

## Course Outline

### PHIL 2201 Epistemology

Spring 2024

**Course Format:** Lecture 3.0 h + Seminar 1.0 h + Lab. 0.0 h

**Credits: 3.0**

**Transfer Credit:** For information, visit [bctransferguide.ca](http://bctransferguide.ca)

### Course Description

This course is an introduction to epistemology, the study of knowledge. The question “What is knowledge?” seems very easy to answer – until you try. We humans apparently know many things about the world these days, about the chemical composition of distant stars, the structure of the atom, evolutionary history, etc., but our understanding of human knowledge *itself* is still a work in progress. The good news is that there’s been a lot of activity in the field over the past few centuries, and especially the past few decades, and it seems that real progress is being made.

Some questions we will address are: How is knowledge to be defined? Do we really have knowledge, or should we really suspend judgement about almost everything? Does our belief formation have to be consciously supervised and monitored, in order for our beliefs to count as knowledge, or can we trust our unconscious belief-forming processes to do their job? Is some human knowledge innate? Does every belief have to be supported by other beliefs, or are some beliefs “foundational”? Can human knowledge be understood scientifically, as a biological property, or is there something “non-natural” about it that resists this approach?

**Prerequisites and Corequisites:** Any first-year Philosophy course or consent of the instructor.

### Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Read philosophical texts, including some from the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, and be able to discuss their contents.
- Accurately summarise the views and arguments of major philosophers covered in the course readings.
- Demonstrate understanding of these views and arguments by writing essays that include criticism and evaluation of them.
- Write in a contemporary academic style that combines clarity and precision with simplicity and accessibility.

**Instructor:** Dr. Richard Johns

**Office:** A382d

**Phone:** (604) 323-5830

**Email:** rjohns@langara.ca

**(Zoom Office:** <https://langara.zoom.us/j/3475366594> by appointment)

**Office Hours:**

Tues: 11 – 12; 3.30 – 4

Weds: 3 – 3.30

Thurs: 1 – 2

Fri: 11 – 12

**Classes:**

Weds + Fri: 12.30 – 2.20

Room: A346

**Textbook and Course Materials:**

Robert Martin, *Epistemology: A Beginner's Guide*, Oneworld, 2010. ISBN 978-1-85168-732-9

Other readings will be posted to Langara iweb (<http://iweb.langara.ca/rjohns>) for free download.

**Assessments and Weighting:**

Two Essays (1,200 words each) ( $2 \times 20\% = 40\%$ )

Two essay outlines ( $2 \times 5\% = 10\%$ )

Best ten (of eleven) reading quizzes ( $10 \times 2\% = 20\%$ )

Final Exam. (30%)

- Hand in your **Essays Outlines** on Brightspace, on each **Friday** indicated on the schedule. This will include your thesis and other basic details.
- The essays will be written in class, on **March 1** and **March 27**.
- The reading quizzes will always take place at the start of class on **Wednesday**. Three questions about readings for the coming week will be provided ahead of time. During the (10 minute) quiz you will answer one of these questions, selected randomly.

**Grading:**

A+	90+	B	72-75	C-	55-59
A	85-89	B-	68-71	D	50-54
A-	80-84	C+	64-67	F	0-49
B+	76-79	C	60-63		

**Course Schedule** (subject to revision):

Jan.	3, 5	Perception, belief and truth. Knowledge basics.	“Perception Basics” (iweb). Martin ch. 1
	10, 12	<b>Q1.</b> The challenge of scepticism	Huemer chs. 1, 2
	17, 19	<b>Q2.</b> The JTB theory of knowledge	BonJour ch. 3
	24, 26	<b>Q3.</b> The Gettier problem and responses	Martin ch. 3
Feb.	31, 2	<b>Q4.</b> Internalism and externalism	Martin ch. 4
	7, 9	<b>Q5.</b> Foundationalism and coherentism	Martin ch. 5
	14, <b>16</b>	<b>Q6.</b> Empiricism and rationalism (Feb. 16: <b>Essay #1 Outline</b> due)	Hume (iweb), Induction and IBE notes (iweb)
	19 – 23	<b>*** Spring Break ***</b>	
March	28, <b>1</b>	<b>Q7.</b> Basics of induction (March 1: <b>Essay #1</b> written in class)	The argument for rationalism from induction
	6, 8	<b>Q8.</b> Science and Induction	Martin ch. 6, BonJour, <i>In defense of pure reason</i>
	13, <b>15</b>	<b>Q9.</b> Contextualism, Testimony (March 15: <b>Essay #2 Outline</b> due)	Nagel or Rowley
	20, 22	<b>Q10.</b> New approaches to epistemology	Martin ch. 9
	<b>27</b>	( <b>Essay #2</b> written in class)	
	29	<b>*** Good Friday ***</b>	
	3, 5	Feminist epistemology, Review.	TBD

As a student at Langara, you are responsible for familiarizing yourself and complying with the following policies:

**College Policies:**

[E1003 - Student Code of Conduct](#)

[F1004 - Code of Academic Conduct](#)

[E2008 - Academic Standing - Academic Probation and Academic Suspension](#)

[E2006 - Appeal of Final Grade](#)

[F1002 - Concerns about Instruction](#)

[E2011 - Withdrawal from Courses](#)

**Course Policies:**

It is the student's responsibility to understand what plagiarism is and avoid it. For detailed information about plagiarism and advice see <http://langara.ca/library/research-help/citing-help/avoid-plagiarism.html>. **Do not use a paraphrasing tool.** This usually produces nonsense, *and it's still plagiarism* unless the original text is clearly cited.

The course instructor will hold office hours at the times listed on the previous page. You are encouraged to attend these if you either have a difficulty related to the course, or are especially interested in some topic and want to know more. The instructor has set aside this time, and is very happy to interact with students.

The instructor's email address is also listed. Students may use email to ask questions of the instructor, when this is more efficient than attending an office hour. In many cases, use of email is highly convenient to both the student and the instructor. Students should use only email the instructor when necessary, however. Always first check the course outline, and Course Tools, to see if it has the information you need, and consider asking a class mate for help.

Late essays are penalised at the rate of 5% per day. Essays also cannot be handed in by email, except with the permission of the instructor. Sending me an essay by email will however be accepted as proof that the essay was completed by a certain date, which can reduce or eliminate a late penalty.