

Comparative Theories of Knowledge

PHIL 044

Syllabus – Spring 2023

Important Information:

Instructor: Rosanna Picascia

E-mail: rpicascl@swarthmore.edu

Day/Time: MWF 10:30am-11:20am.

Location: Pearson Hall 006

Office Hours: Wednesdays/Fridays 3pm-4pm in Beardsley 211C. Or, by appointment.

Course Description:

This course looks at some of the major questions in both contemporary Western epistemology and Indian epistemology on the nature of knowledge, skeptical challenges to knowledge, the foundational role of nonconceptual perceptual awareness, and topics in social epistemology. Students will be encouraged to think creatively about their own answers to these questions, while appreciating the influential answers coming from a diversity of voices and perspectives in the history of philosophy.

Course Goals:

(1) To learn how to read, think, and write about complex philosophical problems in a way that is both personally engaging and academically rigorous; (2) To learn how to construct a productive conversation between philosophers from diverse backgrounds; and (3) To learn how to converse with one's peers about seemingly intractable problems in philosophy

Course Readings:

You do not need to purchase any course materials. All the course materials will be available through Moodle.

Assignments:

Email to a friend:

Your first writing assignment is to write a short email (**about 500 words**) to a friend explaining Gettier's argument. Then, send the email to your friend (and cc me). Your sole aim in this assignment is to explain Gettier's argument in clear and accessible language so that your friend can understand.

Argument Maps

The readings for this course are challenging, but rewarding. They are best read slowly and carefully, and, if time-permitting, more than once. To help you digest, organize, and preserve what you've understood from the weekly readings, you will prepare a short reconstruction of the central argument (or one important sub-argument) from the week's primary text. You can think of this like an informal outline, but it can take other forms, like a diagram, flow chart, etc. While the content of Argument Maps is not graded, you will need to complete 10 to receive full credit for this component of your grade.

Below are some helpful questions to consider when preparing your outline:

- 1) What is the central philosophical problem/question the author is trying to solve?
- 2) What is the author's central position or claim?
- 3) What reasons does the author give for their claims?
- 4) How would you evaluate the author's argument? What position do you take on the topic or philosophical question?

Course engagement:

I define course engagement as the completion of any concrete course-related participation activity. Examples of course engagement include (but are not limited to) the following: participating in small group work, attentive listening, asking questions in class, contributing to class discussion, and coming to office hours.

Your grade will be based on 1) the completion and submission of small group activities centered on constructing or responding to arguments and 2) your own documentation and self-assessment of your course engagement. Regarding the first component, there will be weekly small group activities that will be collected and assessed for completion. Regarding the second component, three times during the semester, you will document your class engagement by filling out a self-assessment rubric.

Papers:

A Midterm paper and a Final paper are required for this course. The Midterm paper should be 6-8 pages (double spaced, 12-pt font), and the Final paper should be 8-10 pages (double-spaced, 12-pt font). Each paper will follow the traditional philosophical format: presenting and explaining a philosopher's argument on a particular philosophical question, anticipating objections to the argument, and developing your own argument on the question. I will distribute paper prompts in advance of both papers.

Grading:

- A. Midterm paper, 30% of overall grade
- B. Final paper, 30% of overall grade
- C. Argument maps, 20% of overall grade
- D. Email to a friend, 10% of overall grade

E. Course engagement, 10% of overall grade

Laptop and phone policy:

Laptops (and phones) are not permitted because they are bad for the classroom environment. The best evidence available suggests that laptops distract from learning, not only for the laptop users, but additionally, for those around them. Exceptions will be made based on need (see Accommodations Statement below).

Printing primary reading material:

Since the course material is available online or in pdf format, you will need to print out the **primary reading material**, which we will reference in class. Supplemental reading (background or commentary) does not need to be printed. Instead, make note of anything from the supplemental reading that you wish to discuss in class and bring those notes to class.

There is no charge for printing. Here is a list of printers available in public computing areas and residence halls- <https://kb.swarthmore.edu/display/PRIN/Printing+for+Students>

Accommodations Statement:

If you believe you need accommodations for a disability or a chronic medical condition, please contact Student Disability Services via email at studentdisabilityservices@swarthmore.edu to arrange an appointment to discuss your needs. As appropriate, the office will issue students with documented disabilities or medical conditions a formal Accommodations Letter. Since accommodations require early planning and are not retroactive, please contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. For details about the accommodations process, visit the Student Disability Services website. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs. However, all disability-related accommodations must be arranged, in advance, through Student Disability Services.

Course Calendar

UNIT 1: What is knowledge?

Week 1 (1/18): Course introduction

1/28 (W): Overview of course content; in-class activity

First assignment: Read syllabus by next class

1/24 (F): Finish up in-class activity; discuss syllabus

Week 2 (Jan 23rd): What is knowledge?

Required primary:

Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"

Required background:

Richard Feldman (*Epistemology*): Chapter 2: The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge and Chapter 3: Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge

Week 3 (Jan 30th): The aftermath of Gettier

Required primary:

- i. Linda Zagzebski, “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems”
- ii. Laurence Bonjour, “The Myth of Knowledge”

Optional background:

Richard Feldman (*Epistemology*): Chapter 4: Evidentialist Theories of Knowledge and Justification (**only pp. 39-49**) and Chapter 5: Nonevidentialist Theories of Knowledge and Justification (**only pp. 90-99**)

Week 4 (Feb 6th): Introduction to pramāṇa theory

Required primary:

Dasti & Phillips, *The Nyāya-sūtra: Selections with Early Commentaries* [Chapters 1 and 2]

Required background:

B.K. Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Theories of Knowledge* [chapter 1]

Jonathan Stoltz. *Illuminating the Mind*, [Chapter 1 and chapter 2]

Optional commentary:

- i. Stephen Phillips, *Epistemology in Classical India*, Chapter 7: Lessons for Analytic Epistemology (**only pp. 96-101**)
- ii. Dasti & Phillips, “Pramana are factive--a response to Jonardon Ganeri”

Week 5 (Feb 13th): The theory of non-conceptual awareness

Required primary:

Gaṅgeśa, *The Debate on Bare Perception (Nirvikalpakavāda)*. Translated by Phillips and Tatacharya in *Epistemology of Perception: Gaṅgeśa’s Jewel of Reflection on the Truth about Epistemology (Tattvacintāmaṇi)*

Required commentary:

- i. Arindam Chakrabarti, “Against Immaculate Perception: Seven Reasons for Eliminating Nirvikalpaka Perception from Nyāya”
- ii. Stephen Phillips, “There’s Nothing Wrong with Raw Perception: A Response to Chakrabarti’s Attack on Nyāya’s Nirvikalpaka Pratyakṣa”

UNIT 2: Skeptical Challenges

Week 7 (Feb. 27th): Nāgārjuna’s critique of epistemology

Required primary:

- i. Nāgārjuna, Selections from *Dispeller of Disputes (Vigrahavyāvartanī)*, trans. Jan Westerhoff [also read Westerhoff’s commentary]
- ii. The Nyāya response to Nāgārjuna: Vātsyāyana and Uddyotakara’s commentaries on *Nyāyasūtra* 2.1.16-2.1.20, pp. 52-57 in *Nyāyasūtra: Selections with Early Commentaries*, trans. Dasti & Phillips)

Required commentary:

- i. Stoltz, *Illuminating the Mind*, Chapter 7: Skepticism
- ii. Matilal, *Perception*, Chapter 2: Scepticism

Spring Break: Mar 6th- Mar 10th

Week 8 (Mar 13th): Alston on epistemic circularity

Required primary:

William Alston, “Epistemic Circularity” in *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*

Week 9 (Mar 20): Argument from illusion

Required primary:

- i. Buddhist argument from illusion: Vasubandhu, *Twenty Verses (Viṃśikā)*, trans., Dan Arnold, Mario D’Amato, Jonathan Gold, Trina Jones, Rick Nance, and Parimal Patil [**only read sections A-D**]
- ii. Realist reply-Vātsyāyana and Uddyotakara on *Nyāyasūtra* 4.2.31-4.2.37, pp. 65-72 in *Nyāyasūtra: Selections with Early Commentaries*, trans. Dasti & Phillips)

Required commentary:

Matthew Dasti. “Parasitism and Disjunctivism in Nyāya Epistemology”

Midterm Paper due Mar 20th

Week 10 (Mar 27th): The Problem of the External World

Required primary:

- i. Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy: Meditation 1*
- ii. Barry Stroud, “The Problem of the External World”

UNIT 3: SOCIAL EPISTEMOLGOY

Week 11 (Mar 27th): Testimony as a Source of Knowledge

Required primary:

- i. Jennifer Lackey, “It Takes Two to Tango: Beyond Reductionism and Non-Reductionism in the Epistemology of Testimony,” in *The Epistemology of Testimony* (eds. Lackey and Sosa)
- ii. Rachel McKinnon, “Epistemic Injustice”

Week 12 (Apr 3rd): The possibility of scriptural knowledge

Required primary:

- i. Gautama Nyāyasūtra 1.1.7-1.1.8, plus early commentaries (pp. 35-37 in *Nyāyasūtra: Selections with Early Commentaries*, trans. Dasti & Phillips)

ii. Dharmakīrti. *Pramāṇavārttika (Commentary on the Compendium on the Sources of Knowledge)* 1.214-1.219 (translated by John Dunne in *Foundations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy*, Appendix 4, pp. 361-368)

Required background:

Johnathan Stoltz (*Illuminating the Mind*): Chapter 5: Testimony (**only section 5.0 and 5.1**)

Optional commentary:

Rosanna Picascia, "Our Epistemic Dependence on Others: Nyāya and Buddhist Accounts of Testimony as a Source of Knowledge"

Week 13 (Apr 10th): The epistemology of disagreement

Required primary:

- i. David Christensen, "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News"
- ii. Thomas Kelly, "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement"

Optional:

Lackey, "A justificationist view of disagreement's epistemic significance"

Week 14 (Apr 17th): Disagreement and permissivism

Required primary:

- i. Richard Feldman, "Reasonable religious disagreement"
- ii. Miriam Schonefeld, "Permission to Believe: Why Permissivism is True and What it Tells Us About Irrelevant Influences on Belief"

Final Paper due by May 11th