Philosophy 384: Applied Epistemology

Contact info  Sarah Moss
              ssmoss@umich.edu
              office: 2232 Angell Hall

Description  This course surveys philosophical theories of knowledge and rationality in order to
              examine the implications of these theories for our thinking about race, ethnicity, and
              racism in the United States today. The practical applications of material covered in
              this course include the epistemology of racial profiling, racial and ethnic disparities
              in our criminal justice system, the epistemic value of first-personal reports about
              experiences of discrimination on the basis of race or gender or disability status, def-
              initions of race and ethnicity, and finally, what we should believe when confronting
              disagreement between different religious or cultural or political views. In short, this
              course is about epistemology—and yet at the same time, it is about how you should
              live your life as an agent governed not only by epistemic norms, but also by legal,
              political, cultural, social, and ethical norms.

Prerequisites  A previous course in philosophy is an advisory prerequisite for this course.

Materials    All readings and assignments will be posted on our U-M Canvas course webpage at
              https://umich.instructure.com/.

Grading     Early mid-term exam in lecture: 20%
              First paper: 20%
              Second paper: 20%
              Final exam: 25%
              Section participation: 15%

Disability  Students requesting academic accommodations for a disability are required to regis-
              ter with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities. If you need accommo-
              dation, please contact both me and your graduate student instructor with an official
              request for accommodation at the beginning of the course.

Readings    Gettier cases and the analysis of knowledge

9/8         Nagel 2014: “The Analysis of Knowledge”
9/13        Edelman 2016: “Heffernan v. Paterson and an Absurd First Amendment
              Doctrine”
              Alexander 2012: “The Color of Justice”

1This reading is chapter 3 of The New Jim Crow.
excerpt from Du Bois 1903: *The Souls of Black Folk*
excerpt from Baldwin 1963: *The Fire Next Time*

**Probability theory and degrees of belief**

9/20 Bradley 2015: “Belief and Probability”
9/22 Strevens 2012: “Notes on Bayesian Confirmation Theory,” §1–3.3
9/27 Schneps and Colmez 2013: “Multiplying Non-Independent Probabilities”
9/29 Schneps and Colmez 2013: “Simpson’s Paradox”


**Bayes’ Theorem and the base rate fallacy**

10/4 Bradley 2015: “Bayes’ Theorem and the Base Rate Fallacy”

Gendler 2001: “On the Epistemic Costs of Implicit Bias”
10/11 Early mid-term exam in lecture

**Reliabilist theories of knowledge and reference class problems**

10/11 excerpt from Goldman and Beddor 2015: “Reliabilist Epistemology”
excerpt from Comesaña 2011: “A Well-Founded Solution to the Generality Problem”

James 2016: “Do Races Exist? Contemporary Philosophical Debates”
10/13 Schauer 2003: “Pit Bulls, Golden Retrievers, and Other Dangerous Dogs”

James 2016: “Race versus Ethnicity”
excerpt from West 2002: “A Genealogy of Modern Racism”
10/18 University of Michigan Fall Study Break

**Sensitivity conditions on knowledge**

10/20 Nagel 2014: “Internalism and Externalism”

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2This reading is chapter 1 of *A Critical Introduction to Formal Epistemology*.
3This reading is chapter 1 of *Math on Trial: How Numbers Get Used and Abused in the Courtroom*.
4This reading is chapter 6 of *Math on Trial: How Numbers Get Used and Abused in the Courtroom*.
5This is chapter 2 of *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America*.
6This reading is the first appendix of *A Critical Introduction to Formal Epistemology*.
7This reading is chapter 2 of *Profiles, Probabilities, and Stereotypes*.
8This reading is chapter 5 of *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*. 
Social choice theory and Arrow’s impossibility theorem

11/1 Peterson 2009: “Introduction”9
   The first paper for this class will be due by the start of lecture on 11/3.
11/10 Nathanson 1985: “Does it Matter if the Death Penalty is Arbitrarily Administered?”

Testimony and testimonial injustice

11/15 Nagel 2014: “Testimony”12
11/22 Barnes 2016: “Taking Their Word for It”14
   excerpt from Mills 2015: “Global White Ignorance”
11/24 University of Michigan Thanksgiving Recess

Peer disagreement and higher-order evidence

12/1 Feldman 2007: “Reasonable Religious Disagreements”
   Lorde 1979: “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House”
12/6 Huemer 2005: “Is Critical Thinking Epistemically Responsible?”
12/8 The final lecture of this course will be reserved for summary and reflection.
   The second paper for this class will be due by the start of lecture on 12/8.

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9This reading is chapter 1 of An Introduction to Decision Theory.
10This reading is chapter 13 of An Introduction to Decision Theory.
11This reading is chapter 1 of Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions.
12This reading is chapter 6 of Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction.
13This reading is section 1.3 of Epistemic Injustice.
14This reading is chapter 4 of The Minority Body.