

Philosophy and Film: Epistemic Injustice

A draft sample syllabus by Tiina C Rosenqvist

[This syllabus outlines a proposed introductory philosophy and film course with a focus on epistemic injustice.]

1. Course Description

This course explores the concept of epistemic injustice through a blend of philosophical texts and film texts. We will explore the mechanisms by which epistemic injustices arise and examine strategies for addressing them. Central themes include *testimonial injustice*—when a speaker's credibility is unfairly undermined owing to their membership in a marginalized group—and *hermeneutical injustice*—when gaps in shared interpretive resources prevent certain groups from fully articulating or understanding their experiences.

To bring these ideas to life, we will analyze feature films like *Moonlight* (2016) and documentaries including *When They See Us* (2019). These film texts will serve as case studies for applying theoretical insights to real-world settings. Readings from philosophers like Miranda Fricker, José Medina, and Kristie Dotson will provide the foundational framework for our discussions.

Throughout the course, you will engage in class discussions, comparative analyses, and reflective writing exercises to deepen your understanding of epistemic injustice. Assignments will include film reviews, analytical essays, op-eds, reflections, and presentations.

2. Course Objectives

Through active participation in this course, you will gain insights into how epistemic injustice operates in society, and develop the tools to critically assess and address these injustices in your personal, academic, and professional lives. You will:

- Understand key concepts related epistemic injustice
- Practice analyzing and evaluating philosophical arguments
- Develop critical media literacy
- Reflect on how individuals and communities can challenge and resist oppressive structures of knowledge and power
- Enhance your writing and argumentation skills
- Collaborate on group projects

3. Course Structure

In-person sessions:

The standard format for the in-person sessions is lecture and discussion. There will also be occasional group work. You are expected to participate actively in discussions and other in-class activities. You will also deliver an in-class presentation of a group project.

Out-of-class activities:

Outside of class, you will complete a number of writings assignments and collaborate on a group project. Additionally, you are expected to finish the assigned readings and watch the assigned film texts before the relevant class sessions.

4. Assignments & Assessment

- Attendance and Participation — 10%
- Review of *Victim/Suspect* (500-600 words) — 5%
- Comparative review of *The Central Park Five* and *Victim/Suspect* (700-800 words) — 10%
- A short paper (700-800 words) about silencing — 15%
- An op-ed / column (600-800 words) — 15%
- Learning reflection — 5%
- A longer paper (1,200-1,600 words) — 20%
- Group project and presentation — 20%

Having a variety of low-stakes assignments throughout a course is intended to provide you with an opportunity to *gradually* develop and hone your analytical, reflective, and argumentative skills. By regularly engaging in these smaller tasks, you will explore complex topics in manageable portions, experiment with different approaches to writing, and receive constructive feedback without the pressure of high-stakes grading.

Please know that I'm here to support your learning journey and am more than happy to help during office hours. Whether you want to brainstorm ideas, seek clarification on course topics, or receive guidance or feedback on assignments, I encourage you to stop by! Your success in this course matters to me, and I'm here to help you navigate any challenges that arise.

5. Course Policies

Omitted from this sample.

6. Resources

Omitted from this sample.

7. Modules

Module 1: Getting Started

The first module introduces key concepts in epistemic injustice and sets the stage for the course.

Philosophy:

- Fricker (2007), *Epistemic Injustice*, Introduction
- Pryor, How to Read Philosophy

Module 2: Introduction to Testimonial Injustice

The second module examines how testimonial injustice works in various contexts, analyzing films like *Unbelievable* and *Victim/Suspect* alongside foundational philosophical texts by Fricker and Medina.

Films:

- *Unbelievable* (2019; Susannah Grant, Ayelet Waldman, Michael Chabon)
- *Victim/Suspect* (2023; Dir. Nancy Schwartzman)

Philosophy:

- Fricker (2007), *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Ch. 1: Testimonial Injustice
- Medina (2013), *The Epistemology of Resistance*, Ch. 1: Active Ignorance, Epistemic Others, and Epistemic Friction

Assignment:

- Review of *Victim/Suspect* (500-600 words)

Module 3: Extracted Speech and Testimonial Injustice

The third module explores how testimony may be extracted from members of marginalized groups, with a focus on two documentaries: *The Central Park Five* and *When They See Us*.

Films:

- *The Central Park Five* (2012; Dir. Ken Burns)
- *When They See Us* (2019; Dir. Ava duVernay)

Philosophy:

- McKinnon (2016), "Extracted Speech," *Social Theory and Practice*
- Thiem (2023), "True Crime Television as 'Popular Legality': Affect, Testimonial Injustice, and the Criminal (In)Justice System in Ava DuVernay's *When They See Us*," *Law, Culture, and the Humanities*

Assignment:

- Comparative review of *The Central Park Five* and *Victim/Suspect* (700-800 words)

Module 4: Silence and Silencing

The fourth module investigates the practice of silencing, or preventing individuals or groups from sharing knowledge, giving testimony, or expressing their perspectives.

Films:

- *The Invisible Man* (2020; Dir. Leigh Whannell)

Philosophy:

- Dotson (2011), "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia*
- Medina (2013), *The Epistemology of Resistance*, Ch. 3: Imposed Silences and Shared Hermeneutical Responsibilities
- Maitra (2004), "Silence and Responsibility," *Philosophical Perspectives*

Assignment:

- A short paper (700-800 words)

Module 5: Hermeneutical Injustice and Gaslighting

The fifth module looks at how hermeneutical gaps and gaslighting undermine individuals' ability to make sense of their own experiences.

Films:

- *Nevertheless* (2021; Dir. Sarah Moshman)
- *Moonlight* (2016; Dir. Barry Jenkins)

Philosophy:

- Fricker (2007), *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Ch. 7: Hermeneutical Injustice
- McKinnon (2017). "Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice." *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*

Assignment:

- Learning reflection (500-600 words)

Module 6: Interpretative injustice and Pathocentric Epistemic Injustice

The sixth module focuses on interpretative injustice and epistemic injustice within healthcare, analyzing films like *Pain Warriors* and *Take Care of Maya* alongside scholarly work on the epistemic violence in medical settings.

Films:

- *Pain Warriors* (2019; Dir. Tina Petrova, Eugene Weis)
- *Take Care of Maya* (2023; Dir. Henry Roosevelt)

Philosophy:

- Peet (2017), "Epistemic Injustice in Utterance Interpretation," *Synthese*
- Carel & Kidd (2014), "Epistemic injustice in healthcare: A philosophical analysis," *Medicine Health Care and Philosophy*
- Heggen & Berg (2021), "Epistemic injustice in the age of evidence-based practice: the case of fibromyalgia," *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*.

Assignment:

- An op-ed / column (600-800 words)

Module 7: Resistance

The seventh module explores resistance and solidarity in the context of epistemic injustice, reflecting on how individuals and communities can challenge and resist oppressive structures of knowledge and power.

Films:

- *Hidden Figures* (2016)
- *The Florida Project* (2017).

Philosophy:

- Medina (2013), *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*, Ch. 5: Meta-Lucidity, Epistemic Heroes, and the Everyday Struggle Toward Epistemic Justice
- Medina (2013), *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*, Ch. 6: Resistant Imagination and Radical Solidarity

Assignment:

- A longer paper (1,200-1,600 words)

Module 8: Group Projects and Presentations

The final module provides an opportunity to synthesize and apply the knowledge you've gained throughout the course by collaborating on a group project. It fosters critical engagement, independent exploration, and reflective analysis, allowing you to demonstrate deep understanding of course topics.

Working in groups, you will select a film, TV show, documentary, or other media piece not previously covered in the course that exemplifies one or more forms of epistemic injustice or

resistance to it. Using the theoretical frameworks explored in the course, your group will conduct an in-depth analysis of the chosen media and prepare a presentation for the class.

Your presentation will (i) identify the form(s) of epistemic injustice or resistance portrayed in the media, (ii) analyze how these connect to broader social, political, or cultural contexts, (iii) integrate philosophical theories and texts from the course into your analysis, (iv) engage the class through discussion questions or other interactive elements.

Assignment:

- Group project and presentation (20min)