

Epistemology

PHIL ### Syllabus

CRN: ###

Instructor: Jacob Huls

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HOW TO CONTACT: Contact via email any time. I will try to get back to you as quickly as I can.

Office hours: By appointment. There will be scheduled office hours around tests. I will notify you about these closer to those respective assignments

10:00 am–10:50 MW

Hall 214

Fall or Spring 20##

1. Course Description

This is a sample epistemology syllabus. It is intended to be modifiable to fit requirements for epistemology classes depending on the university. The general goal of this syllabus is to give students an introduction to the important epistemological questions, ideas, and views. We will start with the question: do we know anything at all? We will look at a few arguments that the answer must be *no*. Next, we will examine some potential responses to these arguments and debate them. From here, we consider how perception works: Do we perceive the world, or do we just perceive an image of the world? After this, we will consider the question: What is knowledge? We will examine a few potential answers to this question. Next, we will consider whether it is possible to rationally take different doxastic attitudes towards a proposition with the same body of evidence. We will spend a week thinking about epistemic paradoxes. We then go on to consider what may be called *applied* epistemological questions: What are conspiracy theories and do they essentially have bad epistemological features? Can we know or rationally believe that God exists without evidence or arguments? What is it to have faith in something?

2. Schedule and Readings

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* by Michael Huemer
ISBN: 0742512533

REQUIRED MEDIA:

- *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Season 6, Episode 9, “Ship in a Bottle”
Note: You can buy a digital copy of this episode on Amazon. You can also watch it with a Paramount+ subscription. If you do not and have not previously had a Paramount+ subscription, you should be able to watch it with a free trial to Paramount+.

REQUIRED MATERIALS: Please bring a pen or pencil and plenty of paper to class. At the very least, make sure you bring plenty of paper and a pen/pencil to the final test.

READINGS: Most readings will come from our required texts. Some weeks, the readings will be uploaded to the “Readings” folder on Canvas. Please refer to the schedule below to see where the readings are posted.

The difficulty of the required readings vary. Some of the readings are relatively easy, while others are relatively difficult. You are not expected to fully grasp the readings. When you find that you are not understanding a particular part of the reading, keep going and prepare to ask questions in class.

Readings may be removed, added, or changed (although it is unlikely this will happen). But I will notify you about any changes at least two weeks before the readings are due.

SCHEDULE

Week 1: Overview and Skepticism

Mon #/#: Syllabus, overview of epistemology
Reading: No reading but **WATCH** *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Season 6, Episode 9, “Ship in a Bottle”

Wed #/#: Arguments for Skepticism
Reading: *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* (hereafter SVP) pages 1–26

Week 2: The infinite regress argument

Mon #/#: Coherrentism
Reading: “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge” by Donald Davidson (PDF on Canvas)

Wed #/#: Infinitism
Reading: “Human Knowledge and the Infinite Regress” by Peter D. Klein (PDF on Canvas)

Week 3: The BIV argument & the simulation hypothesis

Mon #/#: Is it likely that we’re in a simulation?
Reading: “Is it likely that we’re in a simulation?” by David Chalmers (PDF on Canvas)

Wed: #/#: More answers
Reading: “Brains in a vat” by Hilary Putnam (PDF on Canvas)

Week 4: Perception

Mon #/#: Direct realism, indirect realism, the nature of perceptual experience
Readings: SVP pages 51–78

Wed #/#: Huemer's direct realism and the mistake indirect realists make
Reading: SVP pages 79–92
(PDF on Canvas in addition to the hyperlink)

Week 5: Foundationalism and direct realism

Mon #/#: Beginning to answer the infinite regress argument
Reading: SVP pages 93–118

Wed #/#: Objections to Direct Realism
Readings: SVP pages 119–149

Week 6: Against Indirect Realism and Huemer's Answers to Skepticism

Mon #/#: Against indirect realism
Reading: SVP pages 150–174

Wed #/#: Answering skepticism
Reading: SVP 175–192

Week 7: Analysis of Knowledge I

Mon #/#: JTB & Internalism vs. Externalism
Reading: "[Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?](#)" by Edmund Gettier; (PDF on Canvas in addition to link)
["Internalism and Externalism in Epistemology"](#) by Ted Poston
Instructor handout: "Necessary and Sufficient Conditions" (PDF on Canvas)

Wed #/#: No false lemma, causal analyses of perceptual knowledge
Reading: "Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge" by Alvin Goldman (PDF on Canvas)

Week 8: Analysis of Knowledge II

Mon #/#: Modal conditions I
Reading: "Conditions for Knowledge" by Robert Nozick (PDF on Canvas)

Wed #/#: Modal Conditions II

Reading: "[Knowledge is believing something because it's true](#)" by Tomas Bogardus and Will Perin (PDF on Canvas)

Week 9: Analysis of Knowledge III

Mon #/#: Proper functionalism

Reading: "[Proper Functionalism](#)" by Kenneth Boyce (PDF on Canvas)

Wed #/#: Are Gettier cases inescapable?

Reading: "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems" by Linda Zagzebski (PDF on Canvas)

Week 10: Permissivism vs. Impermissivism

Mon #/#: For Permissivism

Reading: "[A defense of intrapersonal permissivism](#)" by Elizabeth Jackson (PDF on Canvas)

Wed #/#: For Impermissivism

Reading: "The arbitrariness objection to permissivism" by Ru Ye (PDF on Canvas)

Week 11: Epistemic Paradoxes

Mon #/#: The Surprise Quiz

Reading: "The Surprise Quiz" by Michael Huemer (PDF on Canvas)

Wed #/#: The knower paradox, the knowability, the lottery paradox, the preface paradox

Reading: Instructor Handout: "Epistemic Paradoxes"

Week 12: Contextualism & Applied Epistemology

Mon #/#: Contextualism

Reading: "Elusive Knowledge" by David Lewis (PDF on Canvas)

Wed #/#: Conspiracy Theories

Reading: "Of Conspiracy Theories" by Brian Keeley (PDF on Canvas)

Week 13: Religious Epistemology

Mon #/#: Is belief in God properly basic?

Reading: "Is belief in God properly basic?" by Alvin Plantinga (PDF on Canvas)

Wed #/#: What is faith?

Reading: "Contemporary perspectives on faith" by Elizabeth Jackson (PDF on Canvas)

Week 14: Review and Q&A

- Mon #/#: Review and Q&A
How to prepare: Come with questions based off the study guide
- Wed #/#: Review and Q&A
How to prepare: Come with questions based off the study guide

4. Assignments and Grading

There will be three categories of assignments you will be graded on:

a. ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION (30% of total grade)

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class every session. Attendance + participation constitutes 15% of your total grade. Participation will be determined by the instructor's impression of how often you ask questions or answer questions (the Q&A and review sessions will be a good time to make up for participation). Participation counts for exactly 7.5% of your grade and attendance accounts for exactly 7.5% of your grade. You are granted *two free* absences without excuse. After you have missed two classes without excuse, you must contact the professor to request an absence.

TARDINESS: Being significantly late to class will generally count as an absence. If you show up a few minutes late and miss attendance, talk to the instructor after class to have your attendance recorded.

b. WEEKLY QUESTIONS (10% of total grade)

Each week you will be asked to choose one of the readings to submit questions about. Questions will be due the night before class at midnight. For more about this assignment, see the "Substantive Questions" handout on Canvas.

c. TESTS (60% of total grade)

There will be two tests for this class: one midterm and one final. The midterm test will be composed of a T/F section and a multiple choice section, and it will be taken in the testing center. The final test will have one T/F section, one multiple choice section, and one long-answer section. The final test will be taken during finals week. Both tests will be accompanied by study guides. We will have one week of in-class review before the final test.

GRADING SCALE: This course will use the following grading scale.

A (4.0):	94-100
A- (3.7):	90-94
B+(3.3):	87-90
B (3.0):	83-87
B- (2.7):	80-83
C+ (2.3):	77-80
C (2.0):	73-77
C- (1.7):	70-73
D (1.0):	60-70
F (0.0):	0-6

LATE SUBMISSIONS: Late assignments will, generally, be considered with a penalty to be determined by the instructor. The later the assignment is submitted, generally, the greater the penalty will be.

RE-DOs: Case-by-case basis. Talk to the professor about redoing assignments.

CHATGPT and AI: The use of ChatGPT or generative AI is strictly prohibited. As such, all assignments (**with the exception of weekly questions**) will be written in class or in the testing center. The use of ChatGPT or AI in class will result in a grade of zero on the assignment it was used for.

EXTRA CREDIT: There will be a number of extra credit options available throughout the semester. There will be one extra credit question at the end of both tests. Students who regularly ask questions will likely receive some extra credit at the end of the course.

5. Academic Honesty/Integrity

Academic integrity is honest, truthful and responsible conduct in all academic endeavors. The mission of Saint Louis University is “the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity.” Accordingly, all acts of falsehood demean and compromise the corporate endeavors of teaching, research, health care, and community service through which SLU fulfills its mission. The University strives to prepare students for lives of personal and professional integrity, and therefore regards all breaches of academic integrity as matters of serious concern. The full University-level Academic Integrity Policy can be found on the Provost's Office website at: <https://www.slu.edu/provost/policies/academic-and-course/academic-integrity-policy.pdf>

Additionally, each SLU College, School, and Center has its own academic integrity policies, available on their respective websites.

6. Disability Accommodations

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations must formally register their disability with the University. Once successfully registered, students also must notify their course instructor that they wish to use their approved accommodations in the course.

Please contact the Center for Accessibility and Disability Resources (CADR) to schedule an appointment to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Most students on the St. Louis campus will contact CADR, located in the Student Success Center and available by email at accessibility_disability@slu.edu or by phone at 314.977.3484. Once approved, information about a student's eligibility for academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors by email from CADR and within the instructor's official course roster. Students who do not have a documented disability but who think they may have one also are encouraged to contact to CADR. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries.

Note: due to accreditation requirements, regulatory differences, and/or location-specific resources, the School of Law, the School of Medicine, and SLU Madrid have their own standard language for syllabus statements related to disability accommodations. Faculty in those units should seek guidance for syllabus requirements from their dean's office.

7. Title IX

Saint Louis University and its faculty are committed to supporting our students and seeking an environment that is free of bias, discrimination, and harassment. If you have encountered any form of discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, domestic or dating violence, we encourage you to report this to the University. Discrimination on the basis of sex includes discrimination on the basis of assigned sex at birth, sex characteristics, pregnancy and pregnancy related conditions, sexual orientation and gender identity. If you speak with a faculty member about an incident that involves a Title IX matter, that faculty member must notify SLU's Title IX Coordinator that you shared an experience relating to Title IX. This is true even if you ask the faculty member not to disclose the incident. The Title IX Coordinator will then be available to assist you in understanding all of your options and in connecting you with all possible resources on and off campus.

If you are pregnant or experiencing a pregnancy related condition, the Title IX Coordinator can assist you in understanding your rights and options as well as provide supportive measures.

Anna Kratky is the Title IX Coordinator at Saint Louis University (DuBourg Hall, room 36; anna.kratky@slu.edu; 314-977-3886). If you wish to speak with a confidential source, you may contact the counselors at the University Counseling Center at 314-977-TALK or make an anonymous report through SLU's Integrity Hotline by calling 1-877-525-5669 or online at <http://www.lighthouse-services.com/slu>. To view SLU's policies, and for resources, please visit the following web addresses: <https://www.slu.edu/about/safety/sexual-assault-resources/index.php>.

Note: due to accreditation requirements, regulatory differences, and/or location-specific resources, the School of Law, the School of Medicine, and SLU Madrid have their own standard language for syllabus statements related to Title IX. Faculty in those units should seek guidance for syllabus requirements from their dean's office.

8. Outcomes

The purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to some of the most historically important philosophical texts, ideas, and thinkers as well as to the distinctive activity of philosophy itself. Over the course of the semester, students will:

1. Learn what great thinkers have to say in response to enduring philosophical questions and how their answers represent philosophically and dialectically distinct answers to such questions. Students will consider a range of philosophical voices and perspectives--including classic texts from Plato and Aristotle, texts from thinkers in the Catholic tradition, and texts by thinkers historically underrepresented in the western canon. In reading and discussing such thinkers and texts students will be encouraged to consider and assess both the philosophical merits and costs of the various views they encounter.
2. Learn to *explain, analyze, and evaluate* arguments for philosophical answers to ultimate questions. Students will learn to give a close reading of philosophical texts with a view toward being able to explain and analyze the arguments they contain. By the end of the semester, students should be able to (i) identify the key premises, assumptions, and conclusions present in the texts they encounter and (ii) explain the content of the arguments' premises in a way that (iii) illuminates how these premises support an inference to the conclusion. Finally, students will learn to evaluate the arguments they encounter by, among other things, assessing them according to logical notions of validity and soundness.
3. Begin to shape their own answers to ultimate questions by applying distinctively logical and philosophical ways of thinking to them. To this end, students will learn to raise philosophical questions, to identify unexamined presuppositions, and to reflect on their own assumptions and commitments. Students will also work at philosophically articulating their own views by learning how to offer evidence, arguments, and responses to objections to their own answers to ultimate questions.
4. Learn to articulate their own worldview and practices in dialogue with different answers to ultimate questions. Students will be provided with opportunities to reflect on the way in which their own commitments, values, and practices may overlap with or diverge from the perspectives they encounter in their readings, in lectures, and in dialogue with one another.

Ultimate Questions: Philosophy is one of 19 Core Components. The University Core SLO(s) that this component is designed to intentionally advance are listed below:

University Core Student Learning Outcomes

The Core SLO(s) that this component is intentionally designed to advance are:

SLO 1: Examine their actions and vocations in dialogue with the Catholic, Jesuit tradition

SLO 2: Integrate knowledge from multiple disciplines to address complex questions

SLO 3: Assess evidence and draw reasoned conclusions

Additionally, the Core Component-level Student Learning Outcomes are listed below:

Component-level Student Learning Outcomes

Students who complete this course will be able to:

Explain and evaluate arguments for philosophical answers, including those in the Catholic tradition, to ultimate questions concerning the nature of humanity, reality and God, knowledge, and/or the good life

Apply an array of analytic methods, conceptual tools, logical principles, and other resources to their own inquiry into ultimate questions

Articulate and reflect on their own worldview and practices in dialogue with different answers to ultimate questions, including answers in the Catholic tradition