PHIL 140: Knowledge and Society

Course overview

Number	PHIL 140.001
Title	Knowledge and Society
Credit hours	3
Course Description	*Epistemology* is the branch of philosophy that deals with questions about knowledge, rational belief, evidence, and the like. This course investigates particular "knowledge problems" that emerge in areas of our social and political experience. For example: should we always defer to experts about complex policy questions, or are we justified in forming beliefs for ourselves? Can it ever be rational to believe a conspiracy theory? Should we try to break out of our "echo chambers"? Should the existence of widespread disagreement about politics, morality and religion make us less confident in our own views? Can we ever be epistemically justified in holding prejudices? Through investigating these specific, applied questions, we hope to learn something about the nature of knowledge, evidence and rationality more generally.
Prerequisites	None
Target Audience	The course is designed to be accessible to students who have never taken a philosophy class before, and is taught as such. However, those with prior philosophy classes are also welcome.
Instructor	Giulia Napolitano Office: Caldwell Hall 202A Email: mgnapoli@unc.edu
Teaching Assistants	N/A
Course Website	https://uncch.instructure.com/courses/20823
Class Days, Times, Location	MWF, 1:25 – 2:15 p.m., CW 105.
Office Hours	MWF 11.15-12.15 by appointment, in person or on Zoom. I am always happy to meet with you for clarifications on the course material, for guidance on the assignments, for discussing your progress in the course, or anything else you might want to talk about related to the course. Just schedule an appointment with me via email.
Course Texts	No required texts for purchase. All required reading for the course will be linked in Canvas.
Course Format	The class format will combine short introductory lectures with whole class discussions and smaller group discussions and group activities. You are expected to have carefully read the papers before class and to participate actively in the discussion.

Course Goals and Learning Objectives

All our philosophy courses aim at the acquisition and nurturing of basic philosophic skills. One of the main goals of our philosophy curriculum is to instill and enable the development of skills that are distinct to philosophy, but which are foundational to all forms of knowledge.

These **basic philosophical skills** involve being able to:

- Think critically;
- Deploy philosophical concepts and terminology correctly, in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Represent clearly and accurately the views or argument of particular philosophers, in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Identify the premises and conclusion(s) of a philosophical argument and assess both its validity and soundness;
- Apply a philosophical theory or argument to a new topic, and being able to draw and defend reasonable conclusions about that topic;
- Develop an argument for a particular solution to a philosophical problem in either a historical or contemporary setting;
- Write clearly, precisely, and persuasively in defense of a philosophical thesis;
- Participate in respectful, critical, and reflexive dialogues about difficult philosophical positions;
- Read, interpret, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of different philosophical texts and the philosophical positions presented them.

In addition, PHIL140 satisfies our **metaphysics and epistemology** requirement for the major and thereby aims at developing the following learning outcomes:

- being familiar with some of the most important philosophical answers to fundamental questions about what is real and what we can know;
- Recognize and use distinctly philosophical approach(es) to developing and validating knowledge of the unfamiliar world;
- Being able to evaluate ways that temporal, spatial, scientific, and especially philosophical categories structure knowledge;
- Interrogate assumptions that underlie our own perceptions of the world by recognizing that these presuppose 'ontological' and 'metaphysical' claims that are not always warranted or sustainable and by recognizing that our knowledge is limited;
- Employ strategies to mitigate or adjust for preconceptions and biases and to address the challenges posed by skepticism and relativism.
- Apply philosophical insights to understand patterns of experience and belief.

Specifically, this course will enable students to:

1. Think more critically and systematically about their beliefs and belief systems, about the "epistemic status" of such beliefs (are they rational? do they amount to knowledge?), and about the methods that they use to form such beliefs.
2. Competently deploy key philosophical concepts that relate to knowledge, evidence and rationality, and master a vocabulary and conceptual framework to express their ideas about these topics in a more sophisticated manner.

3. Recognize the relationship between inequality and social, economic, and political power in our society.

4. Critically reflect on the influence and power and ideology on systems of belief and the bias they produce;

5. Interrogate the epistemological processes by which forms of inequality are sustained and how these processes have been and are resisted and transformed;

6. Understand the ways in which social characteristics like gender, race and class can shape both what a person believes and what is believed about them, as well as how they are treated as a source of testimony (drawing on the recent literature on "epistemic injustice");

7. Become competent with the basics of formal argument reconstruction.
8. Be prepared for further philosophical study, as well as to be equipped with philosophical underpinnings for classes in related disciplines (especially the social sciences).

This course is part of the IDEAs in Action General Education curriculum:

Ways of Knowing

Students develop intellectual humility, learning to question assumptions, categories, and norms that structure their worldviews and to understand the sources and effects of biases. They learn, use, and distinguish strengths and weaknesses of one or more approach(es) to knowledge of the unfamiliar, such as: aesthetically, philosophically, linguistically, historically, or culturally remote forms of knowledge and worldmaking, or formal logic, scientific practice, and similar formalized approaches to countering bias and creating knowledge.

Questions for Students

1. What norms and expectations do I take for granted?

2. What categories and concepts frame my assumptions, experiences, and beliefs?

3. What practices of investigation or inquiry best challenge those assumptions and expectations?

4. How can I consider whether my beliefs might be wrong?

Learning Outcomes

1. Recognize and use one or more approach(es) to developing and validating knowledge of the unfamiliar world.

2. Evaluate ways that temporal, spatial, scientific, and philosophical categories structure knowledge.

3. Interrogate assumptions that underlie our own perceptions of the world.

4. Employ strategies to mitigate or adjust for preconceptions and biases.

5. Apply critical insights to understand patterns of experience and belief.

Power, Difference, and Inequality

Students engage with the histories, perspectives, politics, intellectual traditions, and/or expressive cultures of populations and communities that have historically been disempowered, and the structural and historical processes by which that disempowerment has endured and changed.

Questions for Students

1. What are the relevant structures, institutions, ways of thinking, and practices that create, maintain, and change social, economic, and political inequalities?

2. What practices have been implemented and institutionalized to address social, economic, and political inequalities?

Learning Outcomes

1. Recognize the relationship between inequality and social, economic, and political power.

2. Analyze configurations of power and the forms of inequality and bias they produce.

3. Evaluate dynamics of social, economic, and political inequality in relation to specific historical contexts.

4. Interrogate the systemic processes by which forms of inequality are sustained and how these processes have been and are resisted and transformed.

Recurring Capacities

Every focus capacity course includes the following activities:

1. **Writing**, totaling at least 10 pages in length or the intellectual equivalent.

2. **Presenting** material to the class, smaller groups, or the public through oral presentations, webpages, or other means.

3. **Collaborating** in pairs or groups to learn, design, solve, create, build, or research.

These elements – referred to as "recurring capacities" – will help you repeatedly practice crucial skills for future study, life, and career success.

Course Assignments and Assessments

Assignments	Percentages
Class participation	15%
Short writing assignments (10% each) (1-2 pages each)	40%
Term paper outline + peer feedback (1 page)	10%
Term paper (5 -6 pages)	25%
Final project presentation	10%

Grading Scale
Converting your final average to a letter grade:

93-100% : A
90-92.99%: A-
87-89.99%: B+
83-86.99%: B
80-82.99%: B-
77-79.99%: C+
73-76.99%: C
70-72.99%: C-
67-69.99%: D+
63-66.99%: D
0-62.99%: F

Assignment Descriptions

The typical amount of time required to complete work for this course will be between 9 and 12 hours weekly including class/synchronous activities.

Class participation: You will get two participation grades during the course, one for the first half of the semester and another for the second, each worth 7.5% of your grade. Participation will be graded on the basis of

- *Alertness/attentiveness.* Includes (obviously) being fully awake, and not being on your computer, tablet or phone (except for taking notes, checking the readings, or anything else class-related) .
- *Regularity of participation in discussion*. You are expected to participate in class discussions and collaborate with your fellow students regularly. I do understand that participation in discussion can be difficult or intimidating for many students. I want to create an environment in which you feel comfortable participating. If you are having difficulty, please come to office hours or email me and we can set up a meeting to discuss strategies.
- *Respectfulness of participation*. You are expected to be respectful to the instructor and to other students. This includes not talking over others or drowning them out, as well as listening to others and responding to what they say.
- *Preparedness.* Your participation should reflect having done all the reading and having thought about it. You can demonstrate this by referring to specific ideas from the readings in your comments, and by answering when I ask the class to recall something from a reading.

Note: you will <u>not</u> be graded on the philosophical quality of your contributions, as I want people to be able to speak freely and try out new ideas without fear of judgment. I also want to add that asking questions, including clarificatory questions, can be a great way to participate.

Short writing assignments: Four short written assignments—1-2 double-spaced pages—summarizing and critically engaging with a reading from class in response to a prompt provided by me in advance. These assignments are meant to gradually build your writing skills in preparation for the term paper.

Term paper outline and peer feedback: In preparation for the term paper, you will write an outline of your paper. You will also be assigned to two peers to provide feedback on their outlines. You will be graded both on the quality of your outline, and the quality of your feedback to your peers. Instructions on writing outlines and giving feedback will be provided closer to the date.

Term paper: You will write a paper—5-6 double-spaced pages— in response to one of several distributed prompts. Further instructions on this assignment, including the grading rubric that will be used, will be provided closer to the date.

Final group project: A group project where students apply concepts and frameworks learnt in the course to one case study of their choice. The grade will be based on the presentation of the group project which will take place on the day scheduled for the final exam. More guidance and information will be provided closer to the date.

Extra credit: Over the course of the semester there will be a number of opportunities to get some extra credit for this course. In each case, it will involve participating in, and then engaging with, something that had direct relevance to this course. In each case, in order to receive extra credit, you should write a short essay (≈1-2 double-spaced pages) engaging critically with an argument or view presented in one of the qualifying opportunities.

In addition to the announced opportunities, you may also contact me to recommend something. Each event and essay is worth 1 extra point (1%). You can earn maximum 2 extra points throughout the semester. You should notify me of any event you plan to attend for extra credit beforehand, and you should email me your short essay after the event. All extra credit must be completed BEFORE the end of classes. Under no circumstances will I accept extra credit assignments after the last day of classes.

As with all assignments in this course, the Honor Code applies. If you have any questions about plagiarism, consult this page: https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/plagiarism/.

Policies for Submission of Written Work.

All written work should be submitted via the Assignments function on Canvas (except for extra credit essays, which should be emailed directly to me).

To facilitate anonymous grading, please don't include your name anywhere on your paper or in the file name. Use your UNC PID instead.

Extensions & Late Penalties:

- For term papers and short written assignments:
  - Extensions are granted to anyone who asks at least 24h before the deadline. Under no circumstances will extensions be granted after the deadline for the assignment.
  - Late submissions (without an extension) will lose 1/3 of a letter grade for every day or part of a day that they are late.

- For paper outlines and peer feedback:
    - No extensions will be granted, due to the nature of the assignment (it is essential to provide feedback to your peers in a timely fashion for them to be able to incorporate it in their final paper).
    - Late outlines and comments will be graded maximum as a C if they are submitted within 2 days of the deadline. Later submissions will receive zero points.

You are more than welcome (indeed, encouraged) to meet with me while working on assignments. This is free advice that almost always improves your grade. However, in the interest of fairness, I will not provide feedback on any written drafts.

Course at a Glance

The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

Module	Topic	Readings	Date
Introduction & basic philosophical skills	Intro to the course	Syllabus	M 01/9/23
	Skills day 1: reading and summarizing a philosophy paper	Jim Pryor's guidelines on reading philosophy	W 01/11/23
	Skills day 2: making arguments and engaging with philosophy	Bailey - But how do I participate?	F 01/13/23
			M 01/16/23 MLK day
	Intro to epistemology	Knowledge: a very short introduction (ch.1) - Nagel	W 01/18/23
		A right to believe? - Rowland + Discussion	F 01/20/23
	Skills day 3: writing philosophy	Jim Pryor's guidelines on writing philosophy	M 01/23/23
Deference, expertise, and testimony	Intellectual autonomy and expertise	Is Critical Thinking Epistemically Responsible? - Huemer	W 01/25/23

		The Social Value of Non-Deferential Belief - Hazlett	F 01/27/23
		Discussion	M 01/30/23 *Short writing assignment 1 due*
	Conspiracy theories	Conspiracy theories and the conventional wisdom - Pigden	W 02/1/23
		Conspiracy theories - Cassam (ch. 1)	F 02/3/23
		Discussion	M 02/6/23
	Case study: climate change	The Skeptic and the Climate Change Skeptic - Worsnip	W 02/8/23
		Discussion	F 02/10/23
		M 02/13/23 well-being day	
Echo chambers and news media consumption	Echo chambers	Escape the echo chamber - Nguyen	W 02/15/23 *Short writing assignment 2 due*
		The Obligation to Diversify One's Sources - Worsnip	F 02/17/23
		Discussion	M 02/20/23
		Echo Chambers, Fake News, and Social Epistemology - Lackey	W 02/22/23
		What's Wrong with the Online Echo Chamber: A Motivated Reasoning Account - Avnur	F 02/24/23

		Discussion	M 02/27/23 *Short writing assignment 3 due*
	Fake news and deepfakes	The fake news about fake news - Coady	W 03/1/23
		Deepfakes and the epistemic backstop - Rini	F 03/3/23
		Discussion	M 03/6/23
	Catch up discussion	No new reading	W 03/8/23
	Skills day 4: writing a paper outline	No reading	F 03/10/23 *Short writing assignment 4 due* *Participation grade 1*
M 03/13/23 - M 03/19/23 SPRING BREAK			
Group project description and first meeting		Come with ideas for the group project	M 03/20/23
Bias, disagreement, and partisanship	Bias and disagreement	Irrelevant Cultural Influences on Belief -McKenna	W 03/22/23
		Disagreement and Public Controversy - Christensen	F 03/24/23 *Paper outline due*
		Discussion	M 03/27/23
	Partisanship	What are the Chances You're Right about Everything? An Epistemic Challenge for Modern Partisanship - Joshi	W 03/29/23
		Discussion	F 03/31/23 *Peer feedback due*
			M 04/3/23 NO CLASS
			W 04/5/23 NO CLASS
			F 04/7/23 University Holiday

Epistemic injustice and prejudice	Epistemic injustice	Testimonial injustice - Fricker (ch.1)	M 04/10/23
		Hermeneutical Injustice - Fricker (ch.7)	W 04/12/23
		Discussion	F 04/14/23
	Prejudice	The epistemology of prejudice - Begby	M 04/17/23
		Social Media, Trust, and the Epistemology of Prejudice - Frost-Arnold	W 04/19/23
		Discussion	F 04/21/23 *Final paper due*
	Catch up discussion	No new reading	M 04/24/23 *Participation grade 2*
Final projects	Final project meeting time	No reading	W 04/26/23
		No reading	F 04/28/23 Last day of classes
MAY 5th 4.00 pm final projects presentations			