Theory of Knowledge (Epistemology) Syllabus

Philos 3O03

Instructor: Kirk Lougheed (PhD Candidate)

Email: lougheek@mcmaster.ca

Office Location : TBA

Office Hours: TBA

Course Description:

Epistemology is the study of how and if we can have *knowledge*. This course focuses (mostly) on contemporary analyses of the concept of knowledge. The first part of the course examines the traditional analysis of knowledge as justified true belief. We will explore Gettier’s famous (or perhaps infamous) counterexample to the traditional analysis. The second part of the course will examine contemporary accounts of justification/knowledge that can all, in some sense, be understood as seeking to avoid Gettier counterexamples. These accounts include foundationalism, coherentism, reliablism, and proper functionalism. The third and final part of the course will focus on new arguments for scepticism including those based on cognitive bias, safety, and disagreement. Throughout this course we will discover that knowledge is a highly problematized concept which is not easily susceptible to precise characterization. We will also explore whether there are any promising ways of avoiding scepticism.

Textbook:

1. Feldman, Richard. (2001). *Epistemology*. Pearson.
2. The Feldman text will be supplemented with a number of articles that I will post well in advance of class on Avenue.

Objectives:

1. To understand the traditional analysis of knowledge and the problems associated with it.
2. To understand some of the prominent contemporary theories of justification, along with new arguments for scepticism.
3. To become better readers of philosophical texts.
4. To become better verbal communicator of philosophical ideas.
5. To develop skills associated with carefully explicating philosophical ideas and arguments.
6. To develop analytical skills associated with evaluating philosophical ideas and arguments.

Evaluation:

Short Essay:

This course will consist of one short essay of 600 words (+/-10%) on Gettier’s counterexample to the traditional analysis of knowledge. The essay is supposed to be expository only. This means summarizing the traditional analysis of knowledge and describing Gettier’s (or Russell’s) counterexample to it. Do not evaluate the traditional analysis or Gettier’s objection. The goal of this essay is clearly describe and summarize a philosophical text. Having to do this within a limited word count helps to develop this skill. This essay is worth 15% of your final grade. You must submit your essay to the appropriate folder on Avenue to Learn (all submissions will be examined by Turnitin) prior to class. Late essays will be penalized at 5% per day (including each day on weekends) and will receive no comments. *Your paper is not considered submitted unless it is submitted on Avenue to Learn*. **Due:** **Friday, February 1st at 11:59pm (on Avenue)**

Major Essay:

2500 (+/-10%) words on any topic raised in the course. The essay should be argumentative and need only focus on *one* reading. This means you need to succinctly summarize a position and then tell me *why* you agree or disagree with it. If you are unsure if a topic is suitable please speak to me. I will post more guidelines about the essay on Avenue, including suggested topics. The essay is worth 30% of your final grade. You must submit your essay to the appropriate folder on Avenue to Learn (all submissions will be examined by Turnitin) prior to class. Late essays will be penalized at 5% per day (including each day on weekends) and will receive no comments. *Your paper is not considered submitted unless it is submitted on Avenue to Learn.* **Due:** **Friday, March 29th at 11:59pm (on Avenue)**

Mid-Term Examination:

The mid-term exam is worth 25%. This exam will consist of the following format: 3 definitions each worth 1 point. There will be more than 3 options to choose from. The definitions will be followed by 1 essay questions worth 10 points. There will be more than 1 option to choose from for the essay question. The examinations will consist of material from lectures *and material from the required readings that may not have been mentioned in lecture. Students who miss the mid-term for a legitimate reason will be able to write a (different) make-up at a mutually agreed upon date.* **Date: Wednesday,** **February 27th (in class)**

Final Examination:

The final exam is worth 30% and will be cumulative. Both exams will consist of the following format: 5 definitions each worth 1 point. There will be more than 5 options to choose from. The definitions will be followed by 2 essay questions each worth 10 points. There will be more than 1 option to choose from for each of the essay questions. The examinations will consist of material from lectures *and material from the required readings that may not have been mentioned in lecture. Students who miss the mid-term for a legitimate reason will be able to write a (different) make-up at a mutually agreed upon date.* **Date: As scheduled by the registrar.**

Course Policies:

Delivery:

I plan to deliver much of the course material via lectures with PowerPoint slides. I will post PowerPoint slides and handouts on Avenue. However, this service is a student privilege, not a right. *I reserve the right to stop posting slides and/or handouts if the overall attendance in lecture is poor.* As there will be no tutorials for this course, I will also expect students to participate in a number of activities during the lectures which are designed to enhance their ability to master the course content.

Technology:

Laptops will be permitted in lecture, but I reserve the right to view your screen at any time during lecture. I reserve the right to ban technology if I feel it is a distraction. Keep cellular phones and other devices on silent. If you absolutely must answer a call or text please step out of the classroom*.*

Changes:

At certain points in the course it may make good sense to modify the schedule outlined below. The instructor reserves the right to modify elements of the course and will notify students accordingly (in class and post any changes to the course website)

Academic Integrity:

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at <http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty: 1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained. 2. Improper collaboration in group work. 3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities:

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140, ext. 2865 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University’s Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.

Schedule:

**Part 1: The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge**

Week 1. Introduction: The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge (Jan. 7 and Jan. 9)

Epistemology and its role within Philosophy

Knowledge as Justified True Belief

Readings: Ch. 1 and 2 pp.1-24

Suggested Readings: Plato *Theaetetus*

Week 2. Challenges to the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge (Jan. 14 and Jan. 16)

Gettier Counterexamples to JTB

Replies to Gettier

Readings: Ch. 3 pp. 25-38; Gettier 1963;

Suggested Readings: Russell 2009

Week 3. Sceptical Challenges to Knowledge (Jan. 21 and Jan. 23)

Cartesian Scepticism

The Problem of the Criterion

Moore’s Response to Scepticism

Readings: Ch.6 pp.108-129; Moore 1939

Suggested Readings: Descartes

**Part 2: Contemporary Accounts of Justification**

Week 4. Foundationalism **SHORT ESSAY DU**E (Jan. 23 and Jan. 25)

Readings: Ch.4 pp.39-60; McGrew 1999

Suggested Readings: Klein 1999

**SHORT ESSAY DUE on Friday, February 1st at 11:59pm (on Avenue)**

Week 5. Coherentism (Feb. 4 and Feb. 6)

Readings: Ch. 5 pp.60-80; Davidson 1989

Suggested Readings: Elgin 2005

Week 6. Reliablism/ Proper Functionalism (Feb. 11 and Feb. 13)

Readings: Ch. 5 pp.90-107; Plantinga 1986

Suggested Readings: Goldman 1967

Reading Week: Feb. 18 to Feb. 24

Week 7. **MID-TERM EXAMINATION** (Feb. 25 and Feb. 27)

Feb. 25: Review for Mid-Term

Feb. 27: **Mid-Term (in class)**

Week 8. Internalism and Externalism (Mar. 4 and Mar. 6)

Readings: Feldman and Conee 2001; Goldman 1999

Suggested Readings: Bergmann 2006

**Part 3: New Arguments for Scepticism**

Week 9. Cognitive Biases **[Last week before drop without failure]** (Mar. 11 and Mar. 13)

Readings: Dunning 2014;

Suggested Readings: Ballantyne 2015

Mar. 15: **Last day to drop without failure**

Week 10. The Safety Condition (Mar. 18 and Mar. 20)

Readings: Comesaña 2005; Pritchard 2005

Week 11. The Epistemology of Disagreement **MAJOR ESSAY DUE** (Mar. 25 and Mar. 27)

Readings: Feldman 2006

Suggested Readings: Christensen 2007

**MAJOR ESSAY DUE on Friday, March 29th at 11:59pm (on Avenue)**

Week 12. The Epistemology of Disagreement Cont’d (Apr. 1 and Apr. 3)

Readings: Kelly 2005

Suggested Readings: Bergmann 2009

Week. 13. Review for Final (Apr. 8)

**Time and Location of Final Exam: As Scheduled by the Registrar’s office**

Turnitin Disclosure:

In this course we will be using a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal plagiarism. Students will be expected to submit their work electronically to Turnitin.com and in hard copy so that it can be checked for academic dishonesty. Students who do not wish to submit their work to Turnitin.com must still submit a copy to the instructor. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to Turnitin.com. All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, etc.). To see the Turnitin.com Policy, please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.