

Epistemology

Phil 352A · Prof. J. Dunn

Spring 2012
MWF 2:50-3:50
Asbury Hall 110
DePauw University

Office: 210 Asbury
Office Hours: M 9:15-10:15; W 4-5; F 1:30-2:30
Email: jeffreydunn@depauw.edu
Homepage: http://acad.depauw.edu/jeffreydunn_web

Description

We seem to know various things: that the Colts had a pretty bad season last year; that there will be a presidential election in November; that $5+7=12$; that DNA has a double helical structure. Maybe we don't actually know these things. Even so, we at least seem to have very good reason to believe them. But what is it to know or have a reason to believe something? Since we're often interested in evaluating the beliefs that we (or others) hold, this question seems to be important. Epistemology is the discipline that attempts to answer it. In this course we will survey the central topics within epistemology. We will read some classic work in philosophy by authors such as Plato, Descartes, and Hume, but the majority of reading will be recent work by contemporary philosophers. Topics to be considered include the structure of justification, the threat of skepticism, the nature of scientific and mathematical knowledge, and the proper relationship between epistemological theorizing and science. This course will focus mainly on primary sources in epistemology. As a result, it will be challenging, but also rewarding.

Books

- ▶ *Epistemology*, Richard Feldman, Prentice Hall.
- ▶ *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*, Steup & Sosa (eds.), Blackwell.

(The books above are available at the University Bookstore.)

Other materials will be made available to you online through Moodle.

Grading

Participation	5%
Short Assignment:	5%
Paper 1 & 2:	15% (7.5% each)
Midterm Take-Home Exam:	20%
Final Paper Presentation:	5%
Final Paper:	20%
Final Exam:	30%

Course Requirements

Participation

One of the best and most engaging ways to learn philosophy is to participate in careful, informed discussion about the material being read. This class will center on such discussion and you are expected to be an active participant each day in class. For such discussions to be profitable, they must be *informed*. This means that you are also expected to have *carefully* and *thoughtfully* have completed the reading for each class. A schedule of the reading assignments is available online. I will assess this aspect of your participation based on your engagement during class, your engagement outside of class, and your attendance.

Writing Assignments

Short Assignment

The Short Assignment is just what it sounds like: a short assignment. It comes early in the semester and allows you to get early feedback on your progress in the course. The assignment will be posted online.

Short Assignment Assigned: **Aug. 31**

Short Assignment Due: **Sep. 3**

Papers 1 & 2

Papers 1 & 2 are writing assignments where you will be asked to write a clear and careful response to a focused question concerning two of the topics discussed in class. These papers are good chances to hone your philosophical writing for the final paper. Specific information about these papers will be posted online when they are assigned.

Paper 1 Assigned: **Sep. 10**

Paper 1 Due: **Sep. 17**

Paper 2 Assigned: **Oct. 3**

Paper 2 Due: **Oct. 24**

Final Paper

Your final paper for this course will be an argumentative paper on a topic of your choosing. It should be approximately a 2,500-3,000 words. There are three main parts to this assignment:

1. Give a 5-minute presentation to the class, explaining your thesis, main arguments, and sources. Then respond to questions from the class. **Nov. 12, 14, & 16.**
2. Compose a rough draft of your paper and submit it to me for comments. **Nov. 26.**
3. Revise your paper in light of comments and submit the final draft. **Dec. 7.**

To give you an idea of what is expected, below are two examples of the kind of structure that would be appropriate for your paper. (For more detailed information about the paper, please see the document posted on the course website.)

Example 1:

1. Present a view discussed in class.
2. Present an objection to that view.
3. Consider possible replies to the objection.
4. Evaluate the replies and offer an assessment.

Example 2:

1. Present a key argument from a paper that you selected in the area of your topic.
2. Explain this argument, defining all technical terms, and providing the best possible reasons in favor of each premise of the argument.
3. Evaluate the argument, explaining how someone could criticize it.

* I strongly recommend that you take advantage of the Writing Center in the Academic Resource Center, located in 115 Asbury. After scheduling an appointment, you will have the chance to meet with a trained tutor who will read your work and offer feedback. This is a great way to improve your writing, however, slots can fill up quickly, so please plan ahead and take advantage of this great resource.

Exams

Midterm Exam

The midterm exam for this course is a take-home exam. Any material in the course readings or in the class discussions is fair game. It will be assigned on **Oct 10** and is due on **Oct. 12**.

Final Exam

The final exam for this course is *not* a take-home exam. It will be taken during the final exam period. It is a cumulative exam. Any material in the course readings, student presentations, or in the class discussions is fair game. It will be on **Wednesday, Dec. 12 from 1:00 - 4:00 pm**.

Other Requirements

You should take control of your experience in this course: what you get out of the course will largely be a function of what you put in to it. If you are falling behind or are confused about something, please make arrangements to meet with me. I really like the material we're covering in this course, and I'm on campus every day. So come talk to me about it!

Things You Can Expect From Me

I will give clear and prompt feedback on your work.

I will assist you in choosing a paper topic, finding outside sources, and editing your paper.

I will be available to discuss the material outside of class, whether over email, during office hours, or at other times.

Special Considerations

DePauw University is committed to providing equal access to academic programs and university-administered activities and reasonable modifications/accommodations to students with disabilities in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, as amended in 2008. Any student needing special accommodations due to a disability should contact the Coordinator of Student Disability Services, Pam Roberts, 302 Harrison Hall or call (765) 658-6267. It is the responsibility of each student to discuss implementation of approved modifications/accommodations with each faculty member and/or staff member within one week of the date of receiving a modification/accommodation approval memo or within the first two weeks of the academic semester.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is very important, and violations are serious offenses, which I take very seriously. There is a clear Academic Integrity Policy that can be found here:

<http://www.depauw.edu/univ/handbooks/dpuhandbooks.asp?ID=101parentid=100>

It is your responsibility to read the university policy. If you are unclear about what constitutes a violation of academic integrity, it is your responsibility to contact me with any questions so that you are clear about it. Ignorance is not an excuse. The *minimum* penalty for violations of Academic Integrity is a 0 on the relevant assignment and a further reduction in your overall grade.