

Knowledge in the Real World (FYS)

Fall 2018

Instructor Information

Instructor

Dr. Justin Morton

Email

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Office Location & Hours

Social Sciences 2281
Wed. 1:00-3:00

General Information

Description

Traditional epistemology has been concerned with questions such as: “What is knowledge?” and “Is justification fallible?” These questions are very important. However, in many cases, such questions are asked and answered without much concern for how it affects our epistemic standing in the real world. Outside the philosophy classroom, we are often concerned with such questions as: “How can I find out whether there was a conspiracy to kill JFK?”, “Which experts do I trust, when they disagree?”, and “Can I really trust what science says?” In this course, we will be concerned with questions like these: questions about how we ought to form and organize our beliefs about concrete issues in the world of our daily experience.

Expectations and Goals

The goals of this course are (1) to acquaint you with the thought of philosophers on how you ought to order your beliefs in the real world, and (2) to teach you a host of critical thinking skills, such as public debate, private reasoning, critical reading, and analytical writing.

Course Materials

Required Materials

None! I will supply all readings on Canvas.

Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Reading	Notes
Week 1: Oct. 2	Intro	None	
Week 2: Oct. 9	Should we ever believe conspiracy theories?	Watch selection from <i>Loose Change</i> Keeley, “Of Conspiracy Theories”	
Week 3: Oct. 16	Which experts should we trust?	Goldman, “Experts: Which Ones Should We Trust?”	
Week 4: Oct. 23	How do we gain knowledge from testimony?	Nagel, “Testimony”—ch. 6 of <i>Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction</i>	**First short paper due in class
Week 5: Oct. 30	What should we do when we disagree with our peers?	Feldman, “Reasonable Religious Disagreements”	

Week	Topic	Reading	Notes
Week 6: Nov. 6	When do outside influences on our beliefs undermine knowledge?	Greene, "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul"	
Week 7: Nov. 13	Does science track truth? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The underdetermination of theory by evidence 	Psillos, ch. 8 of <i>Scientific Realism</i>	**Second short paper due in class
Week 8: Nov. 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inference to the best explanation 	Sober, "Why is Simpler Better?"	
Week 9: Nov. 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The pessimistic meta-induction 	Psillos, chs. 5 and 6 of <i>Scientific Realism</i>	
Week 10: Dec. 4	When are groups justified in their beliefs?	Pettit, "Groups with Minds of Their Own"	

Evaluation

2 short papers | 20% each

Final project | 30%

Discussion | 30%

Additional Information and Resources

Electronics policy:

No cellphones or laptops in class. This does not apply to those who have a good reason to be using such. If you do have such an excuse, see me privately.

Student Academic Code of Conduct:

<http://sja.ucdavis.edu/files/cac.pdf>

Plagiarism:

Plagiarism violates the UCD Code of Academic Conduct. Students suspected of plagiarism will be referred to Student Judicial Affairs. For information on what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it, see the handout "Avoiding Plagiarism". We will also discuss as a class what constitute good citation practices, in the week before the first short paper is due.