

Philosophy 320: Knowledge and Assertion Spring 2019

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Office hours: Mondays, 1–2 and by appointment

Overview: This course will study closely topics in the intersection of epistemology, the study of knowledge and rationality, and philosophy of language. The goal of the class will be to see how studying epistemology can help us understand language use and *vice versa*.

The first half of the class will study communication, broadly speaking. We will study how tools from epistemology can help us understand the practice of making assertions, of how we use background interpretation to interpret each other, of how we can use words to mean more than they say and more. These will be case studies for the more general idea that various communicative practices can be understood as simply arising from the fact that people are rational agents who are trying to share information.

In the second half we will focus on using language to make progress on issues in epistemology. Language plays a central role in acquiring knowledge: we will study how we use testimony to transmit knowledge or justified belief. But we will also see how philosophers have attempted to use our understanding of language to dispel skeptical problems that have plagued epistemology for centuries. We will finish by asking what it is to know *how* to do something and see how modern philosophy of language has been used to motivate certain views of know how; and we will ask whether knowing a *language* is a kind of know how or some other special kind of knowledge.

Prerequisites: The material in the class is mostly self-standing: most of the necessary background will be explained in the first few introductory lectures. However, students should have some experience in Philosophy, like a 200 level class; and some background in philosophy of language or epistemology will probably be helpful.

Website: The course website can be found on Sakai (<https://sakai.rutgers.edu/portal>). I will use it to make announcements, distribute handouts and readings and to post paper topics. It is very important that you are able to access the website. If you are not able to, let me know straightaway.

Reading: All readings will be posted on the Sakai site.

Forum: There is a forum page on the website that you will use to discuss the readings ahead of class. You will be expected to post a question or comment on **every** reading. They need not be long, but they must be substantial. (Comments like “I don’t understand ‘x’” or “What does ‘y’ mean?” are not sufficient; comments like “I don’t understand ‘x’ because ... ” can be.)

Comments or questions must be posted by **midnight the day before lecture**. Sometimes I will post prompts to discuss specific parts of the reading.

Assessment: Students will write two shorter papers and one longer final paper. The first paper will be due on February 27th, the second on April 8th and the final paper on May 6th. There will also be a participation grade based on your contribution to discussion in class and a grade based on your forum posts.

The grades will be broken down as follows:

Paper 1: 20%
Paper 2: 25%
Paper 3: 35%
Participation in class: 10%
Forum posts: 10%

Here are some more or less necessary conditions for getting a particular letter grade in the participation and forum post components:

- A: Drops 4-5 posts; 1-2 unexcused absences at most.
- B: Drops 6-8 posts; three to four unexcused absences.
- C: Drops more than 8 posts; four or more unexcused absences.

(These are *not* sufficient conditions: posts must reliably make a genuine effort to engage with the text and you must reliably participate in class to actually obtain the relevant letter grade.)

Paper drafts: I am happy to discuss drafts of your papers with you before you submit them. However, if you wish to do so, you must email the paper to me and arrange a meeting to discuss it with me. Requests must also be made in a timely manner: I will not accommodate requests to meet that happen with 36 hours before the deadline.

Class Policies:

Attendance: Unexcused absences will have a negative impact on your participation grade. If you will be absent, I expect you to use the university website, <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/>, to report this, indicating the date of and reason for your absence.

Late Assignments: Late homework will not be accepted, except in the case of illness, bereavement and other extenuating circumstances. Any extensions must be cleared ahead of time.

Academic Integrity: Violations of academic integrity are a very serious matter and the consequences can be extremely severe. Among the most serious violations are cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating violations of academic integrity. (For a more thorough overview of what violations are and what their consequences can be, see <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>.)

Plagiarism can occur unintentionally from ignorance; but ignorance is not an excuse. If you are not sure what counts as plagiarism, consult the following tools:

The Camden Plagiarism Tutorial (INTERACTIVE):

<http://library.camden.rutgers.edu/EducationalModules/Plagiarism/>

Consult Don't Plagiarize: Document Your Research! For tips about how to take notes so that you don't plagiarize by accident. http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/avoid_plagiarism

Further resources are available at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/resources-for-students/>.

Laptop Policy: I strongly encourage you all to take notes *by hand*: it's well-documented that taking notes by hand better facilitates learning. But however you decide to take notes, please refrain from texting, surfing the web and other non-class related activities during lectures.

Schedule of Readings

Overview and Background

1/23. Background on epistemology

1/28. Background on language

PART 1: Communication

Norms of Assertion

1/30. Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits*, ch. 11

2/4. Lackey, “Norms of Assertion”

Speech Acts

2/6. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, Lectures 1 & 8

Language and Rationality

2/11, 2/13 Grice, “Logic and Conversation”, §1–3

Implicature 2

2/18 Davis, *Implicature*, ch.4

2/20 Wilson and Sperber, “Loose Talk”

2/23 Writing Workshop

Implicature 3

2/27 Lepore and Stone, *Imagination and Convention*, ch.3

(PAPER 1 DUE)

Presupposition

3/4 Stalnaker, “Pragmatic Presupposition”

3/6 Simons, “Presupposition and Accommodation”

3/11. Simons again

Political Pragmatics

3/13. Haslanger, "Ideology, Generics and Common Ground"

SPRING BREAK

3/25. Langton, "Beyond Belief"

(3/27. OUT OF TOWN)

PART 2: Problems of Knowledge as Problems of Language

Testimony

4/1 Fricker, "Against Gullibility"

4/3 Lackey, "Testimonial knowledge and transmission"

4/8 Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, ch.s 1 and 3

(PAPER 2 DUE)

Skepticism

4/10 Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries*, ch.1

4/15 Nozick, "Knowledge and Scepticism"

(4/17 OUT OF TOWN)

Contextualism

4/22 Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge"

4/24. Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries*, ch.2

Subjective Sensitive Invariantism

4/29 Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries*, ch.3.

5/1 Stanley, *Knowledge and Practical Interests*

Know How and Semantic Knowledge

5/6. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, ch. 2, Stanley and Williamson, “Know How”, Hornsby, “Semantic Knowledge and Practical Knowledge”

(PAPER 3 DUE)