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## PHL 460: EPISTEMOLOGY

FALL 2010 • MW 3:00-4:20 P.M. • EBH 312

DR. KRISTIE DOTSON

OFFICE: S. Kedzie 514

OFFICE HOURS: MW 1:30-2:30 p.m. & by appt.

E-MAIL: dotsonk@msu.edu

PHONE: 353-4617

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

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This course offers an opportunity to survey current, major themes in epistemology. As a survey, this course will offer a broad look at some contemporary developments within epistemology. Starting with a classic problem, the problem of the external world, we will examine questions around epistemic justification, analysis of knowledge, and the overall purpose of epistemology. By beginning with a classical problem it will become easier to see the current trajectories of thought within contemporary epistemology. The goal of this course is to offer a wide enough introduction to contemporary epistemology that, should you choose to read further in the area, you will have a solid grasp of the ‘business’ of epistemology to continue a course of self-study.

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### TEXTS

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- Bonjour, Laurence. *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010. (ECC)
  - Sosa, Ernest, Jaegwon Kim, Jeremy Fantl, and Matthew McGrath, ed. *Epistemology: An Anthology*. Malden: Blackwell, 2008. (E)
  - Additional readings that are not available online on ANGEL.
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### REQUIREMENTS

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- Class Participation (10%)
  - Philosophical Correspondences (10%)
  - Oral Presentations (30%)
  - Take-home midterm exam (20%)
  - Take-home final exam or final paper (30%)
  - Final Exam/Final Paper is due December 15, 2010 by 5:00 pm.
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### ASSIGNMENTS

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- **Oral:**

**Everyone’s duty** is to read the assigned text *as many times as it takes to understand it* and to note problems and questions. Be prepared to mention them if they don’t come up naturally in discussion. It is everyone’s duty to aid the summarizers, help the problematizers solve the problems, and answer the questioners’ questions—always assuming that questions end with a variation of, *Why or why not? Speak to one another;*

*learn one another's names, and never participate while peering into your laptop or gazing over it at your classmates.*

**The summarizer's duty** is to present the major points made by an author in their relations to one another; i.e., to make obvious the structure of the author's argument/s, clarifying as necessary. Normally, a summarizer begins by saying, in one succinct sentence, what overall conclusion the author defends or reaches. A summarizer may find it helpful to use the chalkboard or a handout, especially if addressing a complex set of arguments. (It's *not* okay merely to read aloud from notes because no one can follow it.)

Why have two summarizers, working independently? Summarizers may judge different points to be major or find different passages in need of clarification. The class can benefit from comparing them and is not harmed by repetition.

**The problematizer's duty** is to state 1-3 problems that emerge from the assigned reading. These might be criticisms (e.g., The Moorean argument is circular) or challenges of other sorts (e.g., Quine leaves out the *philosopher's* role in the process; Smith *assumes* a notion of plurality that we might not share; It is unclear how DeRose's two claims are compatible; This would put Fumerton in conflict with Greco).

**The questioner's duty** is to raise 1-3 questions about the assigned reading for members of the class. These should not be questions of *fact* (e.g., What does 'phenomenalism' mean?—which should be answered as homework), nor should they be open-ended (e.g., What did you all think of x?). The questions should address philosophical aspects of the reading (e.g., Does Moore rely upon an unfounded principle of epistemic closure? Is there anything Quine's philosopher is able to do that a natural scientist or mathematician could not? Which notion of justification is more defensible, x or y? We could make DeRose's claims compatible by saying x, but should we?). Try to think of questions that would genuinely *interest* your colleagues.

- Philosophical Correspondences (see attached sheet)

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## ASSIGNMENT ASSESSMENT

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- I assess written work on three factors. 1) The aptness of the submitted work to the given assignment. Did you fulfill the requirements of the assignment adequately? 2) Demonstrated ability to offer detailed, defensible readings of the course texts present in the assignment. Is the content of the assignment well supported by the class texts? Does the author understand the class texts to an appropriate degree? And 3) the organizational, structural and/or grammatical integrity of a given assignment. Is the assignment well written? Each factor is not given equal weight. The first and second factors play a major role in my grading assessments, whereas the third factor is less significant. However, all three factors can significantly affect the final grade of a given assignment.

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## OVERALL GRADING SCALE

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- 4 = 100-90%
- 3.5 = 89-85%
- 3 = 84-80%
- 2.5 = 79-75%
- 2 = 74-70%
- 1 = 69-60%
- 0 = 59-0%

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## ATTENDANCE POLICY

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- It is your responsibility to be in class. I do not perform “make-up” lectures in my office to catch absent students up on material they were not in class to receive. Please take the time to get to know other students in the class with whom you can share class notes and direct inquiries concerning missed lectures. If you find yourself unable to understand certain points of a missed lecture, please feel free to arrange a meeting with me where I will answer *specific* questions about the course material.

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## PLAGIARISM

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- In this class, **all** of your work is to be done only by yourself. All work is individual work. Plagiarism is presenting the work or ideas of another person as if they are your own. I will not consider any instances of plagiarism to be ‘accidental’ or done ‘with good will’. Examples of plagiarism include, but **are not limited to**: 1) Putting your name on group work to which you have not contributed equally; 2) Submitting work that has been purchased or given to you; 3) Turning in work that you have merely agreed with, but not thought of yourself; 4) Submitting work that was found online; and 5) Incorporating the words of an author without giving that author due credit. There is a minimum of **two** penalties for plagiarism in my class:

- 1.) You will receive a zero on the plagiarized assignment.
- 2.) Your academic dishonesty will be reported to the Dean, and subsequent university action will be taken.

Also, at my discretion, I reserve the option to assign a failing grade in any class for any student who commits plagiarism.

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## ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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- Students with disabilities should contact the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities to establish reasonable accommodations. For an appointment with a disability specialist, call 353-9642 (voice), 355-1293 (TTY), or visit [MyProfile.rcpd.msu.edu](http://MyProfile.rcpd.msu.edu).

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**DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR**

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- Article 2.3.5 of the Academic Freedom Report (AFR) for students at Michigan State University states: "The student's behavior in the classroom shall be conducive to the teaching and learning process for all concerned." Article 2.3.10 of the AFR states that "The student has a right to scholarly relationships with faculty based on mutual trust and civility." General Student Regulation 5.02 states: "No student shall . . . interfere with the functions and services of the University (for example, but not limited to, classes . . .) such that the function or service is obstructed or disrupted. Students whose conduct adversely affects the learning environment in this classroom may be subject to disciplinary action through immediate ejection and/or the Student Faculty Judiciary process."

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**MISC. POLICY**

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- Please ensure all cell-phones and noise-making-technological-devices are turned off.

## Tentative Reading Schedule

### *Week 1-4: Skepticism and the Problem of Knowledge*

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#### **Week One:**

W – 9/1: Introduction

W – 9/8: ECC, Chapter 1-3; (1-46)

*Recommended: Rene Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy*

#### **Week Two:**

M – 9/13: Barry Stroud, “The Problem of the External World” *E* (7-25)

*ECC*, Chapter 7; (119-138)

W – 9/15: G.E. Moore, “Proof of an External World,” “Four Forms of Scepticism,” & “Certainty.” *E* (26-34)

*Recommended: ECC*, Chapter 12 (237-256)

Wai-Hung Wong, “Moore, the Skeptic, and the Philosophical Context” (ANGEL)

#### **Week Three:**

M – 9/20: Jonathan Vogel, “The Refutation of Skepticism” (ANGEL)

W – 9/22: Richard Fumerton, “The Challenge of Refuting Skepticism” (ANGEL)

#### **Week Four:**

M – 9/27: Keith Lehrer, “Why Not Skepticism” (ANGEL)

W – 9/29: *ECC*, Chapter 9 & 10; (177-220)

### *Week 5-8: Epistemic Justification: Internalism & Externalism*

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#### **Week Five:**

M – 10/4: Richard Feldman & Earl Conee, “Evidentialism” *E* (310-321)

W – 10/6: Alvin Goldman, “What is Justified Belief?” *E* (333-347)

*Philosophical Correspondences (Weeks 2-4) Due*

#### **Week Six:**

M – 10/11: Laurence Bonjour, “Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge” *E* (363-378)

W – 10/13: Alvin Goldman, “Internalism Exposed.” *E* (379-393)

#### **Week Seven:**

M – 10/18: John Greco, “Justification is not Internal” (ANGEL)

W – 10/19: Richard Feldman, “Justification is Internal” (ANGEL)

*Administer Midterm Exam*

## *Week 8-11: Analysis of Knowledge*

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### **Week Eight:**

- M – 10/25: Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge” *E* (192-193)  
W – 10/27: Linda Zagzebski, “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems” *E* (207-212)

### **Week Nine:**

- M – 11/1: Duncan Pritchard, “Epistemic Luck” (ANGEL)  
*Midterm Exam Due*  
W – 11/3: Alvin Goldman, “A Casual Theory of Knowing” (ANGEL)

### **Week Ten:**

- M – 11/8: Fred Dretske, “Epistemic Operators” *E* (237-246)  
W – 11/10: Robert Nozick, “Knowledge and Skepticism” *E* (255-279)  
*Recommended: ECC, Chapter 11 (221-236)*  
*Philosophical Correspondences (Weeks 5-9) Due*

### **Week Eleven:**

- M – 11/15: Keith DeRose, “Solving the Skeptical Problem.” *E* (669-690)  
W – 11/17: W.V. Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized” *E* (145-164)  
*Recommended: ECC, Chapter 12 (237-256)*

## *Week 12-14: What is the Purpose of Contemporary Epistemology?*

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### **Week Twelve:**

- M – 11/22: Jaegwon Kim, “What is ‘Naturalized Epistemology’?” *E* (538-551)  
W – 11/24: Louise Antony, “Quine as Feminist” *E* (552-584)

### **Week Thirteen:**

- M – 11/29: William Alston, “Epistemic Desiderata” (ANGEL)  
W – 12/1: Alvin Goldman, “Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology” (ANGEL)

### **Week Fourteen:**

- M – 12/6: Steven Stich, “Reflective Equilibrium, Analytic Epistemology, and the Problem of Cognitive Diversity.” (ANGEL)  
*Administer Final Exam*  
W – 12/8: Conclusion: Epistemological Reflections  
Nichols, Stich, & Weinberg, “Metaskepticism: Meditations in Ethno-Epistemology” (ANGEL)  
*Philosophical Correspondences (Weeks 10-13) Due*

**Final Exam Due on December 15, 2010 by 5:00 pm**