

## Philosophy 1510-006: Skeptics and Believers

- Instructor:** Nick Rimell  
nkr2uz@virginia.edu
- Office Hours:** Mondays, 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. in Cocke Hall, room 206  
Thursdays, 3:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. in Cocke Hall, room 206
- Time/Place:** 1 p.m. to 3:15 p.m. in Chem 262

### Course Description

It might seem obvious that we know that there is a world out there, independent of our minds, and that we know many things about this world. But the external-world skeptic challenges this. The skeptic denies that we know these things about the external world, or even that we know that there is one. In this course, we'll talk about what makes the skeptic's argument so powerful, and we'll also give our best shot at resisting it. In the process, we'll discuss and evaluate various ways that philosophers have responded to the skeptic's challenge. We'll then move on to consider some other skeptical challenges, such as those involving induction and other minds.

### Reading List

All readings for this course will be provided on Collab. The following is a list of these readings in the order in which they will be read. This list may be modified in response to our in-class discussions.

#### *Part One: What Is Knowledge?*

1. Plato, "Meno" (97b – 98b) and "Theaetetus" (201d)
2. Gettier, "Is Knowledge Justified True Belief?"
3. Dancy, *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, "Knowledge"

#### *Part Two: External World Skepticism*

##### *The Skeptic's Argument*

4. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, "First Meditation" and a selection from "Second Meditation"
5. Stroud, *The Importance of Philosophical Scepticism*, "The Problem of the External World"
6. from Dancy, "Scepticism"

##### *The Coherentist's Response*

7. from Dancy, "Foundationalism"
8. from Bonjour, "In Search of Coherentism"

### ***The Moorean Response***

9. from Moore, “Proof of an External World”
10. from Moore, “Four Forms of Scepticism”
11. Chisholm, “The Problem of the Criterion”

### ***The Response from Meaning***

12. from Austin, “Other Minds”

## ***Part Three: Other Kinds of Skepticism***

### ***Skepticism about Induction***

13. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* – 4.1 through 5.1
14. Stove, “Another Attempt to Prove that Induction is Justified: The Law of Large Numbers”
15. Goodman, “The New Riddle of Induction”

### ***Skepticism about Other Minds***

16. Nagel, “Other Minds”
17. Russell, “Analogy”
18. Malcolm, “Knowledge of Other Minds”

### ***Skepticism and Everyday Belief***

19. from Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* – 1.4.7
20. from Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*

## **Potential Additional Readings**

### ***Skepticism about Meaning***

- A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*, “The Wittgensteinian Paradox”

### ***Live Hypotheses***

- B. from Frances, *Scepticism Comes Alive*
- C. from Merricks, *Objects and Persons*

## **Requirements and Policies**

**Papers and Outlines (45%):** There will be two papers, as well as an outline for each paper. The first paper will be 4-5 pages and will be worth 15%. The second paper will be 6-7 pages and will be worth 20%. Each outline is worth 5%.

**Tests (40%):** There will be two tests – a midterm (worth 15%) and a final (worth 25%).

**Participation (15%):** Engaging with the texts and the issues both inside and outside of the classroom are crucial to coming to understand them. Therefore, active and thoughtful participation (including active listening) will be expected and encouraged.

**Deadlines:**

Wednesday, July 17<sup>th</sup>: Outline of first paper  
Monday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>: First paper  
Tuesday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>: In-class midterm  
Monday, July 29<sup>th</sup>: Outline of second paper  
Thursday, August 1<sup>st</sup>: Second paper  
Friday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>: Final exam

Assignments are due at the beginning of class and will be marked down a third of a letter grade (e.g., A- to B+) if late, as well as an additional third for each additional day late.

You are welcome to turn in your outlines earlier than the days on which they are due. I will return each outline on the day following whenever it is received. Also, I am happy to look at segments of your outlines and/or paper drafts and to answer questions, either in person or over e-mail (though in person is preferable). But please e-mail me 48 hours in advance of the relevant deadline if you want to receive a response. Also, if you'd like to schedule a time to meet outside of office hours, please e-mail me (or ask me in class) at least 72 hours in advance of the relevant deadline.

**Attendance Policy:** Each student may have one unexcused absence without penalty. After that, the participation grade will suffer one letter grade for each additional absence.