Instructor: Dr. Amy K. Donahue
Temporary Assistant Professor
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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00pm — 3:15pm, or by appointment. I’m very willing to meet, in person or electronically, so long as my schedule allows.

Prerequisites: ENGL 1101 strongly recommended

Catalogue Course Description: A philosophical and critical examination of the different ways of knowing and thinking in the humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences — including ethical and religious perspectives. Emphasis is on the nature and purpose of philosophical inquiry as applied to selected issues within philosophy and the broader implications of these methods and questions for other disciplines and in everyday contexts.

Instructor’s Course Description: We will critically examine the possibility, nature, and potential risks and advantages of different styles of claiming to know. In the first half of the course, we study classical Greek and Indian accounts of the necessary and sufficient conditions of proper knowledge claims, explore Daoist, Greek, Indian, and other skeptical counterarguments, and evaluate efforts by figures such as Gangeśa, Augustine, and Descartes to respond to these skeptical challenges. In the second half, we look specifically at modern appeals to common sense and explore epistemological, ethical, and political arguments against such appeals.

Required Texts:
Select online materials and handouts.

Instructional Methods: Philosophy, and critical thought more generally, is a democratic and interpersonal exercise. The instructor therefore emphasizes “active” over “passive” learning
methods. Group discussions will take priority over lectures as much as pedagogically possible. Please do not think that you will learn less this way, or that the course will therefore be “soft” or easy. Rather, you will be challenged to formulate arguments, orally and in writing, to defend your perspectives, and to accurately and responsibly represent arguments that challenge your positions. Please be prepared to critically engage and learn from the texts, your fellow students, and the instructor.

**Learning Outcomes:** For a grade of “B” or better, students must fulfill the following learning outcomes for this course:

- Demonstrate direct, text-based knowledge and understanding of important historical and contemporary texts, arguments, and counterarguments relating to ways of knowing and common sense through argument summaries, midterm and final papers, weekly online discussions, and active classroom participation.

- Write two five to seven page essays on a topic to be assigned, each supporting a clearly stated and philosophically relevant thesis and accurately and subtly representing relevant arguments from assigned primary texts for and against the thesis.

- Actively engage with fellow students’ live and online class contributions. Assist them with their thoughts and pose relevant, informed, and on-topic critical questions.

**Course Requirements:** Students must attend classes, read course materials, bring assigned texts to class, and complete assignments unless there are exceptional circumstances that they can document. Each student is expected to treat other members of the class with respect and to actively participate in class assignments, exercises, and discussions.

**Grading:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Discussions</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two 2-page argument summaries</td>
<td>18% (9% each)</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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**Grading Scale:**

- 100 – 90    = A
- 89 – 80    = B
- 79 – 70    = C
- 69 – 60    = D
- < 60       = F

**Online Discussions:** Post are required by 11am on each day of class, from Weeks 2 — 15, on the class’ online discussion board. Each post is worth 0.5 per cent of your final grade. You can miss
two posts without academic penalty. If you complete all discussion posts, you’ll receive 1% extra credit.

Each 75—150 word discussion post should be written in conversational English and should demonstrate your direct, personal familiarity with, if not expertise in, the texts and topic for the upcoming class. The instructor will moderate the board primarily to ensure that students are actively and appropriately engaging the relevant primary texts, class assignments, and discussions, and to non-intrusively identify areas of student confusion, interest, and concern that she may address later in class. The discussion board is meant to serve as a place for students, including those who find live class interactions awkward, to raise questions or concerns about class concepts and philosophical perspectives, to try to answer or address classmates’ questions or difficulties, or to attempt to hash out in their own words what a text means, You are welcome to wax poetic about, or go on tirades against, particular philosophers and/or philosophical perspectives, but must also treat other class participants with respect. Your online discussion posts will be evaluated according to the following rubric:

1 point — The post is submitted by 11am the day of class, is written in intelligible if not grammatically perfect English, demonstrates personal familiarity with, if not expertise in, the relevant texts (e.g., through direct textual references), is not disrespectful of other class participants, and does not appear to the professor to substantially repeat an earlier student post.

0 points — Either it is not submitted by 11am before class, or it isn’t written in intelligible English, does not demonstrate personal familiarity with the relevant texts, is disrespectful of other class participants, or appears to the professor to substantially repeat an earlier student post.

**Argument Summaries:** Approximately two weeks before your midterm and final papers are due, you must submit a two page, text-based summary of one argument that we have read and studied in class. Each should be double-spaced, with 12 point Times New Roman font and 1” margins, and should follow MLA citation guidelines (see [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/02/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/02/)). We’ll talk about the structure of philosophical arguments in class. Students are also invited to view this Oxford University video podcast’s introduction to arguments in philosophy: [http://media.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/conted/critical_reasoning/talbotcr01-medium-video.mp4?CAMEFROM=podcastsGET](http://media.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/conted/critical_reasoning/talbotcr01-medium-video.mp4?CAMEFROM=podcastsGET). Your summaries must accurately represent and explain 1) a conclusion defended by one particular philosopher whom we have read, 2) the premises that he or she gives to support the truth of the conclusion, and 3) why, according to the author, the premises make the conclusion necessarily or most likely true. Your summaries should appropriately reference the *primary text* (not simply the editors’ introductions or class notes) in ways that prove that your representations and explanations are accurate. Think of these summaries as part of the drafting process for your midterm and final papers. You are welcome to include them verbatim in your papers.

**Papers:** Your midterm and final papers should be between 5-7 pages, be formatted with double-spacing, 12 point Times New Roman font, and 1” margins, and follow MLA citation guidelines
(see http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/02/). Please review KSU’s policies on academic integrity and plagiarism before submission. Time permitting, I am extremely happy to review paper drafts before assignments are due and to work with students to improve their academic writing. Graded papers are normally returned no more than two weeks after their due date. I will distribute a grading rubric for your written assignments before assigning your papers.

**KSU Academic integrity policy:** No student shall receive, attempt to receive, knowingly give or attempt to give unauthorized assistance in the preparation of any work required to be submitted for credit (including examinations, laboratory reports, essays, themes, term papers, etc.). Unless specifically authorized, the presence and/or use of electronic devices during an examination, quiz, or other class assignment is considered cheating. Engaging in any behavior which a professor prohibits as academic misconduct in the syllabus or in class discussion is cheating. *When direct quotations are used, they should be indicated, and when the ideas, theories, data, figures, graphs, programs, electronic based information or illustrations of someone other than the student are incorporated into a paper or used in a project, they should be duly acknowledged.* No student may submit the same, or substantially the same, paper or other assignment for credit in more than one class without the prior permission of the current professor(s).

**Attendance Policy:** Attendance is mandatory. Students are required to provide a reasonable, documentable explanation for class absences. After three unexcused absences, students lose a full letter grade, to be deducted from class participation, with *each additional unexcused absence.*

**Disabilities** — I will be happy to work to meet the access needs of any student who requires reasonable accommodations because of the impact of a physical or mental disability.

**Tentative Course Schedule**  
(read assignments and activities are subject to revision)

**Week 1:**

- **8/20** — Class introductions, welcome, and discussion of syllabus and the concept ‘knowledge’. What is knowledge? Introduction to the distinction between “knowing how” and “knowing that.” Are belief, true belief, and knowledge different? If so, how? Arguments in philosophy.

- **8/22** — Reading due — Plato’s Internalism (B&P, pp. 334—343). What, according to Socrates, is knowledge, and how does he justify (i.e., argue for) its difference from, and superiority to, mere belief, and merely true belief? Internalist and externalist models of warrant. Arguments in philosophy.
Week 2:


8/29 — Discussion post. Re-read Locke selection. Discussion of Locke’s argument for the *tabula rasa* theory of human knowledge, and for his empiricist foundationalism.

Week 3:

9/3 — LABOR DAY — No Class.

9/5 — Discussion post. Reading due — Indian Realism: Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika (B&P, pp. 309—314). What is an “externalist” theory of knowledge? According to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school, in what ways (*pramāṇa*-s) does knowledge happen? When, and only when, are beliefs produced through perception, testimony, and inference valid? Can people really be said to know if they cannot justify their beliefs? If people’s beliefs are produced in the ways that the Nyāya Sūtra-s describe, would it be reasonable to demand that they justify them?

Week 4:

9/10 — Discussion post. Reading due — Chinese Theories of Knowledge — Daoist Skepticism (B&P, pp. 320-328). Recap of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika *pramāṇa*-s. Examination of Zhuangzi’s skeptical arguments. Do creatures and experiences differ so much, and do judgments depend so much on varying subjective conditions, that objective “knowing that” is impossible? What is the problem of the criterion and why does Zhuangzi think it’s a problem? What does Zhuangzi think he shows by raising the possibility of dreaming? Be prepared to explain and accurately restate Zhuangzi’s skeptical arguments from variability, the interdependence of subject and object, the problem of the criterion, and the possibility of dreaming.

9/12 — Discussion post. Re-read Zhuangzi selection. Continued examination of Zhuangzi’s skeptical arguments from variability, the interdependence of subject and object, the problem of the criterion, and the possibility of dreaming. Review of arguments in philosophy. How might Zhuangzi’s arguments apply to Plato, Locke, or Nyāya?
Week 5:

9/17 — Discussion post. Review internalist and externalist theories of knowledge, and Zhuangzi’s skeptical arguments. Which, if any, of these theories of knowledge make the most sense to you and why? How are these accounts of knowing different from or similar to the perspectives and assumptions that you came to class with? Arguments in philosophy.

9/19 — FIRST ARGUMENT SUMMARY DUE. Discussion post. Reading due — Descartes’ Foundationalism (B&P, pp. 373 — 377) and Descartes’ Dualism of Mind and Body (pp. 264 — 270). Why is Descartes a foundationalist and not a skeptic? What is his answer to the problem of variation and to the skeptical argument from the interdependence of subject and object? What are clear and distinct ideas, and why, according to Descartes, are they an appropriate criterion for objective, certain knowledge?

Week 6:

9/24 — Discussion post. Re-read Descartes selections. Examination of Descartes argument for a rationalist foundationalism. Introduction to Nagarjuna.

9/26 — Discussion post. Reading due — Nāgārjuna’s Skeptical Regress and New Logic Responses to Skepticism (B&P, pp. 314 — 317). What does Nāgārjuna mean to show by raising the possibility of a skeptical regress? How does his argument compare to Zhuangzi’s version of the problem of the criterion? Is Descartes’ foundationalism vulnerable to Nāgārjuna’s critique?

Week 7:

10/1 — Discussion post. Reading due — New Logic Responses to Skepticism (B&P, pp. 317 — 319). What assumptions support Gangeśa’s dismissal of Nāgārjuna’s skeptical argument? Are all real doubts truly “local doubts?” Why? When should a person have to justify his or her beliefs, what are the appropriate methods of justification, and how can anyone establish what these appropriate methods of justification are without committing the logical fallacies that Nagarjuna predicts?

10/3 — Discussion post. Reading due — Sextus Empiricus’s Skepticism (B&P, pp. 348—356). Are creatures and experiences so varied and diverse that knowledge of external, mind-independent things is impossible? How can anyone be sure that they know, and their feelings of certainty aren’t wed to
a fleeting mental state, such as dreams, fevers, or intoxication? What is the problem of the criterion and why does Sextus Empiricus consider it a problem? Be prepared to accurately explain and restate Sextus Empiricus’ skeptical arguments from variation, the possibility of dreaming, and the problem of the criterion.

Week 8:


10/10 — Last day to withdraw without academic penalty. MIDTERM PAPER DUE. Discussion post. Reading due — Thomas Reid, “Introduction to the “Philosophy of Common Sense,” and “Of Common Sense” (http://oll.libertyfund.org/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=2044&Itemid=27), and Edmund Burke, On Taste, Introductory Discourse (http://www.bartleby.com/24/1/1.html). Introduction to modern common sense philosophies. How common is common sense? What ways of knowing belong to the realm of common sense, and where do the borders of this common space of judgment roughly begin? Do mathematical and logical judgments fall within the realm of common sense or outside of it? What about Locke’s “simple ideas” and Burke’s judgments of taste? Can anyone decide these questions — and what would be the criteria?

10/12 — Last day to withdraw without academic penalty

Week 9:

10/15 — Discussion post. Re-read Reid and Burke. How common is common sense? What ways of knowing belong to the realm of common sense, and where do the borders of this common space of judgment roughly begin? Why, according to Burke, are common tastes for objects of sense and imagination naturally assured? Why, according to Burke, do people’s tastes for objects of judgment vary? If all people exerted themselves and were similarly educated, would common tastes for objects of judgment naturally emerge?

10/17 — Discussion post. Re-read Burke. Be prepared to explain and restate Burke’s arguments for common tastes for objects of sense, imagination, and judgment. Introduction to Mencius’ theory of naturally grounded common sense.
Week 10:

10/22 — Discussion post. Reading due — The Intuitionism of Mencius (B&P, pp. 44-52). Why, according to Mencius, do people naturally share similar moral and epistemological tastes and standards. If all people cultivated and hued closely to natural human feelings, would common tastes for objects of judgment emerge? How does Mencius account for variation?

10/24 — Discussion post. Re-reading due — The Intuitionism of Mencius (B&P, pp. 44-52). Why, according to Mencius, do people naturally share similar moral and epistemological tastes and standards. How does Mencius account for variation? If all people cultivated and hued closely to natural human feelings, would common standards of judgment emerge? Be prepared to accurately restate and summarize Reid’s, Burke’s, and Mencius’ arguments for naturally given common sense knowledge.

Week 11:

10/29 — Discussion post. Reading due — Xunzi’s Pessimistic View of Human Nature (B&P, pp. 52 — 57) and Suzanne Kessler, “The Medical Construction of Gender” (uploaded to Blackboard). Recap arguments for naturally grounded common sense knowledge, and begin to explore arguments against the possibility of warranting this kind of belief. Can common sense knowledge about appropriate judgment and behavior be rooted in natural human feelings if appropriate judgment and behavior amounts to restraining, and being conditioned to restrain, natural human feelings and tendencies? If common sense, including common sense standards of properly sexed embodiment and behavior, is natural, then why do people apparently need schools, governments, prisons, scientists, and doctors to have this sense?

10/31 — Discussion post. Re-reading due — Xunzi’s Pessimistic View of Human Nature (B&P, pp. 52 — 57) and Suzanne Kessler, “The Medical Construction of Gender” (uploaded to Blackboard). Recap Xunzi’s argument against naturally grounded common sense knowledge, and begin critically assessing Xunzi’s theory of socially constructed common sense knowledge. If common sense beliefs, for instance about appropriate judgment and behavior or properly sexed embodiment, are produced by social practices, how can such practices warrant these beliefs as knowledge?
Week 12:

11/5 — **SECOND ARGUMENT SUMMARY DUE.** Discussion post. The Skepticism of Francisco Sanches (B&P, pp. 399 — 402). If people must be taught common sense beliefs, then how can these beliefs 1) be truly shared, or 2) be warranted as knowledge? Is it possible to justify a theory of common sense without masquerading incomplete subjective beliefs as complete, objective ones, arguing in a circle, or falling into an infinite regress?

11/7 — Discussion post. Reading due — Susan Rosenfeld, Introduction (uploaded to Blackboard). Introduction to “postmodern” critiques of modern appeals to common sense knowledge. According to Rosenfeld, what is common sense and what three political-historical developments conditioned its production? Introduction to Lugones. Will any theory of common sense have a “light side” and a “dark side?” If so, can apparently common sense beliefs be warranted as legitimate ways of “knowing that?”

Week 13:

11/12 — Discussion post. Reading due — Maria Lugones, “The Coloniality of Gender” (uploaded to Blackboard). Is it possible to make modern, middle-class standards of meaning and value seem common and shared without constructing racialized “light” and “dark” sides of humanity?


Week 14:

11/19 — Discussion post. Reading due — Michael Warner, preface and chapter 1 (pp. vii — 40). What, according to Warner, is “moralism” and how does it contrast with “morality?” Can any set of experiences, judgments, and perspectives appear generally representative and authoritative for a society, species, or culture (i.e., appear as common sense knowledge) without practices that shame and make “others” appear inferior or disordered? Compare with Lugones’ concept of “coloniality” and Rosenfeld’s history of modern appeals to common sense.
11/21 — Fall Break. No class.

Week 15:

11/26 — Discussion post. Reading due — Warner, chapter 2 (pp. 41-80). How, according to Warner, do “stigmaphobe” movements, such as same sex marriage campaigns, participate in moralism? Would moral (i.e., “stigmophile”) public spaces share common sense knowledge in the ways that Reid, Burke, Mencius, or Xunzi conceive of it?

11/28 — Discussion post. Reading due — Warner, chapter 3 (pp. 81 — 149). Note Warner’s claims that same-sex marriage campaigns seek to “civilize gays.” Would any attempt to ground knowledge in naturally or socially produced “common sense” necessarily produce “light” and “dark” sides of humanity, manifest in some kind of moralistic civilizing mission? Can it be possible, therefore, to warrant modern appeals to common sense beliefs as legitimate ways of “knowing that?”

Week 16:

12/3 — No discussion post required. Recap of arguments against the possibility and legitimacy of 1) naturally grounded common sense knowledge and 2) socially grounded common sense knowledge.

12/5 — Last day of class. No discussion post required. How, if at all, do people know, not only individually, but collectively, as members of societies, cultures, and one species? Where, if anywhere, should the epistemological and ethical limits of appeals to common sense knowledge be drawn, and why?

FINAL PAPER: DUE ELECTRONICALLY FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7, BY 6PM THROUGH BLACKBOARD.