

Epistemic Normativity

University of Houston
Phil 6395 (26726)
AH 512
Mon 2:30pm-5:30pm

Instructor: Dr. Luis R.G. Oliveira
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Office Hours: Tue 1pm-3pm, or by appointment.

Course Description: After spending many decades discussing *descriptive (or conceptual)* questions in epistemology—What is knowledge? What is justification?—epistemologists in the last 20 years have paid more and more attention to *normative* questions instead—What is the value of knowledge? What is the source and nature of epistemic reasons? This recent shift in focus, as we will see, is nothing but a return to an approach already present in modern figures such as Descartes and Locke. In this course, after a brief introduction to the historical background, we will look at recent papers on three topics in *epistemic normativity*: The value of knowledge and true belief, the connection between epistemic reasons and our interests, and the nature and structure of epistemic norms.

Required Text: *All readings will be made available as PDFs*

Undergraduate Course Requirements:

Participation (5%)
Weekly Reading Responses (20%) ----- Due on Sunday nights
Take Home Exam #1 (25%) ----- Fri (09/29)
Take Home Exam #2 (25%) ----- Fri (11/03)
Take Home Exam #3 (25%) ----- Fri (12/08)

Graduate Course Requirements:

Participation (5%)
Weekly Reading Responses (20%) ----- Due on Sunday nights
Expository Paper #1 (20%) ----- Fri (09/29)
Expository Paper #2 (20%) ----- Fri (11/03)
Final Paper (35%) ----- Fri (12/08)

Grade Curve: Your final letter grade will be assigned in accordance to the following curve:

A+	97-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	65-59
A	93-96	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	60-64
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	F	0-59

Course Policies

Weekly Reading Responses (all students): There are 14 weekly reading responses. The purpose of these responses is to prepare you for a careful and in-depth discussion of the course material in class. You will not be graded on content, unless it is clear to me that you have not done the reading at all. They are always due on the Sunday night before the relevant class. *You are allowed to miss one reading response.*

Take Home Exams (undergraduates only): There are 3 take home exams. The purpose of these exams is to provide you with an opportunity to critically engage the course readings on your own, after we have already discussed them as a group. The exams consist in 2 essay questions per reading assignment for that unit. Some of the questions ask you to explain certain passages; some ask you to clarify certain arguments; and some ask you to evaluate certain claims. You are encouraged to consult the readings and your notes as you work on the exams.

Expository Papers (grad students only): There are 2 expository papers. The purpose of these papers is to provide you with an opportunity to engage with relevant material that we have not discussed in class. There is a specific reading assignment for each paper, whose main argument must be explained clearly (including the author's support for the premises). Expository papers should be between 5-10 pages long (12pt Times, double) or 1.5k-3k words.

Final Paper (grad students only): There is a final paper. The purpose of this paper is to provide you with an opportunity to develop one of your own ideas about the class material at length. You must engage with at least one of the course readings, but you are also expected to incorporate relevant material that you have researched and studied on your own. This final paper should be between 10-15 pages long (12pt Times, double) or 3k-5k words.

Late Submissions: With the exception of *well-documented* emergencies, your grade on any assignment will suffer a 10% grade deduction per late day. No exceptions will be made for excuses such as: "I am too busy," "I found it hard to understand," "I am going through a hard time in my life," and so on. You should come talk to me in advance about any of these issues. Final Take Home Exams and Final Papers will not be accepted late.

Participation: I do not take attendance in my classes. This means that missing classes *will not* affect your grade. When you come to class, however, you will be required to follow certain common sense rules. Minimally: (a) you cannot use your phone, (b) you cannot carry unrelated conversations during class, (c) you cannot use your computer for class-unrelated activities, and (d) you cannot take naps during class-time. Violation of these rules will seriously affect your grade.

Office Hours and Appointments: You are encouraged to make good use of my office hours. I am here to help you succeed in this course, and I am more than happy to review your lecture notes, to explain difficult material a second time, and to discuss any questions or insights that you may have. Graduate students are specially encouraged to come talk to me about their final paper topics and about their progress.

Disabilities: If you have the need for disability-related services, please get in touch with the University of Houston's *Center for Students with Disabilities*. I will be happy to work with you and the center in arranging for reasonable accommodations: <http://www.uh.edu/csd/>

Mental Health: Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS (www.uh.edu/caps) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the "Let's Talk" program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html

Academic Honesty: Do not cheat. Punishment will be harsh if you do. You're expected to be familiar with the University of Houston's policies: <http://www.uh.edu/provost/policies/honesty/>

Class Schedule

Introduction

- Aug 21 – The Background Debate
Required: W.K. Clifford (1879)
Optional: William James (1897)

Epistemic Value: What has value from the epistemic point of view?

- Aug 28 – Is Truth the Primary Epistemic Value?
Required: Marian David (2013)
Optional: Jonathan Kvanvig (2013)
- Sept 11 – Is Knowledge More Valuable than True Belief?
Required: Wayne Riggs (2002)
Optional: Jonathan Kvanvig (2003)
- Sep 18 – Reliabilism and the Value Problem
Required: Goldman & Olsson (2009)
Optional: Jonathan Kvanvig (2010)
- Sep 25 – Virtue Epistemology and the Value Problem
Required: Linda Zagzebski (2003)
Optional: Berit Brogaard (2006) **Take Home Exam or Expository Paper due by Friday (09/29)**

Epistemic Instrumentalism: Are epistemic norms related to our interests?

- Oct 02 – Early Instrumentalist Accounts
Required: Hilary Kornblith (2002)
Optional: Allan Hazlett (2012)
- Oct 09 – Against Instrumentalism
Required: Thomas Kelly (2003)
Optional: Adam Leite (2007)
- Oct 16 – A New Defense of Instrumentalism
Required: Christopher Cowie (2014)
Optional: Nathan Sharadin (forthcoming)
- Oct 23 – Against Practical Reasons to Believe
Required: Jonathan Way (2016)
Optional: Nishi Shah. (2006)
- Oct 30 – In Defense of Practical Reasons to Believe
Required: Susanna Rinard (2017)
Optional: Andrew Reisner (2009) **Take Home Exam or Expository Paper due by Friday (11/03)**

Epistemic Teleology: What is the structure of epistemic norms?

- Nov 06 – The Central Challenge to Epistemic Teleology
Required: Selim Berker (2013a)
Optional: Selim Berker (2013b)
- Nov 13 – A Reply to the Central Challenge
Required: Ahlstrom-Vij & Dunn (2014)
Optional: Alvin Goldman (2015)
- Nov 20 – The Alternative: Non-Teleological Epistemology
Required: Clayton Littlejohn (forthcoming)
Optional: Sophie Horowitz (forthcoming)
- Nov 27 – A Final Consideration in Favor of Epistemic Teleology
Required: Hilary Kornblith (forthcoming)
Optional: Jochen Briesen (2016) **Take Home Exam or Final Paper due by Friday (12/08)**

Bibliography

1. Ahlstrom-Vij, K. and Dunn, J. (2014). "A Defence of Epistemic Consequentialism," *Philosophical Quarterly* 64: 541-551.
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3. Berker, S. (2013b). "The Rejection of Epistemic Consequentialism," *Philosophical Issues* 23: 363-387.
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5. Briesen (2016). "Epistemic Consequentialism: Its Relation to Ethical Consequentialism and the Truth-Indication Principle," in *Epistemic Reasons, Norms, and Goals* by M. Grajner and P. Schmechtig (eds.). de Gruyter.
6. Clifford, W.K. (1879/2008). "The Ethics of Belief," in *The Ethics of Belief*, by A.J. Burger (ed.). CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform: 9-40
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