow)
19. November 7 Other epistemic goods? Certainty
Reading: Crispin Wright, “Scepticism, certainty, Moore and Wittgenstein”
20. November 10 Other epistemic goods? Appreciation
Reading: Errol Lord, “How To Learn about Aesthetics and Morality Through Acquaintance and Deference”
21. November 14 How do we get different epistemic goods? Consciousness
Reading: Uriah Kriegel, “Phenomenal Grounds of Epistemic Value”
22. November 17 How do we get different epistemic goods? Virtues
Reading: Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa, “Hybrid Virtue Epistemology and the A Priori”
23. November 21 How do we get different epistemic goods? Different representational media
Reading: Gabriel Greenberg, “The Iconic-Symbolic Spectrum”
24. November 24 Thanksgiving recess
25. November 28 Beyond knowledge? Ignorance
Reading: Anita Avramides, “Knowing and Acknowledging Others”
26. December 1 Beyond knowledge? Non-meaning
Reading: Ernie Lepore & Matthew Stone, “Against Metaphorical Meaning”
27. December 5 Beyond knowledge? “A maples terrain”
Reading: Carlos Manuel Álvarez, “How to Kill an Executioner”

Due: final project

Other business

Technology requirements

Readings, details of assignments, and forums will all be on Canvas. You just need internet access. (Please visit the [Rutgers Student Tech Guide](#) page for resources available to all students. If you do not have the appropriate technology for financial reasons, please email Dean of Students deanofstudents@echo.rutgers.edu for assistance. If you are facing other financial hardships, please visit the Office of Financial Aid at <https://financialaid.rutgers.edu/>.)

Academic integrity policy

You will need to sign the Rutgers Honor Pledge on every major assignment as follows: ‘On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this assignment.’

Rutgers University takes academic dishonesty very seriously. By enrolling in this course, you assume responsibility for familiarizing yourself with the Academic Integrity Policy and the possible penalties (including suspension and expulsion) for violating the policy. As per the policy, all suspected violations will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct. Academic dishonesty includes (but is not limited to):

- Cheating
- Plagiarism
- Aiding others in committing a violation or allowing others to use your work
- Failure to cite sources correctly
- Fabrication
- Using another person’s ideas or words without attribution—re-using a previous assignment
- Unauthorized collaboration
- Sabotaging another student’s work

If in doubt, please consult the instructor. Please review the [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

Self-reporting absence application

If you are experiencing symptoms of any transmittable disease, remain at home. Site for self-reporting absence application is here: <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>

Student-wellness services

Report a Bias Incident

If you experience or witness an act of bias or hate, report it to someone in authority. You may file a report online and you will be contacted within 24 hours. The bias reporting page is [here](#). [Click here to report a bias incident](#)

Bias is defined by the University as an act, verbal, written, physical, psychological, that threatens, or harms a person or group on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, ancestry, disability, marital status, civil union status, domestic partnership status, atypical heredity or cellular blood trait, military service or veteran status.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS)

(848) 932-7884 / 17 Senior Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901/
<http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/>

CAPS is a University mental health support service that includes counseling, alcohol and other drug assistance, and psychiatric services staffed by a team of professionals within Rutgers Health services to support students' efforts to succeed at Rutgers University. CAPS offers a variety of services that include: individual therapy, group therapy and workshops, crisis intervention, referral to specialists in the community, and consultation and collaboration with campus partners.

Crisis Intervention

<http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/crisis-intervention/>

Report a Concern

<http://health.rutgers.edu/do-something-to-help/>

Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance (VPVA)

(848) 932-1181 / 3 Bartlett Street, New Brunswick, NJ 08901 /
www.vpva.rutgers.edu/

The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance provides confidential crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for victims of sexual and relationship violence and stalking to students, staff and faculty. To reach staff during office hours when the university is open or to reach an advocate after hours, call 848-932-1181.

Disability Services

(848) 445-6800 / Lucy Stone Hall, Suite A145, Livingston Campus, 54 Joyce Kilmer Avenue, Piscataway, NJ 08854 / <https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation:

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines.>

If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this

process, please complete the Registration form on the ODS web site at:
<https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/registration-form>.