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PHL 407.R80: Epistemology (Honors)

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Philosophy 407 Epistemology Syllabus

2:00 pm – 3:20pm MW

This syllabus is a resource for information regarding class policies. I expect you to consult this syllabus if you have a question about the class policies. If you have a question about class policies that isn't addressed in the syllabus, then please feel free to ask me.

I will be communicating with you via your UM email account, especially for any unexpected changes that may come up with schedule, reading materials, etc. If you find the UM email interface unappealing, I suggest you forward that email to an account that you prefer.

Office hours and contact information

- Professor Armond Duwell
- Email: armond.duwell@umontana.edu
- Office hours: by appointment

Summary

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and justified belief. Towards that end, we will examine: proposed definitions of knowledge or criteria for the possession of knowledge and their shortcomings; how beliefs must be structured in order to justify other beliefs; whether justification is mind independent or not; how we might identify epistemic virtues and how they might be used to determine the epistemic status of various beliefs; how knowledge and justification are anchored in the world, or in testimony, memory, and perception; and finally how we might attempt to rebut skepticism.

Learning goals:

1. Students will be able to articulate alternative views associated with different positions in epistemology, i.e. foundationalism, coherentism, etc.
2. Students will be able to articulate the main arguments mustered for and against different positions.
3. Students will be able raise their own criticisms of different positions in epistemology.
4. Students will be able to write a research paper on a topic in epistemology.

Required Texts

- All readings will be posted on Moodle in .pdf form

Grading

10% attendance, 10% participation, 20% presentations, 15% essay, 45% final paper.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. You get two unexcused absences. Additional unexcused absences will incur 5% reduction in final grade per absence up to a total of 10%. Absences will be

excused after the fact only in case of extreme circumstances that could not have been anticipated. Moreover, proof of extreme circumstances is required. Absences may be excused before the fact and is up to my discretion. In all cases, please talk to me about any foreseeable problems as soon as you anticipate them. I'm far more lenient when you are forthright about your problems. You are expected to arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class. Three late arrivals count as one absence. If you have to leave early, please tell me at the beginning of class and sit close to the exit to minimize the disturbance to the class. You are expected to give your full attention to the class. Cell phones or other means of communication should be silenced for the duration of class. You will be asked to leave if you are doing anything not relevant for class, e.g. reading the newspaper, sleeping, doing work for other classes, etc. Three offenses of this type will count as one absence.

Participation: Active participation is essential for learning philosophy. Our primary purpose in this class is to explore conceptual space by means of rational argumentation. I want to hear from you.

- A range: The student is fully engaged and highly motivated. This student is well prepared, having read the assigned texts, and has thought carefully about the texts' relation to issues raised in lecture and section. This student's ideas and questions are substantive (either constructive or critical); they stimulate class discussions. This student listens and responds to the contributions of other students.
- B range: The student participates consistently in discussion. This student comes to section well prepared and contributes quite regularly by sharing thoughts and questions that show insight and a familiarity with the material. This student refers to the materials discussed in lecture and shows interest in other students' contributions.
- C range: The student meets the basic requirements of section participation. This student is usually prepared and participates once in a while but not regularly. This student's contributions relate to the texts and the lectures and offer a few insightful ideas, but do not facilitate a discussion.
- D range: The student comes to class, but often unprepared. This student's contributions are often unrelated to the topic at hand, provide no insightful ideas, and do not facilitate discussion.
- F range: The student often does not come to class, or, if he or she does, he or she generally neither participates nor makes any insightful contributions related to the topic at hand

Presentations: You will be required to present on two articles in class. These will be made in groups of two (one for honors) students. For your presentation you will have to have an excellent command of the article you are presenting on as you will be leading discussion. The presentations should have two parts: 1. A summary of the main problems the author(s) deal(s) with and their proposed solutions (taking not more than 1/2 hour) and 2. a set of problems associated with the author's argument formulated by your group for discussion. To be clear, a problem is a reason for thinking the author's argument is defective in some way, i.e. defective premises or weak inductive argument structure. In addition, some of your problems might relate the article being discussed to previous work we have discussed. You should provide a handout (with your names written on it) to me one day in advance of your presentation. I will electronically distribute it to the class. *I expect to see a copy of your handout, including discussion*

questions, three days in advance of your presentation so I can give you feedback. I am happy to meet with you to help you understand what's going on in your presentation article.

- A range: You present an accurate reconstruction of the problem that the author is dealing with, an accurate and charitable reconstruction of the arguments pertaining to that problem, and a careful criticism of the author's arguments via your discussion questions. You take an active role leading discussion of the paper by responding to student's comments. In particular, you will have anticipated responses to your discussion questions, especially how you think the author(s) might respond, and use those to draw out more elaborate comments about student's responses or to generate further discussion.
- B range: You present a reasonable reconstruction of the problem that the author is dealing with, a charitable reconstruction of the arguments pertaining to that problem, and some criticism of the author's arguments via your discussion questions. You will lead discussion of the paper and respond to student's comments.
- C range: You state the topic of the paper without articulating the problem that the author intends to address. You provide a summary of the paper (mere chronology without isolating the main arguments). You provide discussion questions that are related to the text, but aren't primarily geared to addressing possible weaknesses in the author's argument. You ask questions, but don't develop discussion.
- D range: You misconstrue the author's main claims in some significant respect. You provide a poor summary or reconstruction of the argument. You do not provide any discussion questions, or, if you do, such questions are to a large extent irrelevant to the problem at stake.
- F range: You fail to provide a reconstruction of the paper, and, if you provide discussion questions, such questions are irrelevant to the problem at hand.

Essay: You will be required to write a brief essay ~1000 words (give or take 100 words or so). **The essay is due on Monday 10/5 at the beginning of class, via email.** I will assign an essay topic. The topic will be on material we have already covered in class. I will expect you to provide an analysis much like we do in class. Critically evaluate arguments, address the strengths and weaknesses of a particular position, etc. Most importantly, make sure you read the assignment carefully and do what is asked of you. See below for further grading criteria. Submit your essay via email.

Final Paper: You will be required to write a paper of at least 3000 words (4000-honors) pages on a topic of your choosing. You must submit your paper topic along with an abstract, and a list of at least four sources for consideration **by Monday October 26th**. You must use at least one primary source (from a reputable collection of papers or philosophy journals) that we *have not used in class* (reference works, encyclopedia articles, etc. do not meet this requirement), in a non-trivial way **AND WHICH WAS PUBLISHED AFTER 2000**. No papers can be on the same topic.

An excellent way to write a research paper is to find a disagreement in the literature, two authors who engage each other's work and have a disagreement, and then to adjudicate the dispute in your paper. It is by far the easiest way to get a substantial paper.

We will be workshopping your papers the final three weeks or so of class. You will do two presentations of your final papers. Each will count for 5% (half a letter grade!). I expect you to be well-prepared for these presentations, to take notes regarding the suggestions made by the class, and to institute these suggestions before the next presentation and in your final paper. **The final papers will be due via email at 5:20 pm, Tuesday November 24th.**