



## PHIL 3152.10: THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

SPRING 2017

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**Professor:** Avery Archer  
**Class time:** TR 12:45-2:00PM  
**Classroom:** DUQUES 250

**Office:** 554 Rome Hall  
**Office Hours:** F 1:30-3PM, by apt.  
**Email:** aarcher@gwu.edu

### Course Description

In this course we will investigate how the term knowledge should be defined, what is required for a belief to be justified, putative sources of knowledge, and whether knowledge is even possible. We will explore these questions via a close reading of contemporary texts that have played an important role in shaping the contours of the study of knowledge. One of the primary goals of this course will be to hone your ability to analyze arguments. Consequently, class discussions will be primarily devoted to the careful appraisal of the arguments advanced in the assigned readings.

### Prerequisites

Students enrolled in this course should have completed PHIL 1051 or PHIL 1153 or PHIL 2112. Familiarity with formal logic would be helpful, but is not necessary. However, a willingness to patiently and carefully examine arguments is crucial.

### Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Identify, describe and critically evaluate the dominant theories of knowledge.
- Articulate why it is difficult to offer a conceptual analysis of knowledge.
- Distinguish between different sources of knowledge and identify the unique issues, problems and questions that relate to each.

### Grading

Your grade in this course will be determined using a specification grading system. This grading system is designed to incorporate the most important insights from learning theory, according to which students learn best when they are interested and challenged in a low-stakes environment. See the document "How your grade is determined" distributed during the first day of class (and provided on Blackboard) for further details on how your grade in this class will be determined.

## Methodology

This class will primarily consist of the evaluation of *arguments*. Arguments consist of premises and conclusions, and the logical connection between the two. In setting out an argument, one follows several steps: First, one sets out the premises. Second, one defends those premises by giving reasons for thinking they are true, preferably reasons that are fairly uncontroversial (that is, reasons that could be accepted by parties on both sides of the debate). Third, one shows that these premises lead, logically, to a conclusion. A failure to complete any of these three steps results in a *failed* argument. In this class you will be reconstructing arguments (the premises, the reasons for premises, and the premises' logical connection to the conclusion) and critically evaluating arguments. In order to critically examine an argument, one must evaluate one of these three steps. E.g., you could show that a particular premise is implausible for a given reason; you could show that the defense of a given premise fails for a given reason; or you could show that the premises fail to logically connect to the conclusion. It is *not* a proper evaluation of an argument merely to *deny* the premises or the conclusion *without giving any reason for denying it*. Philosophy is the weighing and balancing of reasons. In order to outweigh an opponent's reason, one must give another reason in turn.

## Minimum Out-of-Class Learning:

In accordance with federal regulation 34 CFR 602.24(f), students are required to spend a minimum of 100 minutes of out-of-class work for every 50 minutes of direct instruction in order to be awarded the relevant credit hours. This means that students should expect to spend at least 5 hours in out-of-class work per week for this course.

## Technology Policy:

Laptops, iPads, Kindles, and other electronic devices must be turned off and put away during class, unless required for a particular assignment. There is a zero tolerance policy for texting or any other cell phone use in class, apart from participation in clicker surveys. Cell phones may be left on vibrate for emergency notification purposes. If you expect an important phone call, please inform me before class and quietly excuse yourself when you receive it.

## Required Reading:

All the readings listed on the reading schedule (below) are available electronically in the "Course Materials" folder on Blackboard. You have three main goals when reading assigned material: (1) **Identify** the main claims the author is arguing for ("What are the author's main conclusions?"); (2) **Understand** how the author argues for those claims ("What arguments does the author offer to support her/his main conclusions? How, exactly, are those arguments supposed to go?"); and (3) **Evaluate** the author's arguments ("How strong are the author's arguments for her/his main conclusions?"). I have included an essay by Jim Pryor

entitled “Guidelines on Reading Philosophy” in the “Course Readings” section of the course Blackboard website. As we begin our course, please have a look at this essay.

### Reading Schedule:

The following reading schedule is tentative. As the class progresses, and I get a better sense of the needs and interests of the participants, I am likely to make changes to the reading schedule.

| <b>Date</b> | <b>Topic</b>                 | <b>Readings (available online)</b>                         |
|-------------|------------------------------|--|
| T 1/17      | 1. Introduction              | (No Readings)  |
| R 1/19      | 2. The JTB Account           | Ayer, “Knowing as Having the Right to be Sure”             |
| T 1/24      | 3. The Gettier Problem I     | Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”             |
| R 1/26      | 4. The Gettier Problem II    | Clark, “Knowledge and Grounds”                             |
| T 1/31      | 5. Responses to Gettier I    | Goldman, “A Causal Theory of knowing”                      |
| R 2/02      | 6. Responses to Gettier II   | Lehrer, “Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief”      |
| T 2/07      | 7. Responses to Gettier III  | Nozick, “Knowledge”  |
| R 2/09      | 8. Diagnosing Gettier        | Zagzebski, “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems”        |
| T 2/14      | 9. Externalist Theories      | Dretske, “Knowledge and the Flow of Information”           |
| R 2/16      | 10. Internalist Theories I   | Feldman, “Internalism Defended”                            |
| T 2/21      | 11. Internalist Theories II  | Chisholm, “The Indispensability of Internal Justification” |
| R 2/23      | 12. Ethics of Belief         | Shah, “A New Argument for Evidentialism”                   |
| T 2/28      | 13. Ethics of Belief II      | Howard, “Transparency and the Ethics of Belief”            |
| R 3/02      | 12. Knowledge Attribution I  | Dretske, “The Pragmatic Dimension of Knowledge”            |
| T 3/07      | 13. Knowledge Attribution II | Chisholm, “The Problem of Criterion”                       |
| R 3/09      | MIDTERM EXAM                 | (No Readings)  |
| 3/14-16     | SPRING BREAK                 | (No Class)   |
| T 3/21      | 14. Contextualism            | DeRose, “Contextualism and Knowledge Attribution”          |

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| R 3/23 | 15. Relevant Alternatives   | Stine, "Scepticism, Relevant Alternatives, and Closure" |
| T 3/28 | 18. Perception I            | Russell, "The Problems of Philosophy"                   |
| R 3/30 | 19. Perception II           | Austin, "Sense and Sensibilia"                          |
| T 4/04 | 20. Memory I                | Malcolm, "A Definition of Factual Memory"               |
| R 4/06 | 21. Memory II               | Huemer, "The Problem of Memory Knowledge"               |
| T 4/11 | 22. Testimony I             | Coady, "Testimony and Observation"                      |
| R 4/13 | 23. Testimony II            | Fricker, "Against Gullibility"                          |
| T 4/18 | 24. Induction I             | Russell, "On Induction"                                 |
| R 4/20 | 25. Induction II            | Goodman, "The New Riddle of Induction"                  |
| T 4/25 | 26. Pulling it all together | Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge"                              |
| R 4/27 | 27. Final Exam Review       | (No Readings)   |

### University Policy on Religious Holidays:

1. Students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance.
2. Faculty should extend to these students the courtesy of absence without penalty on such occasions, including permission to make up examinations.
3. Faculty who intend to observe a religious holiday should arrange at the beginning of the semester to reschedule missed classes or to make other provisions for their course-related activities

### Disability Support Services (DSS):

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in the Rome Hall, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information please refer to: [gwired.gwu.edu/dss/](http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/)

### Mental Health Services (202-994-5300):

The University's Mental Health Services offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include: crisis and emergency mental health consultations confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals. [counselingcenter.gwu.edu/](http://counselingcenter.gwu.edu/)

### **Academic Integrity Code:**

Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. For the remainder of the code, see: [studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity](http://studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity)