



Course Syllabus

Graduate Seminar: Contemporary Skepticism

PHIL 60191-001-16334
MW 3:45-5:00
Spring, 2024

Dr. Frank Ryan
Office: 320-E Bowman
Hours: 2:30-3:45 MW; 3:30-4:45 TR
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Course Content: Kant called skepticism the “scandal” of philosophy. But though it’s been refuted, lamented, berated and ignored, systematic doubt about basic claims about perception and knowledge has shadowed philosophy through its history. This course explores the views of contemporary skeptics and non-skeptics. Classic essays from Russell, Moore, and Putnam provide a foundation for the contemporary debate between those who admit the force of skepticism and others who attempt to refute it by externalist, reliabilist, or contextualist strategies. Beyond fantastic speculations about “brains-in-vats,” skepticism has the serious function of testing the mettle of theories of knowledge and the world-views they presuppose. As such, skepticism remains an indispensable tool for contemporary epistemology.

Text: 1) *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Keith DeRose
2) Additional files on Canvas

Grading: 54% is determined by three unit essay assignments (18% ea.)
6% is determined by a paper abstract
25% is determined by a substantial research paper of 12-15 pages. The first draft may be revised and resubmitted for a higher grade.
15% is determined by seminar contributions.

Important: Assignments and papers submitted late **are penalized a full letter grade for each class day after the deadline. A late penalty for a first draft carries over to the final draft.**

Grades are calculated according to the standard scale:
≥ 93 = A, 90-92 = A-, 88-89 = B+, 83-88 = B, 80-82 = B-, 78-79 = C+, 73-77 = C, 70-72 = C-,
68-69 = D+, 60-67 = D, ≤ 59 = F

Expectations: This course is theory-intensive. As such, regular attendance and completion of reading assignments is expected for each class. You are encouraged to contribute regularly to

class discussions, and to consult your instructor for assistance with any aspect of this course.

Academic Honesty: Cheating and plagiarism are serious academic offenses to which zero tolerance is afforded. Any passage *or* idea taken from the work of another *or not completely and fully of your own creation* (e.g. gpt chat) must be fully cited as such. Violations of academic honesty in this class are handled in conformance to University Policy 3342-3-07, section D. Penalties include, but not limited to (1) assigning a zero grade for the assignment or (2) assigning a course grade of F. Please consult University Policy 3342-3-07 for additional information.

Grievance Policy: The Philosophy Department Grievance Procedure for handling grievances is in conformity with the Student Academic Complaint Policy and Procedures set down as University Policy 3342-4-16 in the *University Policy Register*. For information concerning the details of the grievance procedure, please see the Departmental Chairperson.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>	<u>Assignments</u>
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D: DeRose
 C: File on Canvas

1/17	Instructions for Abstracts and Papers/ Confessions of a Brain in a Vat	C: Some Forms of Skepticism Handout	
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I. Roots of Modern Skepticism

1/22	Descartes, <i>Meditations</i> I and II	C: 144-157	
1/24	Hume, “Of skepticism with regard to the senses,” <i>Treatise</i> I.IV.ii	P: 187-203	
1/29	Hume, “Of skepticism with regard to the senses,” <i>Treatise</i> I.IV.ii,	C: 203-218	
1/31	Hume, “Skeptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding,” <i>Enquiry</i> IV.	C: 15-25	
2/5	Russell, <i>Problems of Philosophy</i> , Ch. 1-2	C: 8-26	

II. The Skeptical Challenge

2/7	Huemer, <i>Skepticism & the Veil of Perception</i>	C: 1-16	
2/12	Huemer, <i>Skepticism & the Veil of Perception</i>	C: 16-37	Unit I Essay Due
2/14	Huemer, <i>Skepticism & the Veil of Perception</i>	C: 37-50	
2/19	Ribeiro, “Skeptical Parasitism and the Continuity Argument”	C: 714-723	
2/21	Riberio, “Skeptical Parasitism and the Continuity Argument”	C: 723-732	

III. Direct Responses

2/26 Moore “Proof of An External World” C: 37-41; D: 1-6

IV. Semantic Solutions

2/28 Putnam, “Brains in a Vat” D: 27-43
3/4 Dretske, “Epistemic Operators” D: 131-145

V. Causal Connections

3/6 Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing” C: 66-76 *Abstract Due*

VI. Reliabilist Routes

3/11 Sosa, “Philosophical Skepticism and Epistemic Certainty” D: 93-102 *Unit II Essay Due*
3/13 Sosa, “Philosophical Skepticism and Epistemic Circularity” D: 103-114
3/18 Hill, “Process Reliabilism and Cartesian Skepticism” D: 115-128
3/20 Greco, “Skepticism About the External World” C: 108-118
3/19-3/25 *Spring Break*
4/1 Greco, “Skepticism About the External World” C: 118-128
4/3 Pritchard, “Sensitivity, Safety, and Antiluck Epistemology” C: 437-446
4/8 Prichard, “Sensitivity, Safety, and Antiluck Epistemology” C: 446-455 *PAPER FIRST DRAFT DUE*

VII. Contextualist Solutions

4/10 DeRose, “Solving the Skeptical Problem” D: 183-200
4/15 DeRose, “Solving the Skeptical Problem” D: 200-219

VIII. A Concession Speech

4/17 Stroud, “Skepticism, Externalism, and the Goal of Epistemology,” 292-304 D: 292-304

IX. A Pragmatic Perambulation

4/22 Ryan, “Skepticism, Realism, and Transactional Pragmatism” C: 1-26
4/24 Ryan, “Skepticism, Realism, and Transactional Pragmatism” C: 26-44
4/29 Ryan, “Skepticism, Realism, and Transactional Pragmatism” C: 44-63 *Unit III Essay Due*
5/1 Ryan, “Skepticism, Realism, and Transactional Pragmatism” C: 63-75 *REVISED PAPER DUE*

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FINAL EXAM SESSION: Friday, May 10, 7:15-9:30 am., paper return and 'substantive discussion'