

# PHL 200N: Epistemology

Spring 2017  
Carthage College

**Section 01:** T,Th 9:50-11:30 (Clausen Center 105)

**Instructor:** Robert K. Whitaker

**Office Hours:** By appointment, T,Th only

**Email:** rwhitaker@carthage.edu

## Course Description

This course will look at epistemology—the philosophical study of knowledge—from both a historical and a contemporary point of view. It will entertain questions such as: “What is knowledge?” “Is knowledge actually possible for human beings, and if so, how?” “What are the sources of knowledge?” “What is the relationship between knowledge and belief?” “What does it mean to say a belief is justified?” “How does knowledge relate to mind or to brain?” “What is the relationship between language and knowledge?” “What is *a priori* knowledge and how is it possible?” “Does knowledge need a foundation?” “How do we know we’re not living in the Matrix?” “What should we do when we disagree?” ...and many more. Such questions will be engaged by means of reading classic works of philosophy, written by figures such as Plato, Descartes, Locke, Hume, etc., as well as more contemporary contributions to analytic epistemology. The course will require close reading, careful, logical reasoning, and clear writing.

## Required Texts

§ Robert Audi, *Epistemology*, Third Edition. New York: Routledge, 2011. ISBN-13: 9780415879231

§ Michael Huemer (ed.), *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*. New York: Routledge, 2002. ISBN-13: 9780415259217

All other course materials will be made available via eLearning. All readings in the schedule should be assumed to come from the Huemer text unless they are labeled “Audi” or “eLearning.”

## Course Objectives and Assessment

By the end of the course,

- (1) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for basic positions concerning perception as a source of knowledge, including the theories of perception held by various classical and contemporary thinkers.
- (2) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for basic positions concerning the nature of reason and the nature and possibility of *a priori* knowledge, including positions held by representative classical and contemporary thinkers.

- (3) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for basic positions concerning testimony as a source of knowledge, including the critiques and defenses of testimony made by various classical and contemporary thinkers.
- (4) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for basic positions concerning the nature of inference, including positions held by representative classical and contemporary thinkers.
- (5) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for basic positions concerning the nature of induction, including the problems with it as argued by various representative classical and contemporary thinkers.
- (6) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for basic positions concerning the architecture of knowledge, including positions held by representative classical and contemporary thinkers.
- (7) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for basic positions concerning the analysis of knowledge, including positions held by representative classical and contemporary thinkers.
- (8) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for basic positions concerning skepticism as a threat to knowledge, including positions held by representative classical and contemporary thinkers.
- (9) The student will be able to state and provide reasons for basic positions concerning the possibility of scientific, moral, & religious knowledge, including positions held by representative classical and contemporary thinkers.

Attainment of all objectives will be assessed primarily through reading responses, the critical paper, and in-class presentation, and the midterm and final exams. All objectives will also be assessed via class participation.

## **Course Requirements**

### **Course Composition:**

Reading Responses	15%
Midterm Exam	20%
Critical Paper	20%
Presentation	10%
Discussion Questions	5%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	10%

The grading scale is as follows:

A	94 – 100	C	73 – 76.9
A-	90 – 93.9	C-	70 – 72.9
B+	87 – 89.9	D+	67 – 69.9
B	83 – 86.9	D	63 – 66.9
B-	80 – 82.9	D-	60 – 62.9
C+	77 – 79.9	F	... – 59.9

**Midterm Exam:** The midterm exam will take place on **Tuesday, March 14**. The exam will include multiple choice, short answer, and short essay questions.

**Final Exam:** There will be a non-comprehensive final exam on **Tuesday, May 16, from 10:30 am - 12:30 pm**. The exam will include multiple choice, short answer, short essay, and a longer essay.

**Reading Responses:** There will be 8 short reading responses assigned throughout the course of the semester (see readings in the schedule marked with an “R”), of which you are responsible for **5**. You may write up to **6** of these. If you write 6, I will drop your lowest grade. If you wish, you may write only 5, but you will be stuck with the grades you get. I highly recommend writing all 6. These are to be **no more than a half page double spaced** (this should be roughly 2-3 paragraphs—do not exceed this!), and are to be purely exegetical. You will **summarize the main arguments of the author; do not provide your own opinion**. Please cite the page number of the relevant reading for any quotations and major points; no outside sources will be necessary. Hand in a hard copy at the beginning of class on the day the reading is assigned. Reading responses will not be accepted after the class for which they are assigned, and you must be present for the whole class on the day you turn in a response (unless you have a valid excuse). Each response is worth **3 percentage points** of your final grade.

**Critical Paper:** The critical paper consists of an articulation and assessment of at least one of the philosophical views considered during the course of the semester. This does not have to be a direct response to one of the readings, though it should be conversant with at least one of the authors we’ve covered. As with the reading responses, you will need to identify and explain the argument or position you are responding to, but the bulk of the paper should be your own argumentation. This may take the form of critiquing the argument of an author, critiquing a philosophical position taken by one or more authors, critiquing an entire style of approach to a type of philosophical problem, and/or making a positive case for your own view over and against the view of one or more of our authors. I will provide a list of potential topics for this paper, and I encourage you to choose something that interests you. You may also suggest something that is not on the list (pending my approval). You will submit the paper (PDF or Word files only) using the **Turnitin** feature on eLearning (no need to turn in a hard copy). The critical paper is **due Tuesday, April 18, by 11:59 pm**.

*Specifications:* 4-6 pages in length, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins, correct grammar, and Chicago (or Turabian) citation. See “Critical Paper Rubric” on

eLearning for further detail.

**Presentation:** Once during the semester, you will be responsible for presenting on a reading of your choice from the schedule, and leading the class discussion on it for that day. Depending on how discussion goes, this shouldn't take more than 45 minutes to an hour. Your presentation needn't be that long; whatever is required to deal with the reading is sufficient. You may use PowerPoint if you like, but this is not required; the style of your presentation is up to you. You will be graded on your mastery of the material, not on your public speaking ability. The presentation is worth **10%** of the final grade.

**Discussion Questions:** Five times during the semester, I will assign discussion questions for a particular reading (see readings in the schedule marked with a "D"). You will type a question or two about these readings for the purposes of fostering discussion in class, and bring your typed question with you to class on the day the reading is assigned. **Handwritten questions will not be accepted.** We will devote a significant portion of class time on these days to discussion of your questions, so please put some thought into them. Turn them in at the end of class, and you will receive one final percentage point. Together, discussion questions constitute **5%** of the final grade.

**Participation:** Participation includes two things: 1. class involvement, and 2. an individual meeting with me outside of class. **Class involvement:** Your involvement is essential to the success of this class and to your success in this class. This means that a) active listening with the day's work present, b) open questioning, and c) creative discussion are expected of you. Note that all of these things require attendance; thus, if you miss too many classes, your grade will suffer. See below under "Attendance" for details. Class involvement constitutes **9%** of your final grade. **Individual meeting:** you are responsible for meeting with me at least once by appointment **on or before May 4** (T,Th only). This meeting may be in relation to your paper or another class assignment, but this is not necessary. A 10-15 minute chat about questions you might have had in class or anything philosophical fulfills this requirement. Please do not procrastinate, as I cannot guarantee extra appointments towards the end of the semester. The individual meeting constitutes **1%** of your final grade.

**Extra Credit:** I have included several **recommended readings** in the schedule. These are clearly marked as "Recommended" and appear in a slightly smaller font size. You are not required to read these for class, but if you choose, you may read one and write a short (2-3 paragraph) response summarizing the main argument of the article. These should be similar in style to a normal reading response, though each will be worth a maximum of **2 points**, rather than 3. You may write a maximum of **two** extra credit reading responses during the semester. These may be turned in any time up to and including **May 9**.

**Grading:** Grading rubrics for the critical paper and the reading responses will be posted on eLearning.

**Writing:** Good writing is a basic skill in any professional field, and I expect you to put in the necessary effort to make sure that your critical paper is lucid and well organized. A **"Tips for Writing Philosophy Papers" document will be posted on eLearning.** Please use it. If you need additional help with this, the Brainard Writing Center, located on the upper level of the Hedberg Library, offers tutoring services

free of charge for the entire Carthage community. For more information, see:  
<https://www.carthage.edu/writing-center/>.

**Attendance:** Attendance is required. Your success in the course will largely depend on your grasp of the material discussed in class, and it is not possible to get the full benefit of that discussion if you are not present. In general, I will not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences (for example, in the case of illness), but if you need to be absent for some extraordinary circumstance, please notify me well in advance. **I will allow a grace period of four absences before I start deducting points.** 5 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 2 participation points; 6 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 4 participation points; 7 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 6 participation points. More than 7 unexcused absences will result in the loss of 9 participation points, plus an additional 4 final percentage points per absence over 8. Additionally, punctuality is expected; if you come to class late, it is your responsibility to make sure I know you are there.

**Late Work Policy:** Four percentage points will be deducted from the student's assignment grade for each late day (including weekends). For example, a student who has earned 85% on a paper but who has turned it in a day late may receive a maximum of 81%.

**Cell Phones and Computers:** Laptops or laptop-like tablets are allowed for note-taking and in-class work. If I catch you using it for something other than in-class work, your participation grade will be lowered. Cell phones are to be off and put away for the duration of the class. Texting, or any other form of electronic communication, is strictly prohibited.

**Academic Dishonesty:** The Carthage College Community Code guidelines on academic dishonesty will be enforced. *Ignorance is not an excuse.* Please refer to these policies for more details or contact me with particular questions in order to avoid any problems. The College's policies can be found online here:  
<https://www.carthage.edu/community-code/academic-concerns/academic-honesty-guidelines/>

More information on plagiarism can be found here: <http://www.plagiarism.org/plagiarism-101/what-is-plagiarism/>

\*A useful, but not foolproof, rule of thumb: When in doubt, err on the side of over-citing.

In this course you will be required to submit written assignments in electronic form to a plagiarism detection website called Turnitin (this is done automatically via eLearning). Your assignments become a permanent part of the Turnitin database, but will not be used for any other purpose than checking for plagiarism.

**Disabilities:** Students with physical or learning disabilities wishing to have special accommodations should contact me as soon as possible. All discussions are confidential, and I will do anything I can to assist you. In addition, Carthage's Learning Accessibility Services is available to assist you. They can be reached by phone at (262) 551-5802 or online here: <https://www.carthage.edu/library/learning-accessibility-services/>.

**Food and Drink:** Please do everything possible to avoid bringing food into the classroom. However, in the

exceptional case, choose being engaged in class while eating a snack over not eating and being unable to focus. Beverages in closed containers are welcome.

**Conduct:** Disagreement is a basic feature of philosophy and all other academic discourse. In this class, we will be discussing important and controversial issues. We may be engaging in discussions which challenge some of our most deeply held beliefs, and disagreement is sure to arise. For this reason, it is vital for each student, and myself, to always conduct ourselves with the utmost generosity and sensitivity toward our fellow students and our authors. I reserve the right to steer discussions in whatever way I deem most appropriate to the day's lesson, and I will not tolerate rude, disrespectful, or offensive comments. If you are unsure whether something you plan to say or do could possibly be offensive, always talk to me before sharing it with the class.

**Reading:** The reading for this course is difficult. Despite this, it is crucial that you keep up with the reading schedule and engage the material (especially since the lectures and all assignments are based on the readings). This means setting aside adequate time to engage the material *before class*. I have tried to keep the assigned readings to a length that allows you to wrestle with the material without getting overwhelmed. If something from the reading is unclear, you may always bring it up in class, or in a meeting with me.

# Tentative Schedule

“R” indicates a Reading Response assignment

“D” indicates a Discussion Question assignment

Intro to Course		Page #
Week 1 (2/2)	Syllabus Review, Introductions, Overview of Course What Is an Argument? (No Reading)	
<b>Perception</b>		
Week 2 (2/7 - 2/9)	Audi: Introduction	1-11
	“Perception” Intro	27-31
	Locke: from <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i>	32-36
	Berkeley: from <i>Of the Principles of Human Knowledge</i> <span style="float: right;"><b>R</b></span>	37-45
<b>Perception (Continued)</b>		
Week 3 (2/14 - 2/16)	Hume: “Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy”	46-50
	Reid: from <i>Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man</i>	51-63
	Audi: “Perception”	16-31
<b>Perception (Continued) / Reason &amp; A Priori Knowledge</b>		
Week 4 (2/21 - 2/23)	Audi: “Theories of Perception”	38-59
	“Reason & The A Priori” Intro	125-130
	<i>Recommended:</i> Noë: from <i>Action in Perception</i> (eLearning)	TBD
	Plato: from <i>Meno</i> <span style="float: right;"><b>R</b></span>	131-141
	Kant: from <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i>	142-151
<b>Reason &amp; A Priori Knowledge (Continued) / Testimony</b>		
Week 5 (2/28 - 3/2)	Russell: from <i>The Problems of Philosophy</i> <span style="float: right;"><b>D</b></span>	152-165
	Audi: “Reason I”	104-121
	“Testimony” Intro	217-218
	Locke: from <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i>	219-220
<b>Testimony (Continued)</b>		
Week 6 (3/7 - 3/9)	Hume: “Of Miracles”	221-233
	Reid: from <i>Inquiry into the Human Mind</i> <span style="float: right;"><b>R</b></span>	234-238
	Coady: “Testimony and Observation”	239-249
	Coady: “Testimony and Observation” (Continued)	
	Lackey: “Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission” (eLearning)	471-490
<b>Midterm Exam / Induction</b>		
Week 7	<b>*Midterm Exam</b>	

(3/14 - 3/16)	“Induction” Intro Hume: from <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> Edwards: “Russell’s Doubts about Induction” <i>Recommended:</i> Goodman: “The New Riddle of Induction”	293-297 298-310 311-319 320-332
<b>Spring Break</b>		
<b>Week 8</b> (3/20 - 3/24)	NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK	
<b>Architecture of Knowledge</b>		
<b>Week 9</b> (3/28 - 3/30)	“The Architecture of Knowledge” Intro Sextus Empiricus: “The Five Modes” Oakley: “An Argument for Scepticism Concerning Justified Beliefs” <b>R</b>	369-371 372-374 375-386
	BonJour: from <i>The Structure of Empirical Knowledge</i> Alston: “Has Foundationalism Been Refuted?” <b>D</b> <i>Recommended:</i> Haack: “A Foundherentist Theory of Empirical Justification” <i>Recommended:</i> Klein: “Infinetism Is the Solution to the Regress Problem” (eLearning)	387-401 402-416 417-431 274-283
<b>Analysis of Knowledge</b>		
<b>Week 10</b> (4/4 - 4/6)	“Analysis of ‘Knowledge’” Intro Ayer: “Knowing as Having the Right to Be Sure” Gettier: “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” <b>R</b> Clark: “Knowledge and Grounds: A Comment on Mr. Gettier’s Paper”	435-439 440-443 444-446 447-449
	Goldman: “A Causal Theory of Knowing”	450-463
<b>Analysis of Knowledge (Continued)</b>		
<b>Week 11</b> (4/11 - 4/13)	Nozick: “Knowledge”	475-490
	DeRose: “Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions” <b>R D</b> <i>Recommended:</i> Alston: “Concepts of Epistemic Justification” (eLearning)	491-506 57-89
<b>Analysis of Knowledge (Continued) / Skepticism</b>		
<b>Week 12</b> (4/18 - 4/20)	Audi: “Knowledge, Justification, and Truth: Internalism, Externalism, and Intellectual Virtue” <i>Recommended:</i> Zagzebski: “Ideal Agents & Ideal Observers in Epistemology” (eLearning) <b>*Critical Paper Due</b>	270-292 131-147
	Descartes: from <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> <b>D</b> Putnam: “Brains in a Vat”	513-523 524-538
<b>Skepticism (Continued)</b>		
<b>Week 13</b> (4/25 - 4/27)	Dretske: “The Pragmatic Dimension of Knowledge” Chisholm: “The Problem of the Criterion” <i>Recommended:</i> Klein: “Skepticism and Closure: Why the Evil Genius Argument Fails”	539-551 590-601 552-574
	Moore: “Proof of an External World” Moore: “Hume’s Theory Examined” <b>R</b>	602-605 606-611
<b>Special Topics</b>		



<b>Week 14</b> <b>(5/2 - 5/4)</b>	Audi: "Scientific, Moral, and Religious Knowledge"	298-328
	Alston: "Perceiving God" (eLearning) <b>R</b>	655-665
<b>Special Topics</b>		
<b>Week 15</b> <b>(5/9 - 5/11)</b>	Langton: "Feminism in Epistemology" <b>D</b>	127-143
	Feldman: "Reasonable Religious Disagreements"	194-214
<b>Final Exam</b>		
<b>Week 16</b> <b>(5/15 - 5/17)</b>	Tuesday, 5/16, 10:30 am - 12:30 pm	