

Epistemology

The value of knowledge in morality, science, education, and political practice

Professor: Bryce Huebner
Office: 234 New North
Office hours: T 10:00-11:30; by appointment

Course meets:
T & Th 17:00 - 18:15 pm
Location: Maguire 103

This course will provide a survey of classic and contemporary issues in epistemology. And over the course of the semester, we will try to figure out what role knowledge and truth play in our everyday social practices, as well as our politically structured lives. We will start with some of the classic approaches to the nature of truth and knowledge, drawing on resources from the European tradition, as well as traditions that flourished in Africa and Asia. In the second half of the class, we will turn to issues of scientific knowledge, trust, and objectivity. We will think about how the process of producing knowledge can break down (focussing on a topic known as epistemic injustice), and we will close by thinking about how it can be repaired (focusing on suggestions by Paulo Freire).

Required Texts:

Michel de Montaigne, *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*
Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge: A very short introduction*
Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*

Course Requirements:

10%	Ongoing	This is a small, discussion-oriented class, and you will be expected to make consistent contributions to the class discussion
30%	Ongoing	You must submit a brief reading response every friday . I will provide questions that I would like you to address, and you must provide a 500-750-word response based on the reading as well as in-class discussion. One of our primary goals will be to <i>work through</i> these questions together, and to collectively get a better handle on the issues that have been raised (or have been ignored) in each of the readings.
You must write two short papers that move beyond your weekly reflections. You can expand upon any of your responses, and move in any direction that suits your own interests.		
20%	10/25	At the midpoint of the semester, you must submit a paper that is based on one of your weekly writing assignments. It must include an informative title, a 60 word abstract, approximately 1200-words of main text (with no footnotes or endnotes), and an alphabetical reference list.
20%	12/6	During the final course period, you must submit a paper that is based on one of your weekly writing assignments. It must include an informative title, a 60 word abstract, approximately 1200-words of main text (with no footnotes or endnotes), and an alphabetical reference list.
20%	12/16	At the end of the semester, you must re-submit your weekly writing assignments, along with a brief narrative assessment of what you have learned in the class, and what questions you feel have been left unresolved (and why). Details will be provided in due course

Grading Criteria:

Weekly writing assignments: You will be given full credit for these so long as you show evidence of engagement with the philosophical issues. This means that you should not just summarize the arguments in the text; you should explain why you think an argument is interesting, wrong, worth pursuing, or relevant to another issue that you are concerned with.

Longer papers: 'B+' papers will 1) clearly articulate the general claims that are being defended, 2) be relatively well organized, 3) will rely on fairly strong evidence and arguments, and 4) will be stylistically clear—thereby presenting a competent argument. 'A' grades will be awarded to papers that *excel* in every category, thereby exhibiting a clear capacity for *doing philosophy*—and 'A-' grades will be awarded to papers that excel in one of these areas. 'B' grades will be awarded to papers that are weaker in one area—but still satisfactory. 'C' grades will be awarded to papers that are weak in two or more of these categories; and 'D' grades will only be awarded to papers that are weak all categories or that omit one category altogether (e.g., by lacking a thesis or lacking arguments for a thesis).

Paper deadlines:

If you need an extension on a paper, please ask *before* the due date. In general, I will be willing to give a 48-hour grace period (no questions asked). If you are still having trouble completing the assignment after that, you must set up an appointment to go over your ideas and set a schedule for finishing the paper. Unless an extension is granted in advance, assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a grade (A- to a B+, B+ to a B, etc.) for each day they are late.

Appealing a grade:

You can appeal any grade that you feel does not accurately represent the work you have done. All appeals for re-evaluation must be made in writing, no more than two weeks after your paper is returned, and no sooner than 48 hours after you have received your grade. They must provide a compelling argument for raising the grade, but an agreement to re-evaluate a paper is no guarantee of a better grade, and it can result in lower grades if there are more serious problems that were missed on the first reading.

The honor code:

The Georgetown University Honor pledge requires you to be honest in your academic endeavors and to hold yourself to the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life. I expect you to be familiar with the letter and the spirit of this pledge; and, I will enforce the Honor Code by reporting any and all suspected cases of academic dishonesty.

Accessibility and diversity:

One finds a great deal of diversity in teaching and learning styles in a modern university. These styles may not always mesh in ways that are conducive to the success and wellbeing of everyone in a course. But there are often ways of improving things. I am happy to discuss the structure of this course, and to work with the learning styles people have to the best of my abilities. So please feel free to talk to me in office hours. I sincerely think that every student is entitled to a meaningful and stimulating classroom experience! Disabled students and students on record with the university as requiring particular accommodations, please let me know that this is the case, in confidence, during the first few weeks of the semester—and please take advantage of services provided by the university. Finally, please let me know if you learn during the semester that something would make the classroom accessible.

Sexual misconduct:

As a faculty member and an educator, it is my responsibility to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. Georgetown University and its faculty are committed to supporting survivors of sexual misconduct, including relationship violence and sexual assault. And university policy requires all faculty members to report any disclosures about sexual misconduct to the Title IX Coordinator, whose role is to coordinate the University's response to sexual misconduct. But Georgetown also has a number of fully confidential professional resources who can provide support and assistance to survivors of sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct. These resources include: [Jen Schweer](#) (202.687.0323) Associate Director of Health Education Services for Sexual Assault Response and Prevention; [Erica Shirley](#) (202.687.6985) Trauma Specialist (CAPS). More information about campus resources and reporting sexual misconduct can be found at <http://sexualassault.georgetown.edu>.

Mind your manners:

Philosophy is best done collectively and collaboratively; however, some of the questions we will be discussing may generate contentious claims, spirited discussions, vehement disagreements, and trenchant criticisms. This is at least part of what doing philosophy is all about. In discussing, disagreeing, criticizing, and arguing with one another, we must make an effort to remain courteous and respectful. I promise to do my best to raise philosophical issues and to start philosophical discussions in ways that are as sensitive as possible to the variety of viewpoints and opinions that we are sure to find among the members of this class. But I will only be able to do this if each of you helps to create an atmosphere where we can develop ideas in a friendly and welcoming environment where we all learn from one another. Perhaps more importantly, if you want to disagree with someone, or if you want to offer a criticism of their viewpoint, be sure to offer reasons for the approach that you are suggesting. If we reason through things together, we are sure to have a great semester!

Tentative reading schedule

	Tuesdays	Thursdays
9/1		Introduction: No reading
9/6	Michel de Montaigne	
9/8	An Apology for Raymond Sebond (pp. 62-164)	
9/13	Jennifer Nagel	Jennifer Nagel
9/15	KVISI 1-29 (Introduction; Scepticism)	KVISI 30-45 (Rationalism and empiricism)
9/20	Jennifer Nagel	Linda Zagzebski
9/22	KVISI 46-59 (The analysis of knowledge)	"The inescapability of Gettier problems"
9/27	Edouard Machery et al	<i>Kālāma Sutta</i> (from the Pāli canon)
9/29	Gettier across cultures	Dōgen , Genjōkōan
10/4	Kwasi Wiredu	Souleymane Bachir Diagne
10/6	"Truth As opinion"	"Truth and untruth"

10/11 10/13	Zhuangzi "On equalizing things"	Jennifer Nagel KVSI 60-71 (Internalism and externalism)
10/18 10/20	Jennifer Nagel KVSI 72-86 (Testimony)	Jennifer Lackey "Knowing from testimony"
10/25 10/27	Kevin Zollman "Network epistemology"	Heidi Grasswick "Scientific and lay communities"
11/1 11/3	Naomi Scheman "Epistemology resuscitated"	Miranda Fricker "Epistemic justice and a role for virtue in the politics of knowing."
11/8 11/10	Benjamin Sherman "There is no testimonial justice"	Mark Alfano ; Natalia Washington ; Lacey Davidson & Dan Kelly Replies to Sherman
11/15 11/17	Shelley Tremain "Knowing disability, differently"	Elizabeth Anderson "Epistemic justice as a virtue of social institutions"
11/22	Tamar Gendler "On the epistemic costs of implicit bias"	Thanksgiving Holiday
11/29 12/1	Paulo Freire <i>Pedagogy of the oppressed</i> (Chapters 2 & 3)	
12/6	Paulo Freire <i>Pedagogy of the oppressed</i> (Chapter 4)	END