



Alain Ghertman,  
*Untitled*  
amodernart.com

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

The facts seem to matter: Does the movie start at seven? Do the breaks on the school bus work? Should we teach evolution? creationism? both? We all have opinions about what the facts are in at least some domains.

But how do we *figure out* what the facts are? What makes some of our beliefs *justified* and others *unjustified*? Can we have any *objective* grasp on the facts? Who decides what the rules of good inquiry are? This course examines those questions.

## LOGISTICS

This course, officially PHIL 81, meets Mondays and Wednesdays 1:15–2:30 p.m. in Pearsons 202.

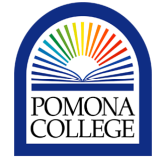
I am Peter Kung, from the Pomona Philosophy Department. My office hours are Mondays and Wednesdays after class and Tuesday from 2–3. I am often available by appointment; email is the best way to contact me: [peter.kung@pomona.edu](mailto:peter.kung@pomona.edu).

The course is an advanced introduction, so while I will not be assuming any background in philosophy, we will be moving through some difficult material fairly quickly. If you have concerns about your background, please come talk to me.

## Epistemology:

TRUTH. JUSTIFICATION. KNOWLEDGE

Phil 81 | Fall 2009 | Kung



## GOALS

My aim is that by the end of this course you will:

1. Have a solid understanding of the issues, distinctions, and arguments in some key areas of contemporary epistemology.
2. Improve your ability to grapple with philosophical issues yourself and to articulate your own position on those issues.
3. Improve your ability to read dense philosophical texts and extract key distinctions and arguments.

You can meet the first goal by passively listening to lectures. For most of you, the second goal requires that you do philosophy, and that means actively discussing what you've read: asking questions, advancing interpretations...in short, participating!

## ASSIGNMENTS

The course assignments complement the course goals. You must complete all required work to receive credit for the class.

1. 2 Homework assignments, 15%/20%
2. Term paper, 25%
3. [reading responses/quizzes/participation 10%]
4. Final exam or final paper, 30%

Homework assignments consist of a series of short answer questions. You are encouraged to work on homework in groups.

The term paper advances an original argument (original at least to you) that you devise.

I may or may not institute reading responses or quizzes, depending on the level of participation. (Katie and Dan will explain reading responses.)

The final exam will be similar to the homeworks; the final paper will be similar to the term paper. You choose which you'd like to do.

## POLICIES

Participation influences borderline grades. There's a big gap between a B+ (10) and an A- (11). You'd be surprised how often grades wind up in the border region.

Lateness is bad, very bad. I do accept late work, but it will be penalized one point on Pomona's 12-point scale per calendar day. I will typically not excuse late work unless circumstances are so serious as to require the attention a doctor, your adviser, or your College's dean.

No early final exams! Our exam is Thursday, December 17 at 2 p.m. Please make your travel plans accordingly.

It should go without saying that academic honesty is a serious matter. Any work that is submitted as your own but written in whole or in part by someone else is plagiarized. Just for the record: any violation results in an F for the course and is subject to further disciplinary action. Below is a link to Pomona's policy; other colleges have similar policies.

<http://www.pomona.edu/adwr/StuAffairs/policies.shtml#academic>

## TENTATIVE READING LIST

Most readings will be available on Sakai, the 5C's course management software of choice; go to [sakai.claremont.edu](http://sakai.claremont.edu). If you are a registered for the course you should be able to login to Sakai and see our course listed. Please let me know ASAP if you have problems accessing Sakai.

The schedule remains *tentative* because I adjust it to match the pace of discussion. We'll stay roughly on this syllabus schedule, but each class I will announce the reading for the next class.

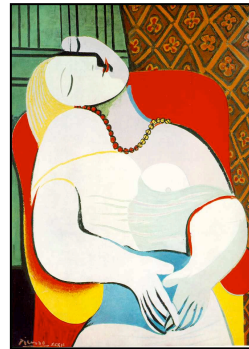
### "Sometimes reasonable people disagree"



We generally take it for granted that reasonable people can reasonably disagree. We'll begin

our course by examining this platitude: is it really true? You will formulate a kind of skeptical argument that suggests, somewhat surprisingly, that it is not.

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| First class/introduction  | Wed 9/2 |
| Feldman, "Reasonable religious disagreement"  | Mon 9/7 |
| Lackey (former Pomona professor!), "A justificationist view of disagreement's epistemic significance" |         |



### "Do I really know?"

Skeptical arguments attempt to show that we lack knowledge of (or justification for, or reason for) many of the things we took ourselves to know (to justifiably believe, to have reason to believe). For instance, how do you know that you are not having a vivid dream

about the first day of class?

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| Descartes, Meditation I & II                      | Wed 9/9  |
| Blumenfelds, "Can I know that I am not dreaming?" | Mon 9/14 |
| Unger, "A defense of skepticism"                  |          |

### "What you don't know won't hurt you"

A natural question to ask in the fact of skeptical arguments is, **even if** they succeed, why do they matter? Should we **care** whether skepticism is true?

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| Vasiliou, "Reality, what matters, and <i>The Matrix</i> "  | Wed 9/16       |
| Pryor, "What's so bad about living in <i>The Matrix</i> ?" | Mon 9/21 x 1/2 |

### "That's just your truth"

With some understanding of skeptical arguments under our belt, we are positioned to examine the tempting yet elusive thought that truth, or justification, is **relative**.



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| Rorty, from <i>Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature</i> | Mon 9/21 x 1/2     |
| Boghossian, from <i>Fear of Knowledge</i>              | Wed 9/23, Mon 9/28 |

FIRST HOMEWORK DUE FRIDAY 10/2

### "It's just depends on what your words mean"

Contextualists suggest that the solution to the skeptical puzzle is **semantic**. We need to pay attention to how the word 'know' works in conversation; when we do,

an answer to the skeptic emerges: the word 'know"'s meaning varies with conversational context.

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| DeRose, "Contextualism and knowledge attributions" | 10/5 |
| Schiffer, "Contextualist solutions to skepticism"  | 10/7 |

### "How are you connected to the world?"

Another proposed solution contends that knowledge is a matter of the right connection between thinker and world. If there is the **right kind** of connection between you and the things you are thinking about, then you have knowledge.

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| Nozick, from <i>Philosophical Explanations</i>                   | 10/12 |
| Stine, "Skepticism, relevant alternatives and deductive closure" | 10/14 |
| BonJour, "Externalist theories of empirical knowledge"           | 10/26 |

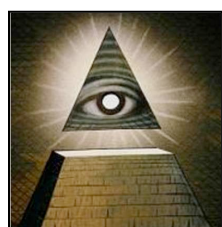
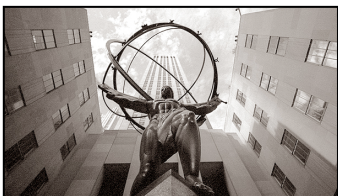
SECOND HOMEWORK DUE FRIDAY 10/30

### "There are some things you just know"

Like Descartes, foundationalists, insist that some beliefs are

**basic**: they are justified and their justification does not rest on our justification for believing anything else.

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| Pryor, "The skeptic and the dogmatist"                     | 11/2 |
| BonJour, "Can empirical knowledge have a foundation?"      | 11/4 |
| Cohen, "Basic knowledge and the problem of easy knowledge" | 11/9 |



### "They are out to get me"

Our first topic in applied epistemology comes from Pitzer Philosophy Professor Brian Keeley (↔ that is not him). Brian wonders whether there is a way to distinguish respectable theory

construction — what we do in the sciences — from the conspiratorial theory construction that is the stuff of tabloids.

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| Keeley, "Of conspiracy theories"       | 11/11 |
| Basham, "Malevolent global conspiracy" | 11/16 |

TERM PAPER DUE FRIDAY 11/20

### "Where did we come from?"

Our second applied epistemology topic is intelligent design. Authors in this area frequently debate what makes a theory **scientific**. Is intelligent design a scientific theory? When should we expect a scientific explanation of some event?

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| Dembski, "The logical underpinnings of intelligent design" | 11/18 |
| White, "Does origins of life research rest on a mistake?"  | 11/23 |
| White, "Fine-tuning and multiple universes"                | 11/30 |

(NO CLASS WEDNESDAY BEFORE THANKSGIVING)

### "What's our evidence in philosophy, anyway?"

Our last applied topic will be philosophy itself. How do we settle philosophical debates? Take moral debates: what is our **evidence** in a moral debate? Should we try to settle philosophical debates using the experimental techniques of the sciences?

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| Haidt, "The emotional dog and its rational tail"             | 12/2 |
| Nado ( <b>Pomona '04!</b> ), Kelly & Stich, "Moral judgment" | 12/7 |
| Appiah, "The new new philosophy"                             |      |

FINAL EXAM OR FINAL PAPER  
DUE PER 5C SCHEDULE  
THURSDAY 12/17 AT 2:00 PM