

PHILOSOPHY 4300: EPISTEMOLOGY

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Texts (all required): Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge* and *Three Dialogues* (OUP); Descartes, *Meditations, Objections, and Replies* (Hackett); Plato, *Theatetus* (Focus); Landesman, *An Introduction to Epistemology* (Blackwell).

General objectives of the course: At the end of the course, you will be asked to evaluate the course's success at meeting these objectives:

- Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories
- Developing skills in expressing oneself orally or in writing
- Learning to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.

Specific objectives of the course: This course will explore philosophical questions about the nature of knowledge, focusing primarily on the relation between knowledge and perception. What do we think we know about ourselves and the world, and how is that alleged knowledge related to what we see, hear, smell, taste, and feel? However, the chief aim of the course is not necessarily to change or advance anyone's beliefs about knowledge; it is to help you gain proficiency in grasping, articulating, and criticizing philosophical theories.

Work and expectations.

- Answer at least 17 out of 20 reading questions (20%)
- Three 4-page papers (20% x 3)
- A final essay on Plato's *Theatetus* (20%)

On all your written work, **everything counts**: style, substance, organization, grammar, spelling - *everything*. I assume that anything you turn in to me will be as good as you can make it. **All written work must be turned in as hard copy; no emailed assignments, please.**



General policy regarding late work: Each reading question assignment is due at the beginning of class. Late reading question assignments will **not** be accepted. Papers are also due at the beginning of class; late papers will be docked a one-third grade increment (the difference between a B and a B-, e.g.) for every day (24 hrs.) they are late. The last essay is due at the posted time, and will **not** be accepted late.

As students, you should expect me to be to class on time and to be well-prepared each day. I have the same expectation for you. While you are in class, I expect you to be just as attentive to the discussion as I am. You may kick me out of class if I fall asleep, or if I use a phone or computer for non-class related purposes, or begin to read a newspaper, or start my reading for another class.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is the crime of taking content from another source and passing it off as your own. It may be literal (word for word) or not. If you know you are drawing heavily from some outside source, then you should acknowledge that fact in a footnote. Egregious cases of plagiarism will result in an "F" for the assignment, and possibly for the entire course. If you are in doubt about whether to cite, ask me.

What I believe letter grades mean:

A or A- The essay is **excellent**. The writing is clear and concise, using proper sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. The essay stays firmly on topic. The writer has accurately described the relevant philosophical positions and arguments. The essay demonstrates that the student has engaged the topic with intellectual curiosity and seriousness, going beyond classroom discussions and readings, and demonstrating a thorough understanding of the material.

B+ The essay is **very good**. The writing is clear and concise, using proper sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. The essay stays firmly on topic. The writer has accurately described the relevant philosophical positions and arguments, except perhaps with a few very minor errors. The essay shows intellectual engagement with the topic, but there is little in the essay which goes beyond classroom discussions and readings.

B or B- The essay is **good**. The writing is clear and concise, using proper sentence structure, grammar, and spelling. The essay stays on topic. The writer has provided a broadly accurate account of the relevant philosophical positions and arguments. There are some errors, but they do not detract from the central aim of the essay. There is little in the essay which goes beyond classroom discussions and readings.

C+ or C or C- The essay is **adequate** in meeting the assignment's requirements. The writing, in terms of grammar, spelling, and sentence structure, is at an acceptable level, though there are errors. The writer has provided an adequate account of relevant philosophical positions and arguments, but with some important errors or omissions. Perhaps the essay wanders from the topic, introducing needless examples or pursuing tangents. There are obvious objections or points that should have been considered.

D+ or D This essay is **not adequate** in quality. There are serious problems in spelling, grammar, and sentence structure. It is not clear that the writer has grasped the relevant philosophical positions or arguments. The organization of the essay is unclear, or nonexistent. Nevertheless, it is clear that some attempt has been made to meet the assignment's requirements; but the result does not demonstrate an adequate mastery of the material.

F This essay is a **failure**. Writing errors abound, and there is no indication of an understanding of the material, or even that any serious effort has been made.

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NOTE: We may end up revising this syllabus. I'm not sure this is the best way in which to present the material, so if problems develop along the way, we will revise our plans.

Date	What we will discuss	Reading questions to answer
T, 1/8	Introduction (NR)	none
Th, 1/10	Descartes, Meditation One	1. Even if I am dreaming, what elements in my experience would still be true?
T, 1/15	Descartes, Meditation Two	2. Why can't I doubt my own existence?
Th, 1/17	Descartes, Meditation Three	3. What is the light of nature?
T, 1/22	Descartes, Meditation Four	4. What causes me to err? • paper #1 assigned
Th, 1/24	no class	
T, 1/29	Descartes, Meditation Five	5. What new knowledge allows for the new argument for God's existence?
Th, 1/30	Descartes, Meditation Six	6. What about a chiliagon allows me to think I probably have a body?
T, 2/5	Objections and Replies	none • paper #1 due
Th, 2/7	Objections and Replies	none
T, 2/12	Berkeley, First Dialogue	7. Why think that sound, smell, color, etc., cannot be qualities of objects?
Th, 2/24	Berkeley, Second Dialogue	8. How is Philonous able to maintain that sensible things exist even when you and I are not perceiving them? • paper #2 assigned
T, 2/19	no class - follow Monday schedule	
Th, 2/21	no class	
T, 2/26	Berkeley, Third Dialogue	9. What is Hylas's objection to Philonous's claim to have an idea of God?
Th, 2/28	Landesman, chapters 1 & 2	10. What is Price's "tomato" argument?
T, 3/5	Landesman, chapter 3	11. What is Moore's argument for an external world? • paper #2 due
Th, 3/7	Landesman, chapter 4	12. What is Nietzsche's response to the cogito?
3/11-15	spring break	

T, 3/19	Hume on induction	13. Why isn't "X causes Y" a relation of ideas?
Th, 3/21	Hume on the self	14. What is Hume's response to the cogito?
T, 3/26	Kant, Wittgenstein, Putnam	none
Th, 3/28	Kant, Wittgenstein, Putnam	none
T, 4/2	Landesman, chapter 5	15. What is transcendent inference? • paper #3 assigned
Th, 4/4	Landesman, chapter 6	16. What is Wittgenstein's "beetle in a box" idea supposed to show?
T, 4/9	Idealism and platonism	none
Th, 4/11	Naturalism	none • paper #3 due
T, 4/16	Plato, <i>Theatetus</i> , first half	17. What is Protagoras's definition of knowledge?
Th, 4/18	Plato, <i>Theatetus</i> , first half	18. What objection does Socrates raise at 162d-e (margin numbers)?
T, 4/23	Plato, <i>Theatetus</i> , second half	19. How does the wax analogy account for mistaken judgments?
Th, 4/25	Plato, <i>Theatetus</i> , second half	20. What is the problem with the last-offered definition of knowledge?
		essay on <i>Theatetus</i> due