

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2022-23
Philosophy 3997G: Knowledge in the Age of Fake News

Winter 2023, LWH 2210

Weekly *In Person* Lecture T 3:30-4:30

Weekly *In Person* Seminar Th 3:30-5:30

Office hours: Wednesday 1:30-3:30, and by appointment

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DESCRIPTION

What do we know, and how do we know it? Traditional epistemology has focused on the individual relationship between perceivers and their environment, investigating such issues as how evidence should guide and constrain belief, and how scientific procedures improve the likelihood of uncovering truths. But current events raise the urgent question: how do we even know what counts as evidence? In this course we will explore philosophical accounts of knowledge that foreground the social, both because they are interesting in their own right, but crucially because they may help illuminate knowledge production in our current age.

TEXTS

Nagel, J. (2014). *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

[https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-](https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search?campus=UWO&term=W2022B&courses%5B0%5D=001_UW/PHI3997G)

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Reserve readings as assigned.

(<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/u45dzaqdi8h030l/AABgw8x4ngEOMB218CH-CIB6a?dl=0>)

OBJECTIVES

The goal of this course is to explore what philosophy might have to say about the epistemic pitfalls of our current era of digital media and “fake news”. Students will gain an understanding of social and applied epistemology, and some insight into the particular dangers of social media and fake news to our knowledge of the world and capacity to cooperate with one another.

REQUIREMENTS

- Regular Attendance
- Class participation
- Weekly quizzes (1% each – 10% total)
- 2 short papers (15% paper 1; 25% paper 2)
- 1 Final paper (50%)

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at

<http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/proceduresappeals.html>. It is your responsibility to

understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

ACCOMMODATION

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

SELF- REPORTED ABSENCE FORM

Students who experience an unexpected illness or injury or an extenuating circumstance (48 hours or less) that is sufficiently severe to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements (e.g., attending lectures or labs, writing tests or midterm exams, completing and submitting assignments, participating in presentations) should self-declare using the online Self-Reported Absence portal. This option should be used in situations where the student expects to resume academic responsibilities within 48 hours or less.

NOTE: You do NOT need to contact me in addition to submitting this form. I get a daily report.

The following conditions are in place for self-reporting of medical or extenuating circumstances: http://westerncalendar.uwo.ca/PolicyPages.cfm?Command=showCategory&PolicyCategoryId=1&SelectedCalendar=Live&ArchiveID=#SubHeading_322

EVALUATION OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

At least three days prior to the deadline for withdrawal from a course without academic penalty, students will receive assessment of work accounting for at least 15% of their final grade.

COURSE ASSIGNMENT

The last day of scheduled classes in any course will be the last day on which course assignments will be accepted for credit in a course. Instructors will be required to return assignments to students as promptly as possible with reasonable explanations of the instructor's assessment of the assignment.

LATE WORK

Work turned in late without academic accommodation will have 5% of the final score deducted for each day it is late. Missed quizzes without academic accommodation will receive a zero.

ACADEMIC OFFENCES

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

PLAGIARISM CHECKING

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

SUPPORT SERVICES

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdwweb/?cmd=login> Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519.661.3030 (during class hours) or 519.433.2023 after class hours and on weekends.

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change with sufficient notice)

Every Tuesday class will start with a short, easy quiz to establish that the required texts have been read, and will be followed with a short lecture and the opportunity to ask questions about the texts. Thursday is devoted to seminary-style discussion. It is *imperative* that you do the readings for this course.

Week 1: Course Introduction

Readings: None

Thursday meeting cancelled; please be sure you have done the first readings by Tuesday, Jan 17. This week has the longest readings of the term.

Week 2: Intro to epistemology and social epistemology

Readings:

Nagel, J. (2014). *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Frost-Arnold, K. (2021). The Epistemic Dangers of Context Collapse. *Applied epistemology*.

Week 3: Bullshit & Fake News I

Readings:

Frankfurt, H. G. (2009). *On Bullshit*. Princeton University Press.

Mukerji, N. (2018). What is fake news?. *Ergo: An Open Access Journal of Philosophy*, 5.

Week 4: Bullshit & Fake News II

Readings:

Levy, N. (2017). The bad news about fake news. *Social epistemology review and reply collective*, 6(8), 20-36.

Dentith, M. R. (2016). The problem of fake news. *Public Reason*, 8(1-2).

Week 5: Bullshit & Fake News III

Readings:

Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2021). The psychology of fake news. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 25(5), 388-402.

Week 6: Propaganda

Readings:

Stanley, J. (2015). *How Propaganda Works*. Princeton University Press. *Excerpts*

Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: Epistemic Communities I

Readings:

Rini, R. (2017). Fake news and partisan epistemology. *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 27(2), E-43.

Lackey, J. (2021). Echo Chambers, Fake News, and Social Epistemology. *The Epistemology of Fake News*, 206-227.

Feb 27: Short paper 1 due

Week 9: Epistemic Communities II

Readings:

Napolitano, M. G. (2021). Conspiracy theories and evidential self-insulation. *The Epistemology of Fake News*, 82-106.

Furman, K. (2022). Epistemic Bunkers. *Social Epistemology*, 1-11.

Week 10: Deference to Expertise I

Readings:

Baier, A. (1986). Trust and antitrust. *Ethics*, 96(2), 231-260.

Wilholt, T. (2013). Epistemic trust in science. *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*.

Week 11: Deference to Expertise II

Readings:

Huemer, M. (2005). Is critical thinking epistemically responsible?. *Metaphilosophy*, 36(4), 522-531.

Hendriks, F., Kienhues, D., & Bromme, R. (2016). Trust in science and the science of trust. In *Trust and communication in a digitized world* (pp. 143-159). Springer, Cham.

March 23: Short paper 2 due

Week 12: Case Study: Climate Change I

Readings:

Dispensa, J. M., & Brulle, R. J. (2003). Media's social construction of environmental issues: focus on global warming—a comparative study. *International Journal of sociology and social policy*.

Worsnip, A. (2021). The skeptic and the climate change skeptic. In *The Routledge Handbook of Political Epistemology* (pp. 469-479). Routledge.

Week 13: Case Study: Climate Change II

Readings: None; Wrap up and discuss final paper

April 10: FINAL PAPER DUE

CLASSES END APRIL 10– NO ASSIGNMENTS CAN BE ACCEPTED AFTER THAT DAY