Instructor: Dr. Amy K. Donahue
Temporary Assistant Professor
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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:15pm — 1:45pm, or by appointment.

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 will study classical Greek and Indian accounts of the necessary and sufficient conditions for proper knowledge claims, explore Daoist, Greek, and other skeptical counterarguments, and evaluate efforts by figures such as Gangeṣa, Augustine, and Descartes to respond to these skeptical challenges. In the second half, we will look specifically at modern epistemological, ethical, and political appeals to common sense, draw relevant comparisons with the philosophies of Mencius and Xunzi, and explore postmodern critiques of these appeals.

Required Texts:
Select online materials and handouts.

Instructional Methods: Philosophy, and critical thought more generally, is a deeply democratic and interpersonal practice. The instructor will therefore emphasize “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 to defend your perspectives and to accurately and responsibly represent arguments that challenge your views orally and in writing. Please be prepared to critically engage and learn from the texts, your fellow students, and the instructor. If you attend regularly and punctually, actively participate in class, and not only do the reading but also think hard about it, you will be surprised how much you learn.

**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 identifying a relevant philosophical debate and accurately representing relevant arguments and claims through direct engagement with assigned primary texts to support a clearly stated and philosophically relevant 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, 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:**

- Weekly Online Discussions — 14%
- Two 2-page argument summaries — 16% (8% each)
- First Paper — 25%
- Final Paper — 25%
- Class participation — 20%

**Grading Scale:**

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

**Weekly Online Discussions:** Two posts are required each week, from Weeks 1 — 7, on the class’ online discussion board, once before each class session. Your posts are due by 10pm on the night before class. Each post is worth 1 per cent of your final grade.
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 also 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, try to answer or address classmates’ questions or difficulties, attempt to hash out in their own words what a text means, or to go on tirades against, or wax poetic about, particular philosophers and/or philosophical perspectives. Your online discussion posts will be evaluated according to the following rubric:

1 point — The post is submitted by 10pm the night before 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), and does not appear to the professor to substantially repeat an earlier student post.

0 points — Either it is not submitted by 2am before class, or it isn’t written in intelligible English, or it does not demonstrate personal familiarity with the relevant texts, or it 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/)). 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 true. Your summaries should appropriately reference the primary text (not simply the editors’ introductions or class notes) in ways that demonstrate 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/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/02/)). Please review KSU’s policies on academic integrity and plagiarism before submission. Time permitting, I will be 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. Since this is a compressed 8 week class, I will try to get them to you sooner. I will also 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.

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**Tentative Course Schedule**

(reading assignments and activities are subject to revision)

**Week 0:**

5/31 — Class introductions, welcome, and discussion of syllabus and the concept ‘knowledge’. What is knowledge? Are opinion, true opinion, and knowledge different? If so, why? Introduction to internalist, externalist, and skeptical theories of knowledge.

**Week 1:**

6/5 — Discussion post. Reading due — Plato’s Internalism (B&P, pp. 334—343). What, according to Socrates, is knowledge, and how does he justify its difference from, and superiority to, mere belief, and merely true belief?

6/7 — Discussion post. Reading due — John Locke’s Empiricism (B&P, pp. 382). What are “simple ideas,” and how do they feature in Locke’s theory of adequate and inadequate ideas?

**Week 2:**

6/12 — 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?

6/14 — Discussion post. Review internalist and externalist theories of knowledge. Which, if any, of these two kinds of 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?

Week 3:

6/19 — Discussion post. Reading due — Chinese Theories of Knowledge — Daoist Skepticism (B&P, pp. 320-328). Do creatures and experiences differ so much, and do judgments depend so much on varying subjective conditions, that objective knowledge 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? How could Plato, Locke, or Nyāya try to respond to these concerns? 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.

6/21 — FIRST ARGUMENT SUMMARY DUE. Discussion post. 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 4:

6/26 — Discussion post. Reading due — Nāgārjuna’s Skeptical Regress and New Logic Responses to Skepticism (B&P, pp. 314 — 319). 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? 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 does anyone know what these appropriate methods of justification are?
6/28 — Discussion post. Reading due — Sextus Empiricus’s Skepticism and Augustine’s Answer to the Skeptics (B&P, pp. 348—356, and pp. 363-366). 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 skeptical arguments from variation, the possibility of dreaming, and the problem of the criterion. Also be prepared to explain and accurately restate Augustine’s answer to skeptical challenges. Does he salvage objective knowledge, and, if not, what does he salvage? Review of skeptical arguments and anti-skeptical responses.

Week 5:

7/03 — 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 begin to be drawn? 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?

7/05 — Discussion post. Reading due — Susan Rosenfeld, Introduction (available online), and The Skepticism of Francisco Sanches (B&P, pp. 399 — 402). Recap of Reid and Burke. According to Rosenfeld, what is common sense and what are its three political functions? Is common sense natural or constructed? Is it possible to justify a substantial theory of common sense without masquerading incomplete subjective beliefs as complete, objective ones, arguing in a circle, or falling into an infinite regress? In class film: Rabbit-Proof Fence.

Week 6:

7/10 — Discussion post. Reading due — The Intuitionism of Mencius, Xunzi’s Pessimistic View of Human Nature (pp. 44 — 57), and Suzanne Kessler, “The Medical Construction of Gender” (uploaded to Blackboard). Are common sense judgments about such things as appropriate judgment, behavior, and properly sexed embodiment rooted in natural human
feelings, or in social training and conditioning? If common sense is natural, then why do people need schools, governments, prisons, and scientists to have this sense? If common sense is not natural, then what gives schools, governments, prisons, and scientists the authority to construct it? Is it possible to justify the modern authority of common, shared social meanings and values without masquerading subjective beliefs as objective ones, arguing in a circle, or falling into an infinite regress? Compare with Sanches and Burke.

7/12 — SECOND ARGUMENT SUMMARY DUE. Discussion post. Reading due — Michael Warner, preface, chapter 1, and chapter 2 (pp. vii — 80). In-class film — Ke Kulana He Mahu. How common is common sense, and where, roughly, if at all, should the boundaries of the concept be drawn? Can experiences, judgments, and perspectives appear generally representative and foundational for a society, species, or culture without practices that shame and make “others” into cultural problems? Compare Warner, Rosenfeld, Rabbit-Proof Fence, Ke Kulana He Mahu, Sanches, Reid, and Burke.

Week 7:

7/17 — Discussion post. Reading due — Warner, chapter 3 (pp. 81 — 149). Compare Warner’s critique of the politics of gay marriage with Sanches critique of the knowledge of definitions and theories, and Burke’s philosophy of good taste in judgment.

7/19 — Discussion post. Reading due — Warner, chapter 4 (pp. 149 — 193). If common conceptions of sexuality and gender are natural, as Burke and Reid would seem to suggest, then why do they require “zoning.” If common conceptions of sexuality and gender cannot exist without zoning, then how can they do the work that Reid and Burke want their theories of common sense to do? Compare with Mencius, Xunzi, The Rabbit-Proof Fence, Kessler, Ke Kulana He Mahu, and Sanches.

Week 8:

7/24 — Review. 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 limits of the epistemological, political, and ethical authority of common sense be drawn, and why?

FINAL PAPER: DUE ELECTRONICALLY FRIDAY, JULY 27, BY 2PM THROUGH BLACKBOARD.