

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2022-23
Philosophy 3997G Knowledge in the Age of Fake News

Winter 2023, LWH 2210

Instructor: Professor Michael Anderson

Weekly In Person Lecture T 3:30-4:30

Office: WIRB 7174

Weekly In Person Seminar Th 3:30-5:30

Email: mande54@uwo.ca

Office hours: Wednesday 1:30-3:30, and by appointment

DESCRIPTION

What do we know, and how do we know it? Traditional epistemology has focused on the individual relationship between perceivers and their environment, investigating such issues as how evidence should guide and constrain belief, and how scientific procedures express the likelihood of uncovering truths. But current events raise the urgent question: how do we even know what counts as evidence? In this course we will explore philosophical accounts of knowledge that foreground the social, both because they are interesting in their own right, but crucially because they may help illuminate knowledge production in our current age.

TEXTS

Nagel, J. (2014). *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

[https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-](https://bookstore.uwo.ca/textbook-search?campus=UWO&term=W2022B&courses%5B0%5D=001_UW/PHI3997G)

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Reserve readings as assigned.

(<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/u45dzaqdi8h030l/AABgw8x4ngEOMB218CIB6a?dl=0>)

OBJECTIVES

The goal of this course is to explore what philosophy might have to say about the epistemic pitfalls of our current era of digital media and “fake news”. Students will gain an understanding of social and applied epistemology, and some insight into the particular dangers of social media and fake news to our knowledge of the world and capacity to cooperate with one another.

REQUIREMENTS

- Regular Attendance
- Class participation
- Weekly quizzes (1% each- 10% total)
- 2 short papers (15% paper 1; 25% paper 2)
- 1 Final paper (50%)

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY POLICIES

The Department of Philosophy Policies which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at

<http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/proceduresappeals.htm> It is your responsibility to

understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

ACCOMMODATION

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested.

The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at

http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

SELF- REPORTED ABSENCE FORM

Students who experience an unexpected illness or injury or an extenuating circumstance (48 hours or less) that is sufficiently severe to temporarily render them unable to meet academic requirements (e.g., attending lectures or labs, writing tests or midterms, completing and

ACADEMIC OFFENCES

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

PLAGIARISM CHECKING

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>

SUPPORT SERVICES

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>

Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login> Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>

Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help. Immediate help in the event of a crisis can be had by phoning 519.661.3030 (during class hours) or 519.433.2023 after class hours and on weekends.

COURSE SCHEDULE (subject to change with sufficient notice)

Every Tuesday class will start with a short, easy quiz to establish that the required texts have been read, and will be followed with a short lecture and the opportunity to ask questions about the texts. Thursday is devoted to seminary

Week 3 Bullshit & Fake News I

Readings:

Frankfurt, H. G. (2009) On Bullshit Princeton University Press.

Mukerji, N. (2018). What is fake news?. Ergo: An Open Access Journal of Philosophy

Week 4 Bullshit & Fake News II

Readings:

Levy, N. (2017). The bad news about fake news.

Week 11: Deference to Expertise II

Readings:

Huemer, M. (2005). Is critical thinking epistemically responsible?. *Metaphilosophy* 36(4), 522-531.

Hendriks, F., Kienhues, D., & Bromme, R. (2016). Trust in science and the science of trust. In *Trust and communication in a digitized world* (pp. 149). Springer, Cham.

March 23: Short paper 2 due

Week 12 Case Study: Climate Change I

Readings:

Dispensa, J. M., & Brulle, R. J. (2003). Media's social construction of environmental issues: focus on global warming—a comparative study. *International Journal of sociology and social policy*

Worsnip, A. (2021). The skeptic and the climate change skeptic. In *Routledge Handbook of Political Epistemology* (pp. 469-