

## Knowledge and Reality

Hum/Pl 9

Fall 2009

**Instructor:** Christopher Hitchcock  
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**Office Hours:** After class, by appointment, or call first and stop by  
**Course Website:** <https://courses.hss.caltech.edu/>  
**Course Listserv:** Section 1: Hum-pl9@hss.caltech.edu  
Section 2: Hum-pl9-2@hss.caltech.edu

**Description:** This course provides an introduction to the topics of *Metaphysics* and *Epistemology*. Epistemology is the study of human knowledge, and metaphysics the study of the fundamental nature of the world. The course is structured around questions of perennial philosophical importance: What is knowledge, and how does knowledge differ from mere belief? What are the different modes of knowledge? Can anything be known with certainty? Is there a world that exists outside of our minds, and if so, what is its nature? What is the relationship between the world, and our representations of the world (e.g. in thought or in language)? In examining these questions, students will be introduced to the ideas of philosophers from several different periods: ancient, early modern, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In addition, students will learn about the methods of philosophy, especially the construction and analysis of arguments. Like all introductory Humanities courses, this course will be writing-intensive, and stress the development of writing skills.

**Pre-requisite:** Students who were required to take English 1ab or English 2 must have completed this requirement before enrolling in this course.

**Class Meetings:** Section 1: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30 – 4:00 P.M., 33 Baxter.  
Section 2: Tuesdays and Thursdays 9:00 – 10:30 A.M., 33 Baxter. Note that there will be no class meeting on November 24.

**Course Website:** To get to the course website, first go to <https://courses.hss.caltech.edu/>, and read the instructions there. You will need to log in using your IMSS username and password (the same ones that you use for e-mail). Then click on the tab that says 'Fall 2009'. Hum/Pl 9 should appear among the list of classes.

**Course Listserv:** If you pre-registered, you should already be signed up for the listserv for your appropriate section. You should have received an e-mail with instructions. If you add the class, be sure and send your e-mail address to the instructor so that you can be added to the listserv.

**Books:** The main text for this course is *Classics in Western Philosophy*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, edited by Stephen Cahn. This book may be ordered through Caltech's online bookstore (<http://bookstore.mbsdirect.net/caltech.htm>). Most of the readings for the course are contained in this anthology. Readings that are not included in the anthology will be available on the course website.

**Evaluation:** Grades for this course will be based upon class participation (10%), performance as a discussion leader (10%) and upon performance on three papers (20% on the first paper, 30% on each of the others). All aspects of evaluation come under the provenance of the university's honor code. A student must receive a passing grade on *each* of these components in order to pass the course.

**Class Participation:** Philosophy is a communal enterprise: the ability to make valuable oral contributions to philosophical discussions can be as important as the ability to write well. Moreover, since the written assignments will force the students to think carefully about very specific topics, participation in class discussion is an important way for students to demonstrate a broader competence with the material than is possible in the papers alone. Evaluation will be based upon the quality, not the quantity, of comments made during class. Students are encouraged to continue class discussions after the class is over, by meeting with the instructor, by continuing the discussion over e-mail, or by posting questions or comments to the course website. Students who for any reason have difficulty speaking up in class are especially encouraged to pursue these options. Obviously, *attendance* is an essential component of class participation. Any student who misses more than two classes will be required to do make-up work for the classes missed.

**Discussion Leaders:** Starting with the class on October 13, students in the course will take turns being discussion leaders for specific classes. Each student will be a discussion leader for two classes, and each class will have two or three discussion leaders. The schedule will be assigned during the fourth class meeting, on Thursday, October 8. Discussion leaders will not be required to present the material, but they will help to provide an agenda for the class. In particular, discussion leaders should make note of which parts of the reading material were particularly difficult or in need of further elaboration from the instructor. In addition, they should prepare a list of questions, criticisms, and comments in order to facilitate class discussion. This should be posted to the course website 24 hours prior to the class meeting. Worksheets will be passed out in class to help discussion leaders prepare.

**Papers:** There will be three paper assignments in this course. For the first two papers, students will be required to submit a draft in advance of submitting the final copy. A draft of the first paper, approximately 1,000 words (3 double-spaced, typed pages) in length, will be due on Sunday, October 11. A revised version of this paper will be due in class on Tuesday, October 20. The remaining two papers will be approximately 1500 words in length (5 double-spaced, typed pages). A draft of the second paper will be due on Tuesday, November 10, and the final version due on Tuesday, November 19. The final paper will be due on Friday, December 11. Late papers will be penalized. Suggested topics for the papers will be given out in class. More information about what will be expected on paper assignments will be given out at that time. Any student who receives a grade of less than B– on a paper will be required to re-write and substantially improve it; other students have the option to do so if they wish. If a paper is revised, the final grade will be 1/3 of the grade of the original paper plus 2/3 of the grade for the revised version. All students will be expected to familiarize themselves with the definition of *plagiarism*, as described in the handout "How Not to Get BOC'ed". Any student who is suspected of plagiarism will be sent before the Board of Control. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, or any other serious academic offense, will automatically receive an F in this class. Papers submitted for the class are eligible for the Hixon writing prize, which includes a cash prize, awarded each year for the best papers written in introductory Humanities classes.

**Special Accommodations:** If you have a disability or personal circumstance that will require special accommodation, please do not hesitate to contact me.

**Readings:** The following calendar shows when various readings will be covered in class. Readings contained in *Classics of Western Philosophy* have their page numbers listed in brackets. Other readings will be available on the course website. Readings should be completed *before* they are covered in class. If you encounter any problems with a reading assignment — e.g., if the instructions are unclear, or if your photocopy is missing pages — please contact me *immediately* by phone or e-mail; do not wait until the next class meeting.

### Course Calendar

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| 9/29 | Introduction and Logistics  |
| 10/1 | Plato, "Knowledge is Justified True Belief," short excerpt from<br><i>Theaetetus</i> . (Website)<br>Plato, <i>Meno</i> (CWP 3 – 19)   |
| 10/6 | E. Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" (Website)<br>"How Not to Get BOC'd" (Website)<br>"How to Write a Philosophy Paper" (Website)<br>"Argument Clinic" (Website) |

- 10/8 Plato, *Republic*, excerpts from Books VI and VII (CWP 154 – 163)  
Aristotle, *Categories*, excerpts (CWP 180 – 183)
- 10/13 Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, excerpts (CWP 190 – 196)  
Sextus Empiricus, "On the Outlines of Pyrrhonism," (CWP 337 – 354)
- 10/15 In class writing exercise
- 10/20 Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Preface, Synopsis,  
Meditations One through Three. (CWP 486 - 503)
- 10/22 Descartes, *Meditations Four through Six* (CWP 503 – 516)
- 10/27 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II:  
Chapters I, II, III, VI, VIII, XXIII, XXVII (CWP 631 – 634, 635 –  
636, 637 – 640, 653 – 657)
- 10/29 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV:  
Chapters I, II, III, VI, IX, XI (CWP 679 – 686, 688 – 691, 693 -  
697)
- 11/3 G. Berkeley, *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, First  
Dialogue, excerpts from Second and Third Dialogues (CWP 715 –  
732, 734 – 5, 751 - 3)
- 11/5 D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* §§ IV, V (CWP  
771 - 783)
- 11/10 C. S. Pierce, "How to Make our Ideas Clear" (CWP 1126 – 1136)
- 11/12 B. Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, Chapters I - V. (CWP 1163 -  
1180)  
G. E. Moore, "Proof of An External World," excerpts. (Website)
- 11/17 N. Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, excerpts (Website)
- 11/19 J. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, excerpts (CWP 1224 – 1237)
- 11/24 No class
- 11/26 Thanksgiving
- 12/1 H. Putnam, "Brains in a Vat." (Website)
- 12/3 D. Lewis, "Elusive Knowledge" (Website)

### **Other Important Dates**

10/8	Scheduling of Discussion Leaders
10/11	Draft of first paper due
10/16	Last day to add course
10/20	Final version of first paper due
11/10	Draft of second paper due
11/18	Last day to drop course or change grading option
11/19	Final version of second paper due
12/11	Final paper due