

PHL 232: Knowledge and Reality

Fall 2017

Instructor: Adam Murray
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Lectures: Mondays and Wednesdays, 12–1 p.m., BR 200

1 Course Description

Welcome to Philosophy 232: Knowledge and Reality.

This course provides an introduction to two of the most central and important areas of contemporary philosophy: epistemology and metaphysics. Epistemology concerns the nature of knowledge, while metaphysics asks after the nature of reality. Topics to be covered include: in epistemology: the nature of knowledge, scepticism and responses to the sceptical challenge, the structure of epistemic justification, and the difference between genuine knowledge and merely true belief. The metaphysics component of the course shall investigate the nature of causation, topics in the metaphysics of temporal persistence and identity over time, and the nature and reality of time itself. We'll finish up with the metaphysics of time travel.

The aim of the course is for you as a student to come away with a broad understanding of some core issues in contemporary epistemology and metaphysics. In addition, the course will allow you to develop your skills in critical reading, writing, and argument assessment.

2 Course Texts

There are two required texts for this course. They are:

Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press: 2014.

Stephen Mumford, *Metaphysics: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press: 2012.

Each book is very short, and affordable. Both are available for purchase at the University of Toronto Bookstore.

3 Course Structure

The course will be structured into two main components.

3.1 Weekly Lectures and Readings

On Mondays and Wednesdays, we will have a course lecture, from 12–1 p.m.

- For each lecture, there will be assigned reading posted to the course Blackboard page. It is your responsibility to come to lecture having read the relevant material for that day's discussion.
- For each lecture, there will be a handout and set of overhead slides covering the day's material. Course tests, and the final exam (each discussed in more detail below) will be based exclusively upon material covered in course lectures. Accordingly, the weekly handouts and overheads provide an excellent study guide for the test and final exam.
- Note that the course *Logic Primer* (available on Blackboard) counts as a running lecture handout. Only assigned sections from the Logic Primer are examinable.

3.2 Weekly Tutorial Sections

In addition to our two weekly lectures, you will attend a weekly one-hour tutorial and discussion section led by one of the excellent teaching assistants for this course.

- Here is the contact information for the course teaching assistants:
 - Lisa Doerksen: l.doerksen@mail.utoronto.ca
 - Rachel MacKinnon: rachel.mackinnon@mail.utoronto.ca
 - Evan Taylor: ev.taylor@mail.utoronto.ca
- Each tutorial leader will be conducting three weekly discussion sections. The scheduled times and locations of these sections should now be available to you on the course Blackboard page. Note that it is **your responsibility** to enroll in a tutorial section for the course.
- Once you have enrolled in a tutorial section, the teaching assistant in charge of that section will be your primary contact for the remainder of the course.
- Note that each of Lisa, Rachel, and Evan will have their own scheduled office hours, and individual preferences for contact procedures. It is **your responsibility** to learn of and adhere to the relevant course policies put in place by the teaching assistant leading your discussion section.

4 Course Evaluation

Your grade in the course will be based upon the following weighted criteria:

- A mid-term test (20%).
- A final examination (25%).
- A short critical writing assignment (15%).
- A final term paper (30%).
- Regular attendance and participation in your tutorial section (10%).

4.1 Detailed Breakdown of Evaluation

Here is a more detailed breakdown of the work you will be required to complete as a student in this course:

1. **The mid-term test.** The course mid-term will be held in-class, on Monday, October 23rd. Your grade on this test will count towards **20%** of your final grade in the course.
 - The course mid-term will deal primarily with material covered in the epistemology component of the course. We will have a review session during our final meeting before the test, and questions will be drawn exclusively from the lecture handouts and overheads. Accordingly, material not discussed in lecture, or on any of the handouts, is not examinable.
 - In broad relief, the test questions will be a combination of multiple-choice, fill in the blank, and short answer. There will be no essay question on the mid-term. Closer to the date we will speak more about the test's structure.
 - Notice that our lecture theatre is at capacity. That means that on the day of the test, you should endeavour to arrive early in order to take a seat and prepare. Attempting to find a seat once the test has already begun will inevitably disrupt those around you.
2. **The final examination.** The final exam for the course will be held during the winter exam period (date and location to be determined by the university later this term). Your grade on the exam will count towards **25%** of your grade in the course. This will be a two-hour exam.
 - The final exam will be cumulative, but will be more heavily weighted towards material covered in the second half of the course (metaphysics).
 - A review session for the exam will be held during our final meeting. As for structure: broadly speaking, the final exam will be structured in exactly the same way as the course mid-term (see above).
 - **Very Important:** as a matter of course policy, **you must pass the final exam in order to pass this course.** This policy is in place to protect the integrity of student grades at the University of Toronto.
3. **Short Writing Assignment.** The short writing assignment will require you to identify, extract, and represent an argument developed by a given philosopher in one of the assigned course readings. Your grade on this assignment will count towards **15%** of your grade in the course.
 - The maximum (upper) word limit on this assignment will be 500 words.
 - A selection of topics will be made available to you on October 16th, together with more detailed instructions. The assignment will be due on October 30th (in class).
4. **Final Term Paper.** The final term paper for the course is your opportunity to investigate one of the topics discussed over the course of the term in more substantial depth. Your grade on the final term paper will count towards **30%** of your grade in the course.
 - The maximum (upper) word limit on the term paper will be 1500 words.
 - A selection of topics will be made available to you on November 20th, together with more detailed instructions. The term paper will be due on December 8th (12 p.m.).

- Note that since this deadline falls after the end of our lectures, the teaching assistant with whom you will be working will be setting out his or her own preferences for submission (i.e., electronic or paper).

5. **Tutorial Attendance and Participation.** Registration in a tutorial section is a course requirement, as is your regular attendance and participation in your tutorial section. This counts towards **10%** of your final grade in the course. The teaching assistant leading your section will have more to say about how this component of your final grade will be assessed.

5 Schedule of Topics and Readings

Here is a detailed schedule of the topics and readings we will be discussing over the course of the term. Note that ‘*’d material is recommended. Unless otherwise noted, all readings are required reading.

Sept. 11: Course introduction.

Overview of course syllabus; introduction to arguments for scepticism from sceptical hypotheses.

Reading: Logic Primer §§1–3; Nagel, *Knowledge*, Ch. 1–2; [Skepticism*](#), esp. §§1–4.

Sept. 13: Traditional Responses to Scepticism (I): Knowledge as Justified True Belief and Foundationalism about Justification.

Reading: Nagel, *Knowledge*, Ch. 4; Haack, ‘Evidence and Inquiry’ (selections); Fumerton, [Foundationalist Theories of Epistemic Justification*](#), esp. §§1–3.

Sept. 18: Traditional Responses to Scepticism (II): Coherentism about Justification and Correspondence vs. Coherence Theories of Truth.

Reading: as for Sept. 13; Young, [The Coherence Theory of Truth*](#); David, [The Correspondence Theory of Truth*](#).

Sept. 20: Rejecting the Sceptical Challenge: Knowledge as True Belief which Tracks the Truth.

Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations* (excerpts); Logic Primer*, §§5–6.

Sept. 25: Assessing Nozick on Knowledge.

Reading: As per September 20 (in this case all required); Nagel, *Knowledge*; Ch. 5.

Sept. 27: The Nature of Epistemic Justification: A Puzzle.

Reading: Gettier, ‘Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?’.

Oct. 2: Internalist and Externalist Solutions to the Puzzle.

Reading: Goldman, ‘What is Justified Belief?’.

Oct. 4: Assessing Epistemic Externalism.

Reading: As per Oct. 2; Unger, ‘An Analysis of Factual Knowledge’.

Oct. 9 No class (Thanksgiving Holiday)

- Oct. 11: Scepticism and Metaphysical Reality.
Reading: Chalmers, 'The Matrix as Metaphysics'.
- Oct. 16: Epistemic Contextualism.
Reading: Lewis, 'Elusive Knowledge'; Stine*, 'Skepticism, Relevant Alternatives, and Deductive Closure'.
Topics distributed for short writing assignment.
- Oct. 18: Assessing Contextualism about Knowledge.
Reading: As per Oct. 11 (in this case all required).
Mid-term test review.
- Oct. 23: **Mid-term test** (in class).
- Oct. 25: Hume on the Problem of Causation.
Reading: Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (excerpts); Mumford, *Metaphysics*, Introduction; Morris and Brown*, [Hume](#), §§5–6.
Overview of metaphysics component of the course.
- Oct. 30: Counterfactual Theories of Causation.
Reading: Lewis, 'Causation'; Logic Primer §§4–5; Mumford, *Metaphysics*, Ch. 5.
Short Writing Assignment due in class.
- Nov. 1: Assessing Lewis on Causation.
Reading: As for October 31st; Fine, 'Review of *Counterfactuals*'.
- No classes Nov. 6 and Nov. 8:** Fall "Reading Break".
- Nov. 13: Primitivism about Causation.
Reading: Strawson, 'Causation and Explanation'.
- Nov. 15: Identity and Persistence through Time: Some Puzzles.
Reading: Ney, 'Persistence'; Logic Primer §4; Mumford, *Metaphysics*, Ch. 4.
- Nov. 20: Perdurantist Solutions to the Puzzles.
Reading: As per Nov. 15; Hawley, 'How Things Persist'.
Topics assigned for final term paper.
- Nov. 22: Assessing Perdurantism about Persistence.
Reading: Ayers, 'Substance: Prolegomena to a Realist Theory of Identity'; Robinson*, [Substance](#), esp. §3.1.

- Nov. 27: The Nature of Time and the Time Series.
Reading: McTaggart, 'The Unreality of Time'.
- Nov. 29: Time Travel and the Grandfather Paradox.
Reading: Lewis, 'The Paradoxes of Time Travel'.
- Dec. 4: Assessing Lewis's Solution to the Paradoxes.
Reading: As per Nov. 29; Mumford, *Metaphysics*, Ch. 6.
- Dec. 6: Review for final exam.

6 Additional Course Information

1. *Course Contact*

- In addition to our regular lectures, I will hold a set of weekly office hours on Mondays from 4–5:30 p.m., in JHB 503. Please feel free to attend these office hours should you need to speak with me on matters pertaining to the course, or to ask any questions. Outside of class and office hours, the absolute best way to reach me is by email. However, as above, your primary course contact throughout the term should be the teaching assistant leading your tutorial discussion sections.
- Please note that all email should include "PHL 232" somewhere in the subject-line.
- Please note also that I typically disregard email that seeks after information readily available on the course syllabus, the course website, or by attending class lectures. Otherwise, please allow 24 hours for a response from me.
- Please note, finally, that email is an inappropriate format for asking substantive philosophical questions about the course material. Those sorts of questions are encouraged, but you should bring them to my office hour, or discuss them with your tutorial leader.

2. *Classroom Etiquette*

- Please be conscientious of those around you if using a laptop computer to take notes in class. In particular, while in lecture, you should refrain at all times from using an electronic device for anything that is not class-related. (Note: Facebook and general web-browsing are not class-related). Surfing the internet while in a lecture is impolite, and distracting to those around you, including me.
- I encourage questions, and regularly set aside approximately ten minutes at the end of each lecture for Q & A. Please remember at all times to raise your hand before asking a question or making a comment.
- It is essential that you be respectful at all times to other students in the class. Disrespectful behavior of any kind will not be tolerated.

3. *Style and formatting of written work.* Your submitted work should conform to a standard formatting and citation style, such as MLA, APA, or Chicago.

4. *Course Policy on Late Work.* Your assigned work for this course must be submitted on time. Late penalties on assigned work are set at 1/3 of a letter grade per day, to a maximum of five days (this includes weekends/holidays), unless accompanied by a documented medical explanation or due to a family emergency. Any work outstanding beyond this point will receive a grade of 0.
5. *Academic honesty.*
 - As you are undoubtedly aware, using someone else’s ideas without explicit acknowledgement is stealing, and constitutes plagiarism. It is your responsibility to understand the nature of plagiarism, and what to do to avoid it in your writing.
 - For more information on academic infractions, and how to avoid them, see [here](#).
 - Note that the common penalty in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences for plagiarism in a written assignment, test, or examination is **F** on the piece of work. For the most serious acts of plagiarism, such as the purchase of an assignment or cheating on a test or examination, the penalty can also include suspension for a period of up to five years from registration in courses taught in a particular department or from all courses taught in this Faculty.
6. *Disability accommodation.* Should you require any accommodations in this course due to a disability, please do not hesitate to communicate this fact to me, or to the teaching assistant leading your tutorial sections.

7 Important Dates

Classes begin	Sept. 7.
University Closed (Thanksgiving)	Oct. 9.
Fall Exam Timetable Posted	Oct. 21. (online)
Mid-term test	Oct. 23. (in-class)
Short writing assignment due	Oct. 30. (in class)
Fall Reading Break (no classes)	Nov. 6–10.
Last day to withdraw without academic penalty	Nov. 6.
Final Class	Dec. 6.
Classes End	Dec. 7.
Final term paper due	Dec. 8. (submission details T.B.A)