

Phil. 270/570: Epistemology Fall 2021

Updated, 9/16/21

Prof. Keith DeRose Tu, Th 9:00-10:15am; Phelps Hall, room 310

KDR office hour: Th (on which classes meet) 10:30-11:25 [CT Hall](#), room 410

The course web page will be at: <http://campuspress.yale.edu/keithderose/epistemology-f21/>

Reading for the First Meeting: If possible, read items 1-2 from the list of readings (on p. 4 of this syllabus). They are both quite short.

Please note: The final exam for this class will be fairly late in Yale's exam period, Tue., Dec. 21, 7-10 pm, and I won't be able to schedule an alternative early exam, so please verify that that time will fit your travel and other plans before taking this course.

Phil. 270

Course Description. This is the basic course in epistemology, so the plan is to discuss at least many of the main topics and issues important to epistemology. However, we won't be having assigned readings about all of these topics. Rather, we will read papers and portions of books that focus on just a few of them (our "focus topics"), but will use these as jumping off points for discussing other issues.

I have not chosen the focus topics described briefly below because they are the five most important topics to epistemology today. Rather, given how they fit together with one another and how they naturally give rise to other important issues, at least as I approach them, they seem to be five topics around which we can build a course in which you encounter interesting philosophical work and also learn about the field of epistemology, encountering, even if not focusing upon, many important topics.

Our first focus topic will be the analysis of knowledge. We will read presentations of a couple of the many types of analyses that were proposed, and, in discussing these, we will also consider other theories that will be presented in lecture.

The project of trying to analyze knowledge is considered by many to have been a failure. So, having sampled some of the relevant attempts, we will move to our second topic, which could be called "meta-epistemology." We will discuss several issues relevant to whole project of analyzing knowledge: the use of "intuitions" in testing philosophical theories, the worry that what counts as knowledge might be a very context-sensitive matter, and Timothy Williamson's thought that maybe philosophers would do better if turned their procedure upside down and used knowledge in their analyses of other philosophically important concepts, rather than attempting to give an analysis of what knowledge is.

Our third topic will be conservatism in epistemology, as an account of where the justification for our beliefs comes from. Broadly, this an approach our inclinations to belief are treated as innocent until proven guilty. (This is quite different from what is called being "conservative" in one's political, social, or theological leanings.)

Fourth, we will investigate at some length the topic of philosophical skepticism, both for its own sake, but also as a good springboard for discussing other topics in epistemology.

Our last focus topic will be a provocative late 20th Century movement in religious epistemology: attempts to argue that certain religious beliefs (like, importantly, the belief that God exists) can be justified or rational even if there is no good evidence for these beliefs. Discussing this will involve us in important epistemological topics concerning the role of evidence in proper believing, “structural” issues (foundationalism vs. coherentism) in the theory of rationality, and the epistemology of sense perception.

Important Dates:

- Oct. 14 (Thursday): in-class test
- Nov. 18 (Thursday), by the start of class: paper proposal due
- Dec. 9 (Thursday), by the start of class: course papers due
- Dec. 21 (Tuesday), 7:00 pm: Final exam; room TBA

Written Work – specifications and descriptions (papers and weekly writing assignments should be typed and double-spaced, with normal margins and normal-sized fonts):

- Short weekly writing assignments: The amount of reading assigned for this course is quite light. The idea is to assign few pages, but to have you read carefully, and engage with, the small amount of material you are assigned. To promote that, each student will complete three short (2-3 pages) written exercises. These will be due on Fridays, by noon. The first assignment will be due on Sept. 10, and the last on **Nov. 5**, but none will be due on **Sept. 17**, Oct. 15, or Oct. 22. That makes a total of six Fridays on which assignments can be submitted (Sept. 10, 24, Oct. 1, 8, 29, Nov. 5). Each student can choose which three of those six assignments they do, observing these restrictions: You must do at least one of the first two assignments (so you must submit your first completed assignment by **Sept. 24**), and must do at least two of the first four assignments (so you must submit your second completed assignment by **Oct. 8**). These assignments will typically focus on the readings we are about to discuss in class, so they will make you engage with the material before we discuss it together. The exact specifications of each assignment will be announced by the Monday evening before it is due, but the current plan (this may change depending on how it is working out) is for these assignments to consist of between 1 and 2 pages of summary of a reading, and between 1 and 2 pages of critical commentary on that material or ideas or questions you have about it. Unless it is announced otherwise, these assignments will not be evaluated with a letter grade, but usually with a simple evaluation of ✓, to designate the assignment was satisfactorily completed, or 0 if it was not satisfactorily completed, with perhaps occasional marks of ✓+ to designate especially good work or ✓- to designate work which, while acceptable, is sub-par. These assignments can and typically will help the grades of those who do them all on time, getting at least a ✓ on all or almost all of them. Such a performance can only help you, even in going for a straight A in the class. They will hurt the grades of those who don't turn them in on time or who consistently do sub-par work. The course cannot be passed if a student doesn't hand in their three assignments, so do get them in by the end of classes, even if you turn them in late. These short assignments should be sent by e-mail attachment by noon on Friday, but can be turned in before then, at any time after the assignment is announced on the Monday before it is due. (If you can't send e-mail attachments, let me know well before the first assignment is due, and we will make other arrangements.) In the subject line of the e-mail, write:

Phil. 270: [DATE] assignment

replacing [DATE] with the due date of the assignment, not the date you turn it in, if that is different from the due date. Send the email with the attached assignment to this address:
keith.derose@yale.edu

- In-class test: This will stress essay questions (and may well consist entirely of essay questions), and will be on the material covered in class before the day of the test (Oct. 14).
- Paper proposal: a 1-2 page long paper proposal is due by the start of class on Thursday, Nov. 18. This should also be turned in by e-mail to the same two addresses listed above. It will not be given a letter grade, though the quality of the proposal will be taken into account in determining your course grade, and the course cannot be passed without completing the proposal. Its purpose, in addition to prodding some to start work on (or at least to start thinking about) their course papers, is to give us a chance to check whether your proposed topic is sufficiently relevant to our course, and in some cases to suggest additional reading you might want to consult in writing your paper.
- Course Paper: The course paper itself is to be 2,100-2,800 words long (about 6-8 pages, typed, double-spaced, normal margins and fonts), and is due by the start of class on Thursday, Dec. 9. This should also be submitted by email attachment to the address above. A description of acceptable topics along with other information about the paper will be distributed and discussed in class on **October 19**.
- Final Exam: Tuesday, Dec. 21; 7:00pm; room TBA

Grading: Attendance at lectures is mandatory. All written work must be submitted, and a satisfactory job must be done on all written work, to pass the course. Supposing that attendance is not a problem and that all written work has been satisfactory, grades will be based roughly on the following formula, though adjustments (which can be quite considerable) will be made for insightful classroom participation and for marked improvement over the course of the semester: Test: 17%; Course Paper: 36%; Final Exam: 25%; Ungraded work (weekly writing assignments, course proposal): 22%.

Email: All emails concerning this course from students, including especially those used to submit assignments, should include “Phil. 270” or “Phil. 570” in the subject line of the email. (This is to avoid being weeded out by my sometimes overactive mail filters, and to allow me to make sure to read all class correspondence quickly, even in times when my inbox is being flooded.)

Fall '21 class days: 25 total – 1 for the in-class test = 24 lectures

Week#	Tu date	Th date	assignment #	Week#	Tu date	Th date	assignment #
W0		S2		W8	O26	O28	5
W1	S7	S9	1	W9	N2	N4	6
W2	S14	S16		W10	N9	N11	
W3	S21	S23	2	W11	N16	N18	
W4	S28	S30	3	NOVEMBER RECESS: N23, N25			
W5	O5	O7	4	W12	N30	D2	
W6	O12	O14		W13	D7	D9	
W7	O19	OCT RECESS		final: Dec. 21 (Tuesday), 7:00pm			

Readings. (The list of readings below is subject to some adjustment as we move through the semester.) Most of these are available via the links provided from on-line subscriber sites, free from Yale internet connections. A few readings (#5, 12, 16, and 21) will be available in the “Files” for this class on Canvass (the first three of them as they are reprinted in DeRose, Warfield, ed., *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*). Please do yourself a big favor and print out copies of all the readings, so you can mark and take notes on your copies, and so you can take those papers to our class meetings, which will sometimes be focused tightly on the readings. Or if you’re one of those who don’t like dealing with paper, download all the readings onto your computer early on, so you’re all set to go, and so you can find out early if you have trouble accessing any of the readings. Phil. 570 students should get the book from which some of their readings are assigned (see p. 6 of this syllabus) early in the semester.

1. Jennifer Nagel, “Ascribing Knowledge in English and Other Languages,” *Certain Doubts* [<https://web.archive.org/web/20171020072127/http://certaindoubts.com/dashboard-certain-doubts-wordpress/>]. Note: The comments to this blog post are not assigned, but do take a quick look at the brief first paragraph of the comment that begins with the words “actually, the list of 63 is for expressions...”
2. Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge,” *Analysis* 23 (1963): 121-123. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3326922>]
3. Alvin I. Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing,” *Journal of Philosophy* 64 (1967): 357-372. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2024268>]
4. Alvin I. Goldman, “Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge,” *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976): 771-791. [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2025679>]
5. Robert Nozick, “Knowledge,” from *Philosophical Explanations*, in DW, pp. 159-164.
6. Jonathan Weinberg, “How to Challenge Intuitions Empirically Without Risking Skepticism,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 31 (2007): 318-343. [<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1475-4975.2007.00157.x/abstract>].
7. Kenneth Boyd and Jennifer Nagel, “The Reliability of Epistemic Intuitions,” from E. Machery, ed., *Current Controversies in Experimental Philosophy*; draft available at <http://philpapers.org/archive/BOYTRO-2.pdf>.
8. Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits*, “Preface” (included in the “Front Matter” in the on-line version of the book), p. v; and “Introduction,” pp. 1-11. [<http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/oso/public/content/philosophy/9780199256563/toc.html>]
9. Thomas Reid via KDR, “Reid’s Anti-Sensationalism and His Realism,” *The Philosophical Review* 98 (1989): 313-348; read sections II.A – II.B (pp. 321-331). [<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2185022>]

10. Michael Huemer, "Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74 (2007): 30–55.
[\[http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2007.00002.x/abstract\]](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2007.00002.x/abstract)
- 10b. KDR: a section on appearances and seemings
11. Susanna Siegel, "Cognitive Penetrability and Perceptual Justification," *Noûs* 46 (2012): 201-222. [\[http://www.jstor.org/stable/41475338\]](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41475338)
12. Hilary Putnam, "Brains in a Vat," from *Reason, Truth and History*, in DW, pp. 27-42.
13. KDR, "Two Substantively Moorean Responses and the Project of Refuting Skepticism," Chapter 3 of *The Appearance of Ignorance* (Oxford UP, 2017).
[\[http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780199564477.001.0001/oso-9780199564477\]](http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780199564477.001.0001/oso-9780199564477)
14. Thomas Kelly, "Moorean Facts and Belief Revision, Or can the Skeptic Win?" *Philosophical Perspectives* 19 (2005): 179-209.
[\[http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2005.00059.x/abstract\]](http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2005.00059.x/abstract)
15. G.E. Moore/KDR, "Moorean Methodology," Chapter 2 of *The Appearance of Ignorance*.
[\[http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780199564477.001.0001/oso-9780199564477\]](http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780199564477.001.0001/oso-9780199564477)
16. Robert Nozick, "Skepticism," from *Philosophical Explanations*, in DW, pp. 164-179.
17. Gail Stine, "Skepticism, Relevant Alternatives, and Deductive Closure," *Philosophical Studies* 29 (1976): 249-261 [\[http://www.springerlink.com/content/q442181244162676/\]](http://www.springerlink.com/content/q442181244162676/) or [\[http://www.jstor.org/stable/4319027\]](http://www.jstor.org/stable/4319027).
18. KDR, "Solving the Skeptical Problem," *Philosophical Review* 104 (1995): 1-52
[\[http://www.jstor.org/stable/2186011\]](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2186011).
19. Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?," *Noûs* 15 (1981): 41-51.
[\[http://www.jstor.org/stable/2215239\]](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2215239)
20. William P. Alston, "Perceiving God," *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 655-665.
[\[http://www.jstor.org/stable/2026614\]](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2026614).
21. KDR, "Direct Warrant Realism," from *God and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge UP, 2005), pp. 150-172; in **Resources** Files.

Phil. 570

Phil. 570 is for graduate students, often Divinity School students. Students taking Phil. 570 will attend the same classes as Phil. 270 students, and will follow the above Phil. 270 syllabus, but with the following modifications.

Readings: You are not assigned readings 19 and 20 from the Phil. 270 syllabus. (Note that reading 21 is still assigned to you.) Instead you should read the following, all from Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, ed., *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) [available, for instance, amazon.com]:

- a. Wolterstorff, "Introduction"
- b. Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God"
- c. Alston, "Christian Experience and Christian Belief"
- d. Wolterstorff, "Can Belief in God Be Rational If It Has No Foundations?"

These are considerably longer papers than are the papers they are replacing (in some cases, very considerably, so be warned), and there are four of them, instead of just the two they are replacing.

Writing: Same as for Phil. 270, except for the short writing assignments. Instead, write these three assignments (submitted by email attachment):

- Do either assignment 1 (due Sept. 10) or assignment 2 (due Sept. 24) from the Phil. 270 syllabus
- 1000-1400 total words (about 3-4 pages) of summary/exposition, and 1000-1400 total words (about another 3-4 pages) of critical commentary on readings a, b, and d, above. These needn't be organized reading-by-reading; you can instead explain the three readings in a way that intersperses your treatments of the three papers. Due by Oct. 8, at noon.
- Same as above (about 1000-1400 words of summary/exposition, and about 1000-1400 words of critical commentary), but on reading c, above, together with reading 21 from the Phil. 270 syllabus. Again, these needn't be organized reading-by-reading. Due by Nov. 5, at noon.

It is fine (but not mandatory) to then write your course paper on the topics of one of the two more substantial weekly assignments. Those assignments can then serve as a step along the way to writing your course paper.