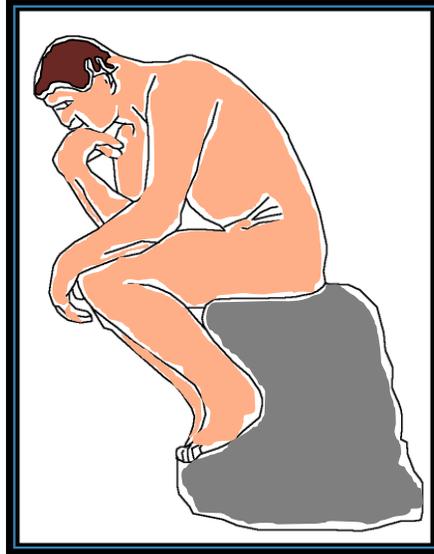


THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY  
Undergraduate Course Outline 2013-14

PHIL3501G: Epistemology



Winter Term 2016  
T: 1:30-2:30 p.m., Th: 1:30-3:30 p.m.  
Location: TH 3154

Instructor: Jacqueline Sullivan  
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Office hours: TBA  
519-661-2111 x85755  
jsulli29@uwo.ca

**DESCRIPTION**

*Epistemology* is the branch of philosophy directed at understanding what knowledge is and how we acquire it. Of central importance is the issue of *epistemic justification*—when, if ever, are we justified in claiming that a belief or proposition counts as *knowledge*? Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, analytic epistemologists have provided different and competing responses to this question. The general approach that they take to this question, namely, to specify necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge, is referred to as “The Standard Analytic Approach”.

However, philosophers critical of standard approaches have sought alternative ways of understanding what knowledge is and how we come to have it. For example, some have turned to those sciences that study human cognitive processes (e.g., cognitive psychology) in order to identify those reasoning strategies most likely to be “knowledge-producing”. These philosophers take what is referred to as a “Naturalistic Approach”.

However, one limitation of naturalized approaches to knowledge is that their legitimacy is to a significant extent contingent on whether those sciences that study human cognitive processes are knowledge generating. This can only be determined if the methods by which these sciences produce knowledge claims are subjected to adequate scrutiny. The domain of philosophy of science that is intended to serve this function is the “Epistemology of Experiment”. Philosophers who work in this area are interested in determining when investigative strategies used in science are knowledge generating, when they fail to be, and why. Findings from such analyses are often used as a basis for making suggestions as to how to improve these strategies.

In this course, we will consider representative examples of each of these three types of

approaches to understanding what knowledge is and how we acquire it. While we will concern ourselves primarily with assessing the merits and failings of paradigmatic examples of each approach, our ultimate goal is to use the fruits of our analyses to answer for ourselves the questions of what knowledge is and when, if ever, we are justified in claiming that we have it.

## **TEXTS**

- (1) Williams, Michael. *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- (2) Additional readings (journal articles) will be made available as pdfs on Owl.

## **OBJECTIVES**

Students who successfully complete this course will have developed a detailed understanding of a subset of traditional and contemporary approaches to the issues of knowledge and epistemic justification, the ability to critically evaluate these positions, and the capacity to formulate and defend a position on a topic in contemporary epistemology that interests them.

## **REQUIREMENTS**

**Attendance & Participation:** 20%

**Midterm exam:** 30%

(Short answer & essay):

**Term Paper:** 50%

[Breakdown

Term paper proposal: 5%;

Term paper draft: 10%;

Term paper: 35%]

## **AUDIT**

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

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/policies.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.

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.