

PHIL 1111: Knowledge in a Social World
Spring 2026

Instructor: Gus Turyn (mat298@cornell.edu)

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 10 am-11:30 am and by appointment

Office number: Goldwin Smith Hall 217

Class meeting times: Tuesday and Thursday, 8:40-9:55 am

Classroom: Goldwin Smith Hall 144

Course overview

A tremendous amount of what we know comes from our interactions with others, primarily through their spoken or written testimony. While philosophers have long been interested in the nature and value of knowledge, recent years have seen a significant shift towards thinking about how social dynamics can affect what we know. In this course, we'll think about the nature of testimony in general and about how facts about our social positions can shape our knowledge in particular. We'll consider questions about the relationship between moral obligations and our obligations to believe other people, whether we have obligations to believe the best about our friends, whether people in disadvantaged social positions have better access to certain facts about oppression than others do, what gaslighting is and how it harms its victims, and more.

Texts

All readings will be posted on Canvas.

Grading

Essay 1: 5%

Essay 2: 15%

Essay 3: 20%

Essay 4: 25%

Attendance and participation: 25%

Discussion boards: 10%

Participation

Learning philosophy requires that we ask questions about the texts that we read and about other people's views. The majority of our class time will be spent discussing the readings that are assigned as homework. We will take more away from these discussions to the extent that more people participate in them.

To encourage attentive participation, electronic devices will not be permitted during class (unless explicitly noted otherwise). If you want to have your notes on the reading available for the purposes of in-class discussion, I encourage you to handwrite your notes or print them out.

If you don't have the opportunity to make a point or ask a question in class that you wanted to, you can also come to my office hours, schedule a meeting at another time, or send me an email explaining the point that you wanted to make or the question that you wanted to ask; doing so will also earn you credit for participating.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory.

Discussion boards

Each week, you should post at least one comment/question about an assigned reading and one reply to a classmate's post by 8 pm the day before the class meeting during which we discuss that reading. Comments/questions should go beyond the surface level. Don't just say whether you liked or disliked a reading or say that you don't understand an argument; try to explain *what* you agreed with in the reading or *why* you don't understand an argument.

Discussion board posts and comments will be graded on the following scale: full credit (100%), partial credit (85%), or no credit (0%). Comments/questions that do not reflect serious engagement with the arguments in the texts that we read may receive no credit. Your lowest two weekly scores will be dropped.

Academic integrity

All of the written work that you submit this semester should be your own. You may not submit work written by others—classmates, friends, uncited online sources, and so on. You also may not submit work written by generative AI. Any work that is not your own will not receive credit.

Essays

This is a writing-intensive course; you will write four essays, three of which will be substantively rewritten. A detailed prompt will be handed out for each essay assignment.

Tentative schedule

All readings are subject to change. Check Canvas for the most up-to-date schedule.

Week 1	1/20: Course introduction	1/22: Selections from Blaise Pascal's <i>Pensées</i>
Week 2 Essay #1 due on 1/26	1/27: W.K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"	1/29: William James, "The Will to Believe"
Week 3	2/3: No new readings	2/5: Gendler, "The epistemic cost of implicit bias"
Week 4	2/10: Sarah Stroud, "Epistemic Partiality in Friendship"	2/12: Axel Gelfert, "The epistemology of testimony"

Week 5 Essay #2 draft due 2/22	2/17: FEBRUARY BREAK, NO CLASS	2/19: Thomas Kelly, "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement"
Week 6 Essay #2 draft meetings	2/24: TBA	2/26: Chapters 1-2 of Miranda Fricker's <i>Epistemic Injustice</i>
Week 7 Essay #2 rewrite due 3/8	3/3: Selections from Jose Medina, <i>The Epistemology of Resistance</i>	3/5: Emmalon Davis, "Typecasts, Tokens, and Spokepersons"
Week 8 Essay #2 meetings	3/10: TBA	3/12: Rima Basu, "The Wrongs of Racist Beliefs"
Week 9 Essay #3 draft due 3/22	3/17: Rima Basu and Mark Schroeder, "Doxastic Wronging"	3/19: Sarah Moss, "Moral Encroachment"
Week 10 Essay #3 rewrite due	3/24: Essay workshop	3/26: TBA
Week 11	3/31: SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS	4/2: SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS
Week 12 Essay #3 meetings	4/7: Kate Abramson, "Turning up the lights on gaslighting"	4/9: Kate Manne, "Moral Gaslighting"
Week 13	4/14: Selections from Kate Manne's <i>Unshrinking</i>	4/16: TBA
Week 14	4/21: Daniel Munro, "Internet Trolling"	4/23: Alison Wylie, "Why Standpoint Matters"
Week 15 Essay #4 Meetings	4/28: Brian Keeley, "Of conspiracy theories"	4/30: TBA
Week 16	5/5: Amia Srinivasan, 'Does feminist philosophy rest on a mistake?' Last day of class	Essay #4 due during final exam period