

Phil. 270/570: Epistemology

Updated 1/21/17, 2/9/17, 4/13/17, 4/18/17

Lectures, Keith DeRose: Tu, Th 11.35-12.25; WLH 117

Sections: Tu 4:00-4:50 room TBA or half sections after lectures, starting week of Jan. 30 from 4/6 – 4/27: instead of sections, reserved meeting times: Tuesday 12:25-12:50 (right after class); Tuesday 3:35-4:00; Tuesday 4:00-4:25; Thursday 12:25-12:50 (right after class)

The course web page will be at: <http://campuspress.yale.edu/keithderose/epistemology17/>

Reading for the First Meeting: If possible, read items 1-2 from the list of readings. They are both quite short.

Phil. 270

Course Description. This is the basic course in epistemology – the course in which you learn what epistemology is about. The plan is to discuss at least most of the main topics and issues important to epistemology. However, we won't be having assigned readings about all of these topics. Rather, we will read papers and portions of books that focus on just a few of the topics of epistemology (our “focus topics”), but will use these as jumping off points for discussing other issues. Thus, for instance, one thing you should learn about in a basic epistemology course is a theory of knowledge (and sometimes of rational or justified belief) called reliabilism. However, we are not assigning any defenses of or critical discussions of reliabilism. (Well, I suppose Nozick's theory can be construed as a form of reliabilism. But if our goal was to have you learn what reliabilism is through readings about that topic, there would be much better sources than this.) But we will discuss reliabilism in class when we discuss other theories of knowledge, since there are some very interesting comparisons between reliabilism and some of the theories we will read about.

I have not chosen the focus topics described briefly below because they are *the* five most important topics to epistemology today. Rather, given how they fit together with one another and how they naturally give rise to other important issues, at least as I approach them, they seem to be five topics around which we can build a course in which you encounter interesting philosophical work and also learn about the field of epistemology.

Our first focus topic will be the analysis of knowledge. We will read presentations of a couple of the many types of analyses that have been proposed, and, in discussing these, we will also consider other theories that will be presented in lecture.

The project of trying to analyze knowledge is considered by many to have been a failure. So, having sampled some of the relevant attempts, we will move to our second topic, which could be called “meta-epistemology.” We will discuss several issues relevant to whole project of analyzing knowledge: the use of “intuitions” in testing philosophical theories, the worry that what counts as knowledge might be a very context-sensitive matter, and Timothy Williamson's thought that maybe philosophers would do better if turned their procedure upside down and used knowledge in their analyses of other philosophically important concepts, rather than attempting to give an analysis of what knowledge is.

Our third main topic will be the knowledge account of assertion.

Fourth, we will investigate at some length the topic of philosophical skepticism, both for its own sake, but also as a good springboard for discussing other topics in epistemology.

Our last focus topic will be a provocative late 20th Century movement in religious epistemology: attempts to argue that certain religious beliefs (like, importantly, the belief that God exists) can be justified or rational even if there is no good evidence for these beliefs. Discussing this will involve us in important epistemological topics concerning the role of evidence in proper believing, “structural” issues (foundationalism vs. coherentism) in the theory of rationality, and the epistemology of sense perception.

Important Dates:

- Feb. 23 (Thursday): in-class test
- March 30 (Thursday), by the start of class: paper proposal due
- April 27 (Thursday), by the start of class: course papers due
- May 8 (Monday), 2:00: Final exam; LC 205

Written Work – specifications and descriptions (papers and weekly writing assignments should be typed and double-spaced, with normal margins and normal-sized fonts):

- Short weekly writing assignments: The amount of reading assigned for this course is quite light. The idea is to assign few pages, but to have you read carefully, and engage with, the small amount of material you are assigned. To promote that, beginning Jan. 27 and ending on April 7 (but skipping Feb. 24, March 10, March 17, March 24, and March 31), short (usually 2-3 page) writing assignments will be due on Fridays, by noon. That makes a total of six Fridays on which these are due (Jan. 27, Feb.3, Feb. 10, Feb. 17, March 3, and April 7). But each student gets to skip one of the assignments, and so must complete a total of five assignments. (You are hereby advised to choose to skip the assignment for a week in which you will be very busy with other classes.) These assignments will typically focus on the readings we are about to discuss in class, so they will make you engage with the material before we discuss it together. The exact specifications of each assignment will be announced by the Monday evening before it is due, but the current plan (this may change depending on how it is working out) is for these assignments to consist of between 1 and 2 pages of summary of a reading, and between 1 and 2 pages of critical commentary on that material or ideas or questions you have about it. Unless it is announced otherwise, these assignments will not be evaluated with a letter grade, but usually with a simple evaluation of ✓, to designate the assignment was satisfactorily completed, or 0 if it was not satisfactorily completed, with perhaps occasional marks of ✓+ to designate especially good work or ✓- to designate work which, while acceptable, is sub-par. These assignments can and typically will help the grades of those who do them all on time, getting at least a ✓ on all or almost all of them. Such a performance can only help you, even in going for a straight A in the class. They will hurt the grades of those who don't turn them in on time or who consistently do sub-par work. The course cannot be passed if a student doesn't hand in their five weekly assignments, so do get them in by the end of classes, even if you turn them in late. These short assignments should be sent by e-mail attachment by noon on Friday, but can be turned in before then, at any time after the assignment is announced on the Monday before it is due. (If you can't send e-mail attachments, let me know well before the first assignment is due, and we will make other arrangements.) In the subject line of the e-mail, write:

Phil. 270: [DATE] assignment

replacing [DATE] with the due date of the assignment, not the date you turn it in, if that is different from the due date. Send the email with the attached assignment **to this address:**

keith.derose@yale.edu

- In-class test: This will stress essay questions (and may well consist entirely of essay questions), and will be on the material covered in class before the day of the test (Feb. 23).
- Paper proposal: a 1-2 page long paper proposal is due by the start of class on Thursday, March 30. This should also be turned in by e-mail to the same two addresses listed above. It will not be given a letter grade, though the quality of the proposal will be taken into account in determining your course grade, and the course cannot be passed without completing the proposal. Its purpose, in addition to prodding some to start work on (or at least to start thinking about) their course papers, is to give us a chance to check whether your proposed topic is sufficiently relevant to our course, and in some cases to suggest additional reading you might want to consult in writing your paper.
- Course Paper: The course paper itself is to be 2,100-2,800 words long (about 6-8 pages, typed, double-spaced, normal margins and fonts), and is due by the start of class on Thursday, April 27. A description of acceptable topics along with other information about the paper will be distributed and discussed in class, some time in February. This should also be submitted by email attachment to the two addresses above.
- Final Exam: **Monday, May 8; 2:00; LC 205**

Grading: **Attendance at lectures is mandatory.** All written work must be submitted, and a satisfactory job must be done on all written work, to pass the course. Supposing that attendance is not a problem and that all written work has been satisfactory, grades will be based roughly on the following formula, though adjustments (which can be quite considerable) will be made for insightful classroom participation and for marked improvement over the course of the semester: Test: 17%; Course Paper: 35%; Final Exam: 23%; Ungraded work (weekly writing assignments, course proposal): 25%.

Email: All emails concerning this course from students, including especially those used to submit assignments, should include “Phil. 270” or “Phil. 570” in the subject line of the email. (This is to avoid being weeded out by my sometimes overactive mail filters, and to allow me to make sure to read all class correspondence even in times when my inbox is being flooded.)

Spring '17 class days: 26 total

Week#	Tu date	Th date	assignment #	Week#	Tu date	Th date	assignment #
W1	J17	J19		SPRING BREAK – TWO WEEKS			
W2	J24	J26	1	W9	M28	M30	
W3	J31	F2	2	W10	A4	A6	6
W4	F7	F9	3	W11	A11	A13	
W5	F14	F16	4	W12	A18	A20	
W6	F21	F23		W13	A25	A27	
W7	F28	M2	5	final:	May 8 (Monday),	2:00	
W8	M7	M9					

Readings. (The list of readings below is subject to some adjustment as we move through the semester.) Most of these are available via the links provided from on-line subscriber sites, free from Yale internet connections. A few readings (#5, 15 and 19) will be taken from DeRose, Warfield, ed., *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader* (Oxford UP, 1999), and will be available to students in this class in the “Resources” for this class of the classes server. A few other readings (#11, 12, 16, 18, 22, 25) will also be available in “Resources.” Please do yourself a big favor and print out copies of all the readings, so you can mark and take notes on your copies, and so you can take those papers to our class meetings, which will sometimes be focused tightly on the readings. Or if you’re one of those who don’t like dealing with paper, download all the readings onto your computer early on, so you’re all set to go, and so you can find out early if you have trouble accessing any of the readings. Phil. 570 students should get the book from which some of their readings are assigned (see p. 6 of this syllabus) soon.

1. Jennifer Nagel, “Ascribing Knowledge in English and Other Languages,” *Certain Doubts*. [<http://certaindoubts.com/dashboard-certain-doubts-wordpress/>]. Note: The comments to this blog post are not assigned, but do take a quick look at the brief first paragraph of the comment that begins with the words “actually, the list of 63 is for expressions...”
2. Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge,” *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121-123. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3326922>]
3. Alvin I. Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing,” *Journal of Philosophy* 64 (1967): 357-372. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2024268>]
4. Alvin I. Goldman, “Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge,” *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976): 771-791. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2025679>]
5. Robert Nozick, “Knowledge,” from *Philosophical Explanations*, in DW, pp. 159-164.
6. Jonathan Weinberg, “How to Challenge Intuitions Empirically Without Risking Skepticism,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 31 (2007): 318-343. [<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1475-4975.2007.00157.x/abstract>].
7. Kenneth Boyd and Jennifer Nagel, “The Reliability of Epistemic Intuitions,” from E. Machery, ed., *Current Controversies in Experimental Philosophy*; draft available at <http://philpapers.org/archive/BOYTRO-2.pdf>.
8. Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits*, “Preface,” p. v; and “Introduction,” pp. 1-11. [<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/content/philosophy/9780199256563/toc.html>]
9. Jennifer Lackey, “Norms of Assertion,” *Noûs* 41 (2007): 594–626. [<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-0068.2007.00664.x/full>]
10. Timothy Williamson, “Knowing and Asserting,” *Philosophical Review* 105 (1996): 489-523. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2998423>]

11. KDR, pp. 92.5-101.7 (sect. 5 and all but the last two paragraphs of sect. 6 of Chapter 3 of) *The Case for Contextualism* (Oxford UP, 2009); in Resources.
12. KDR, “Some Thoughts about Knowledge, Belief, and Assertion in Philosophical Settings and Other Knowledge Deserts,” draft of work in progress; in Resources.
13. Thomas Reid via KDR, “Reid’s Anti-Sensationalism and His Realism,” *The Philosophical Review* 98 (1989): 313-348; read sections II.A – II.B (pp. 321-331).
[<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2185022>]
14. Michael Huemer, “Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74 (2007): 30–55.
[<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2007.00002.x/abstract>]
15. Hilary Putnam, “Brains in a Vat,” from *Reason, Truth and History*, in DW, pp. 27-42.
16. KDR, “Two Substantively Moorean Responses and the Project of Refuting Skepticism,” Chapter 3 of upcoming book; in Resources.
17. Thomas Kelly, “Moorean Facts and Belief Revision, Or can the Skeptic Win?” *Philosophical Perspectives* 19 (2005): 179-209.
[<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2005.00059.x/abstract>]
18. G.E. Moore/KDR, “Moorean Methodology,” sects. 1-5; Chapter 2 of upcoming book; in Resources.
19. Robert Nozick, “Skepticism,” from *Philosophical Explanations*, in DW, pp. 164-179.
20. Gail Stine, “Skepticism, Relevant Alternatives, and Deductive Closure,” *Philosophical Studies* 29 (1976): 249-261 [<http://www.springerlink.com/content/q442181244162676/> or <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4319027>].
21. KDR, “Solving the Skeptical Problem,” *Philosophical Review* 104 (1995): 1-52
[<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2186011>].
22. KDR, “How Can We Know that We’re Not Brains in Vats?,” Chapter 7 of upcoming book, skipping sections 3-5 and 8 reading sections 1-2, 6-7, 10-12 and 23 (a new conclusion, placed after the References); in Resources.
23. Alvin Plantinga, “Is Belief in God Properly Basic?,” *Noûs* 15 (1981): 41-51.
[<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2215239>]
24. William P. Alston, “Perceiving God,” *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 655-665.
[<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2026614>].
25. Keith DeRose, “Direct Warrant Realism,” from *God and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge UP, 2005), pp. 150-172; in Resources.

Phil. 570

Phil. 570 is for graduate students, often Divinity School students. Students taking Phil. 570 will attend the same classes as Phil. 270 students, and will follow the above Phil. 270 syllabus, but with the following modifications.

Sections: Section attendance is optional for Phil. 570 students. You're welcome to come, but it is not required.

Readings: You are not assigned readings 23 and 24 from the Phil. 270 syllabus. (Note that reading 25 is still assigned to you.) Instead you should read the following, all from Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, ed., *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) [available, for instance, amazon.com]:

- a. Wolterstorff, "Introduction"
- b. Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God"
- c. Alston, "Christian Experience and Christian Belief"
- d. Wolterstorff, "Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations?"

These are considerably longer papers than are the papers they are replacing, and there are four of them, instead of just the two they are replacing.

Writing: Replace the last (due April 7) writing assignment, and one other of the weekly writing assignments, with these two somewhat more substantial assignments:

- 3-4 total pages of summary/exposition, and 3-4 total pages of critical commentary on readings a, b, and d, above. These needn't be organized reading-by-reading; you can instead explain the three readings in a way that intersperses your treatments of the three papers.
- 3-4 total pages of summary/exposition, and 3-4 total pages of critical commentary on reading c, above, together with reading 25 from the Phil. 270 syllabus. Again, these needn't be organized reading-by-reading.

One of these two assignments should be submitted by the deadline for the April 7 assignment. The other should be handed in earlier, in place of one of the other Phil. 270 assignments. You can choose which assignment to replace, and thereby choose the due date of this longer assignment. Just submit it instead of the assignment that's due for Phil. 270 students, noting in your e-mail that you are replacing that week's assignment with your graduate credit assignment. Like the Phil. 270 students, you can skip one weekly assignment over the course of the semester, but **do not skip either of these two special Phil. 570 assignments.** All told, then, Phil. 570 students will write these two special assignments, plus three regular weekly assignments.

It is fine (but not mandatory) to then write your course paper on the topics of one of these more substantial weekly assignments. The weekly assignment can then serve as a step along the way to writing your course paper. With that in mind, you may wish to turn one or both of these in before they're due. That's fine. Submit them any time before they're due, but just note that you're doing so. So, for instance, you can submit one of these assignments already in January, with the following instruction in your e-mail: "I am submitting this early, in place of the [DATE] assignment, for graduate credit" and/or you can submit one of them already now with this instruction: "This is my April 7 assignment, for graduate credit."