



Philosophy 2500F (570)
INTRODUCTION TO THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE
Fall/ Winter 2025-2026

Instructor: G. Mouroutsou

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Course Information

Calendar Description:

An introduction to the main problems of epistemology. Specimen topics include: the nature of human knowledge and belief, perception, evidence, truth and confirmation.

Extra Information: 3 hours.

Course Weight: 0.50

Breadth: Category B

Subject Code: PHILOSOP

Notice: Unless you have either the requisites for this course (fulfilment of pre-requisites, no anti-requisite conflicts), or special permission from your Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Introduction into Epistemology (2500)

Professor Georgia Mouroutsou, Associate Professor of Philosophy

Find the times and class at Extranet. The class will start on Sept 10 and will end on Dec 3.
Office hours information can be found on OWL Brightspace

Mode of Instruction: In-person

Description:

This course is an introduction to epistemology and focuses on various relevant questions: Can admitting ignorance be the beginning of knowledge? What can we know? How do we get to know it? What different types of knowledge are there? How do we know that we know?

LEARNING OUTCOMES: You will be able to explain and evaluate the main philosophical arguments and positions discussed in this course, both orally and in writing. You will further develop your critical and creative engagement with philosophical ideas as they appear in philosophical texts and in films inspired by philosophical questions. You will also strengthen your ability to analyze and critically evaluate arguments, enhance the skills required for successful oral and written communication, and deepen your engagement with peers in philosophical discussions and debates.

REQUIREMENTS:

- **Mid-term Exam: 30%**
- **Paper = 30% (due Nov 26)**
- **Exam Final: 40%**

Prerequisites: None.

Antirequisites: None.

Attendance is not graded but necessary for passing and conducive to thriving.

I. BOOKS TO BE PURCHASED FOR THE ENTIRE COURSE

(the rest of the texts we read will be scanned and provided at no additional cost to students):

1. Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, translated by G.M.A. Grube, Hackett, Indianapolis Cambridge 2001, ISBN-10: 0872205541, ISBN-13: 978-0872205543, CDN\$ 6.51.
2. Plato's *Republic*, translated by C.D.C. Reeve, Hackett, Indianapolis Cambridge 2004, ISBN-10: 0872207366, ISBN-13: 978-0872207363, CDN\$9.45.
3. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy: In Which the Existence of*

God and the Distinction of the Soul from the Body Are Demonstrated,
Hackett, Indianapolis Cambridge 2003, ISBN-10: 0872201929, ISBN-13:
978-0872201927, CDN\$ 9.12.

4. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Third Edition. Transl. by T. Irwin. Hackett Edition. ISBN-10 : 162466816X. CDN\$63.67

The above prices are the prices at amazon.ca. The books have been ordered at the UWO bookstore. You can also order them through amazon (for students no shipping costs, free two-day shipping for university students; slightly cheaper than at our university bookstore). As you prefer.

II. ASSIGNMENTS:

A. One research paper of 2000 words (30% of the final grade). Due Nov 26.

- No AI usage is allowed for this assignment. To make sure this will be the case, the topics, to be distributed in September, will be about your personal experience with the content of the class. Moreover, you need to quote the specific pages of both primary and secondary literature (**at least twice for one primary text and twice for the secondary literature you use**), which cannot be done by AI. If you do not do that, **7 points (out of 30) will be reduced**.
- **All papers** must be submitted to the assignment box of Dr. Mouroutsou's OWL site, and **the hard copy handed in in the class**. Any paper that is not turned into turnitin.com will not be given a grade. You are responsible to make sure it is done. Keep a safe copy of your text.
- You must use at least **ONE primary text of those we read in class and ONE bibliographical reference in your paper**. To refer to secondary literature does not mean to quote a couple of lines from books, but to constructively engage with their authors' views. We will explain everything about our research paper in class.
- **NO Internet sources**—you can use Internet search engines like **jstor** for your work.
- Late assignments will be penalized, 5% per day.
- **NO extensions (beyond the three-day self-report according to our policies)** will be granted that have not been approved and recommended by the Academic Dean's office.
- If your submitted document leaves some doubt regarding the method used to prepare the paper, we will invite you to discuss it in person or on zoom.

It is highly recommended that you participate in **student reading and writing groups**, or/and go to the **Write Place** at King's, in order to get assistance with writing. Only by exercising and receiving continuous feedback, our writing can improve. **Content and structure** of the essay will be graded. **Grammar, syntax and spelling** are of importance as well.

NEW: Academic consideration for the mid-term requires submission of a formal documentation. In case of academic consideration without formal documentation, one can have up to three days extension for the essay as per self-report policy. For more days, one needs formal accommodation.

B. Exams:

There will be

- a mid-term examination (**30% of the final grade**) 22 October in class
- The final examination (**worth of 40%** of the final grade, see registrar's schedule please). **All our material is material for the final (including the films and our discussion of them).**

III. SCHEDULE (changes might be made to pursue the interests of the students if this is fitting)

INTRO September 10. Explanation of what and how we will do things in this course.

Unit 1: Knowing That You Don't Know – The Epistemic Awakening

September 17. Socratic Wisdom and the Ignorance That Knows Itself

- Plato, *Apology*
- Plato, *Euthyphro*

Some Guiding Questions:

- What is the Socratic Method? How is it motivated?
- What kind of ignorance is Socrates promoting as wise?
- How does the Socratic method challenge confidence in belief?
- Can admitting ignorance be the beginning of knowledge?
- Can humility be an epistemic virtue?

Unit 2: Reason, Experience and the Limits of Understanding: Rationalism, Empiricism and Scepticism

September 24. The Rationalists

Plato. Theory of Forms.

Texts: The Republic. Book VII.

Descartes: The Foundations of Knowledge

Text: Meditations I-III

Guiding Questions:

- What do we know according to Plato?
- How do we know according to Plato?
- What motivated Plato to develop the “theory of forms”?
- What does rationalism mean?
- What is the method of doubt, and how does it lead to certainty in Descartes?
- What is innate knowledge according to Plato and Descartes?

October 1. Empiricism and Skepticism

Texts: from Sextus Empiricus and John Locke

Guiding Questions:

- What does empiricism mean?
- What is Scepticism? Different schools/directions, motivations and goals
- How do we come to knowledge according to empiricists?
- Empiricists in ancient and modern times.

October 8. Matrix 1 (1999)

Focus: Epistemic Awakening. Radical skepticism and appearance vs. reality.

Film Questions (framed Socratically):

- Epistemic transformation: What does it mean to “wake up”?
- What does Neo think he knows at the beginning of the film?
- Who plays the role of a Socratic figure, and how?
- How do characters respond to challenges to their beliefs?
- Is the realization that “the world is not what it seems” a beginning or an end of knowledge?

Film Questions (framed through Descartes)

- What counts as a justified belief when all perceptions may be manipulated?
- How does the film reflect Descartes’ skeptical scenario?
- Is knowledge possible if reality is a simulation?
- What role do choice and belief play in forming knowledge?

October 15: Discussion of the film

October 22: MIDTERM

October 29, no class due to paper

Nov 5: STUDY WEEK, no class

Unit 3: Knowledge in Practice – Ethics, Skill, and Understanding

Nov 12. Practical Wisdom and Arts/Crafts

Texts: Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI (phronesis/practical wisdom)

Ryle: The distinction between knowing that and knowing how

Guiding Questions:

- How does Aristotle define practical wisdom?
- What are the differences between theoretical and practical knowledge? Why is practical knowledge special?

Unit 4: Justification – How Do We Know That We Know?

Nov 19. Competing Theories of Justification

Text. Rorty. Pragmatism, Relativism, Irrationalism.

Guiding Questions:

- Which are the three aspects of truth?
- What distinguishes foundationalism, coherentism, and contextualism?
- What makes a belief justified?
- Can justification be social or context-sensitive?

Nov 26. *The Night of the Iguana*

ESSAY DUE

Focus: Different types of knowledge—artistic, religious, self-knowledge (how can we know ourselves other than through others) interpersonal (understanding others).

Guiding Questions:

- What kinds of knowledge are on display (emotional, existential, religious)?
- How do the characters understand themselves through others?
- Is there a form of “truth” in emotional or artistic expression?

Dec 3. discussion (Night of Iguana) and Review

DUE DATE FOR RESEARCH PAPERS

An additional film might be screened if there is interest and after discussion, namely, *Rashomon* by Kurosawa. We will discuss about this in class in due time.

KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
GENERAL COURSE POLICIES
2025-2026

1. Academic Accommodations, Consideration for Absences

Academic Accommodation (Accessibility)

Accessibility Services works to ensure that academic programs are accessible to all students, and supports students who may have a condition related to, but not limited to, vision, hearing, mobility, different ways of learning, mental health, chronic illnesses, chronic pain, autism spectrum disorder, ADD/ADHD, and temporary conditions (beyond short-term academic consideration). Accessibility Services provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive assessment. The accommodation policy can be found here [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#). Information on Accessibility Services at King's can be found [here](#).

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

If a student is unable to meet a course requirement due to substantial but temporary extenuating circumstances (medical or compassionate), they should follow the procedures below.

In some cases, where instructors have built flexibility into their assessments, this flexibility will already address consideration needs.

Requests for academic consideration should be directed to the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration. Requests must be made as soon as possible and no later than 48 hours after the missed assessment.

As a rule, documentation is required for academic consideration. For academic consideration requests on medical grounds, the Student Medical Certificate is available at https://www.kings.uwo.ca/kings/assets/File/currentStudents/courses_enrollment/exams_and_tests/SMC-Feb-2025.pdf.

Students are permitted one academic consideration request without supporting documentation per term per course.

Instructors may designate one assessment per half-course weight as requiring formal supporting documentation. Please refer to the course outline for each course.

For further information, please see:

https://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/academic_consideration_Sep24.pdf

Absences from Final Examinations

If you miss the Final Exam, contact the Academic Advising Office of your faculty/college of registration as soon as you are able to do so. They will assess your eligibility to write the Special Examination (the name given by the University to a makeup Final Exam).

You may also be eligible to write the Special Exam if you are in a “Multiple Exam Situation” (e.g., more than 2 exams in 23-hour period, or more than 3 exams in a 47-hour period).

If a student fails to write a scheduled Special Examination, the date of the next Special Examination (if granted) normally will be the scheduled date for the final exam the next time this course is offered. The maximum course load for that term will be reduced by the credit of the course(s) for which the final examination has been deferred. See the Academic Calendar for details (under Special Examinations).

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give notice in writing to the instructor and Academic Advising Office if a course requirement will be affected by a religious holiday/observance. Notice must be given as early as possible, and no later than two weeks prior to an examination, and one week prior to a midterm test date. It is the responsibility of such students to inform themselves concerning the work done in classes from which they are absent and to take appropriate action.

2. Support Services

Accessibility, Counselling and Student Development at King's University College:
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-services/>

Students experiencing emotional or mental health distress can access services at King's University

College: <http://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/campus-services/student-supportservices/personal-counselling/>

Good2talk is a good online and phone 24/7 resource for students and is available in English, Mandarin, and French: <https://good2talk.ca>, 1-866-925-5454

MentalHealth@Western provides a complete list of options about how to obtain help:
https://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/

Academic Support Services at King's University College:
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/academic-resources/>

GBSV Support:

King's is committed to reducing incidents of gender-based and sexual violence and providing compassionate support to anyone who has gone through these traumatic events. If you have experienced sexual or gender-based violence (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at:
<https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safe-campus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

You can reach someone supports at Kings by emailing Care@kings.uwo.ca or calling 519-930-4640 to reach a social worker who can offer help.

You can also reach Western's Gender-Based Violence & Survivor Support Case Manager by email or by calling 519-661-3568.

Further supports can be found on this website: <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/about-kings/safecampus/gender-and-sexual-violence/>

See also https://www.uwo.ca/health/student_support/survivor_support/get-help.html

University Students' Council offers many valuable support services for students, including the health insurance plan: <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

3. Statement on Use of Electronic Devices

Use of Electronic Devices: Unless explicitly stated otherwise, you are not allowed to have a cell phone, or any other electronic device, with you during tests or examinations. Unauthorized possession of such a device during a test or examination constitutes an academic offence.

Use of Laptops, Tablets, and Smartphones in the Classroom: King's University College at Western University acknowledges the integration of new technologies and learning methods into the curriculum. The use of electronic devices such as laptop computers, tablets, or smartphones can contribute to student engagement and effective learning. At the same time, King's recognizes that instructors and students share jointly the responsibility to establish and maintain a respectful classroom environment conducive to learning.

The use of electronic devices by students during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., shall be for matters related to the course at hand only. Students found to be using electronic devices for purposes not directly related to the class may be subject to sanctions under the Student Code of Conduct; see <https://www.kings.uwo.ca/current-students/student-affairs/code-of-student-conduct1/>

Inappropriate use of electronics (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones) during lectures, seminars, labs, etc., creates a significant disruption. As a consequence, instructors may choose to limit the use of electronic devices in these settings. In addition, in order to provide a safe classroom environment, students attending in-person class sessions are strongly advised to operate laptops with batteries rather than power cords.

4. Statement on Academic Offences

King's is committed to academic integrity. Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, is posted at

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

It is expected that students will submit work that is truly their own, completed without external assistance (human or artificial) except as explicitly permitted by the course instructor. Check with you instructor on what tools, including generative AI (ChatGPT, translation tools, grammarchecking tools) are permitted in the course. Because a tool is permitted in one course, that does not mean it is permitted in other courses.

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; see <https://elearningtoolkit.uwo.ca/tools/Originality Reports - TurnItIn.html>.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

5. Copyright of Course Material

Lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials are protected by copyright. Faculty members are the exclusive owner of copyright in those materials they create. Students may take notes and make copies for their own use. Students may not allow others to reproduce or distribute lecture notes and course materials publicly (whether or not a fee is charged) without the express written consent of a faculty member. Unauthorized sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

Similarly, students own copyright in their own original papers and exam essays. If a faculty member wishes to post a student's answers or papers on the course website, they should ask for the student's written permission.

6. Use of Recordings

Participants in this course are not permitted to record the sessions, except where recording is an approved accommodation and/or the participant has the prior written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized recording and/or sharing of class content is subject to academic discipline.

7. Policy on Attendance

Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course, will be reported to the Dean of the Faculty offering the course, after due warning has been given. On the recommendation of the department concerned, and with the permission of the Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course.