

Belief, Knowledge and Truth
PHL B20 H3F
University of Toronto, Scarborough
[May-June 2020]

Course Instructor: Jessica Wright jessicajulia.wright@mail.utoronto.ca

Lecture: Lecture content made available asynchronously on Mondays and Wednesday nights each week.

Live, Online Discussion: 12-1pm Fridays

Professor's Office Hours: 2-5pm Fridays on BB Collaborate by appointment (sign up on Quercus)

Teaching Assistant: Dwight Crowell dwight.crowell@mail.utoronto.ca

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to epistemology. We will start with the familiar phenomenon of disagreement. Should we say that disagreement between people arises because “true for me” is not what’s “true for you”? We will then move on to skepticism. Our senses can sometimes deceive us. Does this mean that we should doubt the existence of the external world? What does such doubt mean for what we know? We will look at related questions about the analysis of knowledge, justification, and issues in social epistemology about testimony and trust.

This is an *online, asynchronous* course. Course lectures will be delivered on Quercus in the form of recorded videos. The professor will also host live, synchronous discussion periods on *BB Collaborate*. These live meetings are for the purpose of discussing the course content, applying the course content, and answering student questions. Because this is an asynchronous course, there is no mandatory attendance in live lecture. However, course readings are difficult, and attendance at live discussions is *highly encouraged*.

ONLINE LEARNING

The University has put together a tipsheet on what minimum tech requirements you must have in order to participate in an online course. It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the ability to access and engage with the course. This includes the ability to watch course lecture videos, access Quercus, and participate in live sessions with the TA and professor. Please find the minimal tech requirements [here](#).

Lectures and lecture content are the intellectual property of the instructor, Dr. Jessica Wright. Lectures will be made available online for the duration of the course, but may not be downloaded, recorded or distributed.

This course has been designed to be as accessible as possible for those facing added difficulties attending scheduled lectures online during the Covid-19 crisis. If you face difficulties that you feel will impede your ability to engage with the course, please inform the course instructor as soon as possible.

COURSE TEXTS

All mandatory course texts are available online through Quercus.

Jennifer Nagel (2014) *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*. Available online via the University of Toronto libraries website. Hard copies available via the University of Toronto bookstore.

Other readings available in PDF format on Quercus (and the University of Toronto libraries website).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Course requirements are as follows. Failure to complete an assignment will result in no grade being assigned for that portion (0%). Failure to complete the final exam may result in failing the course.

40% 5 x Quizlets. You must submit at least 5 over the course of the term (of 6 possible quizlets). Which ones you submit are up to you. If you complete 6 quizlets, your 5 highest marks will count towards your grade. ***Quizlets are due every week on Sundays.***

25% Final Essay (~1000 words) ***Due June 08***

35% Final Assessment (take home) ***Between June 23-27***

Quizlets may not be submitted late.

Late Papers will be penalized in proportion to their tardiness, 3% per academic day (i.e. from 79% to 76%) to a maximum of 10% deduction per week. Papers must be uploaded to the course website, instructions will be given in class.

All papers and final exams will be uploaded to turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and possible plagiarism. Details about using turnitin will be included in the first essay assignment. You might also be asked to provide an oral defense of the argument in your paper.

ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Quizlets: 40% of your course grade will be based on your performance on weekly quizlets. Quizlets are weekly quizzes administered through Quercus. The quizlets are each worth 8% of your final grade. You must complete at least 5 quizlets over the course of the term, of 6 that are possible. You may complete all 6 quizlets, in which case your grade will be based on your 5 best scores. Please note that, in the interest of providing feedback on quizlets, your answer may be used in class (anonymously) as a sample for educational feedback purposes. Because you will be provided with ample time for completion of the quizlets, and because the answers to quizlets will be discussed the following week, ***late submissions and/or excuses for quizlets will not be accepted.*** Accommodations for quizlets will be made on a case-by-case basis. If you require an accommodation for completion of the quizlets, you

must register with Accessibility Services, and you must identify yourself to the professor *at the beginning of term*. Students should have watched the lecture videos and done the week's course readings *before* completing the week's quizlet.

Final Essay: An argumentative philosophy paper. You will be provided with a choice of essay topics for your final paper. Some live discussion time will be dedicated to explaining and working on the skills associated with writing a philosophy paper.

Final Assessment: The final assessment will be in take-home format. Students will be provided with a window for completion during the final assessment period (Due June 27, 2020).

ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS

The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility, as am I as a course instructor. If you require accommodations for a disability, or have any accessibility concerns about the course, the classroom or course materials, please inform the course instructor and contact Accessibility Services as soon as possible: disability.services@utoronto.ca or studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility.

EMAIL POLICY

I will do my best to respond to email within two days of receipt. Please keep all emailed communication with the professor and your course TA polite, professional, and brief. Longer questions may be best discussed during office hours. Unless it is an emergency, I will not respond to emails on weekends or holidays. I will not discuss substantive philosophical questions via email, but I am happy to do so in person during live discussions or office hours. I may not respond to emailed questions if the information you are asking about can be easily found in the syllabus.

Your TA will announce their own email policy.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is fundamental to learning and scholarship at the University of Toronto. Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in this academic community ensures that the U of T degree that you earn will be valued as a true indication of your individual academic achievement, and will continue to receive the respect and recognition it deserves. Students are expected to know what constitutes Academic Integrity. Familiarize yourself with the University of Toronto's Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters: <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/policies/behaveac.htm>. It is the rulebook for academic behaviour at U of T. Please refer to U of T's guidelines on "Using Sources", which includes a tipsheet on "How Not to Plagiarize", available [here](#).

COURSE SCHEDULE

Readings subject to change without notice.

WEEK 1: Intro to Epistemology & Relativism

Monday May 11: Introduction to Course

- (1) Jennifer Nagel Chapter 1 of *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*
- (2) Timothy Williamson *Tetralogue* Chapter 1 “The Perils of Peacemaking”

Wednesday May 13: Relativism

- (1) Plato *selections from Theaetetus* (170a -172c)
- (2) Harvey Siegel “Epistemological Relativism—Arguments Pro and Con”

Sunday May 15th: 1st Quizlet due

WEEK 2: Scepticism & Doubt

Monday May 18th: Cartesian Scepticism

- (1) Jennifer Nagel Chapter 2 “Scepticism” in *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*
- (2) Selections from Descartes, “Meditation I: What Can be Called into Doubt” and “Meditation II: The Mind Can be More Easily Known than the Body” from *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

Wednesday May 20th: Radical Scepticism Cont’

- (1) David Chalmers “The Matrix as Metaphysics”
- (2) Christopher Hookway “Doubt: Affective States and the Regulation of Inquiry”

Sunday May 24th: 2nd Quizlet due

WEEK 3: Knowledge & Justification

Monday May 25th: What is Knowledge?

- (1) Jennifer Nagel “The Analysis of Knowledge” in *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*
- (2) Edmund Gettier “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”

Wednesday May 27th: Justification

- (1) Jennifer Nagel “Internalism and Externalism” in *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*
- (2) Alvin Goldman “Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge”

Sunday May 31st: 3rd Quizlet due

WEEK 4: Testimony & Trust

Monday June 01st: Testimony

- (1) Jennifer Nagel “Testimony” in *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*
- (2) Jennifer Lackey “Testimonial Knowledge & Transmission”

Wednesday June 03rd: Trust

- (1) Elizabeth Andersen “Public Policy and Lay Assessments of Scientific Testimony”

Sunday June 07th: 4th Quizlet due

WEEK 5: Problems of Social Situatedness

Monday June 08th: Echo Chambers & Epistemic Bubbles

- (1) C. Thi. Nguyen “Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles”

Monday June 08th: Final Essay due

Wednesday June 10th: “You Only Believe that Because...”

- (1) Katia Vavova “Irrelevant Influences”

Sunday June 14th: 5th Quizlet due

WEEK 6: Reasons for Belief

Monday June 15th: Criticizing Beliefs

- (1) W. K. Clifford “The Ethics of Belief”
- (2) Mark Rowlands “A Right to Believe?” (aeon)

Wednesday June 17th: Reasons for Belief

- (1) William James “The Will to Believe”
- (2) John Heil “Doxastic Agency”

Sunday June 21st: 6th Quizlet due

Final Assessment: during final assessment period (Due June 27)