PHIL 1.23
CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON
KNOWLEDGE

You probably think that you possess some knowledge. Maybe you know that 5-3=2, or that you didn't sleep well last night, or that your friends are on their way to meet you. But how do you know these things? Did you see or hear something? Did you infer it from something else? Or did someone tell you? Are these reliable ways to gain knowledge? And what if you're dreaming or hallucinating? What exactly is knowledge anyway, and what can we learn by considering the relationships between the knower, the known, and the context?

This course provides an introduction to epistemology—the branch of philosophy that investigates questions like these—through a cross-cultural lens. We will explore philosophical texts and ideas from Chinese, Indian, Islamic, Indigenous, and decolonial traditions, alongside canonical and contemporary works from what is often called the Western tradition.

Dartmouth College | Fall 2025 | MON-WED-FRI (12)
Instructor: Tiina Carita Rosenqvist

Questions? Please ask! tiina.c.rosenqvist@dartmouth.edu

PHIL 1.23:

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Knowledge

Fall 2025 | Dartmouth College

Instructor: Tiina C Rosenqvist
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Office: Bartlett Hall 302

Course meeting time: 12A
Classroom:
Office hours:

This is an abridged version of the syllabus. If you'd like to see the full version, please email me.

1. Course Description

You probably think that you possess some knowledge. Maybe you know that 5-3=2, or that you didn't sleep well last night, or that your friends are on their way to meet you. But how do you know these things? Did you see or hear something? Did you infer it from something else? Or did someone tell you? Are these reliable ways to gain knowledge? And what if you're dreaming or hallucinating? What exactly is knowledge anyway, and what can we learn by considering the relationships between the knower, the known, and the context?

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2. Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of this course, you will:

1. Understand key issues and debates in epistemology. You will be able to:
    *   Differentiate between sources of knowledge
    *   Recall the theoretical debates regarding the nature of knowledge
    *   Recall skeptical challenges and responses to those challenges
    *   Recall criticisms of the idea of philosophy as a view-from-nowhere

2. Critically evaluate arguments regarding knowledge. You will be able to:
    *   Identify simple deductive argument forms, such as *modus tollens* and *modus ponens*
    *   Reconstruct arguments in standard format with premises and a conclusion
    *   Assess the reasoning supporting specific claims
    *   Identify relevant objections
    *   Evaluate the overall validity and soundness of arguments

3. Integrate, apply, and communicate what you have learned. You will be able to:
    *   Explain complex philosophical ideas to others
    *   Participate in constructive philosophical discussion
    *   Read complex philosophical texts and identify key claims and arguments

- Create your own examples and thought experiments to illustrate ideas
- Explain the real-world relevance of philosophical debates
- Appreciate the global nature of philosophy

3. Assignments & Assessment

- Attendance —10%
- Participation—10%
- Canvas Reading Quizzes (10) —10%
- Teach Philosophy! —10%
- Midterm —10%
- In-class writing assignments (3)—15%
- Public Philosophy Group Project—10%
- Final Exam (cumulative)—25%

You are allowed to miss two class session without your participation grade being affected. If you anticipate missing more than two classes, you must provide prior notice and complete a make-up assignment. Active and considerate participation in discussions and class activities is expected.

You are required to take short reading quizzes on Canvas *before* the in-person sessions. There will *at least* 12 quizzes, and only your 10 best scores count towards your grade.

There will be *at least* five in-class writing assignments, but only your three highest-scoring assignments count toward your final grade. Sometimes prompts will be provided in advance.

Both the midterm and final exams consist of quiz-style questions and essay questions. The essay questions will be randomly selected from a list of prompts provided in advance.

For the *Teach Philosophy!* assignment, you will choose a philosophical topic we've studied in class and teach it to a non-expert (a friend, roommate, family member, etc.). You'll record this teaching session (10-15 min) and submit it with a short reflection.

You will collaborate on a public philosophy group project, document your project and write a report explaining how it enhanced your understanding of the course material. You will also present your project to the rest of the class.

4. Key Course Policies

Readings

All course readings will be posted (or linked) on Canvas. You are not required to buy books.

X-Hours

X-hours in this course are designated for additional in-class writing assignments, skill-building workshops, additional review sessions, and make-up classes in case regularly

scheduled classes need to be cancelled for any reason. Please keep the X-hours free to accommodate these sessions.

- Writing assignments: most of the writing assignments will be scheduled during X-hours. Attendance is generally *mandatory.*

- Additional skill-building and review sessions: additional sessions *may* be scheduled to reinforce your understanding of the course material and prepare for assessments. These sessions are designed to provide extra support and ensure you have the resources you need to succeed. While attendance at these review sessions might sometimes be *optional*, it is highly encouraged. Please check Canvas regularly for updates regarding the timing and topics of these sessions.

- Make-up classes: in the event that regularly scheduled classes must be cancelled, make-up classes will be scheduled to ensure that we cover all necessary material and meet the learning objectives of the course. If a class needs to be canceled, you will be notified as soon as possible through an announcement on Canvas. Make-up classes will cover the same content that was planned for the cancelled session. The notification will include the reason for the cancellation and information about the rescheduled class. Attendance at make-up classes is *mandatory*. If you have a legitimate conflict and are unable to attend, please inform me in advance. Alternative arrangements or make-up assignments will be provided to ensure you do not miss out on the material covered.

Submission of Assignments

You are expected to submit all assignments on time. It is your responsibility to ensure that your assignments are submitted correctly and are readable. Files that are corrupted or unreadable will be treated as non-submissions.

If you are struggling with an assignment, please reach out as soon as possible. Philosophy is hard, but I am happy to help!

Generative AI

Understanding how and when to utilize generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, DALL-E) is rapidly becoming an important skill. Therefore, you are encouraged, though not required, to incorporate AI tools in this class, *provided it supports the learning outcomes or objectives of assignments*. On the course Canvas page, you will find an AI Prompt Library with prompts specifically designed to help you engage more deeply with philosophical topics and develop your critical thinking and exposition skills.

Please note that *submitting text generated or edited by AI tools or any automated assistance is prohibited for any coursework*. This includes using AI to generate responses to in-class writing prompts or quizzes, or completing other course-related writing tasks. This practice undermines the development of critical thinking and writing skills essential for academic success and beyond. That said, you are allowed to use AI for brainstorming, checking understanding, and getting feedback on your assignment ideas.

5. Class & Readings Schedule

MODULE I. GETTING STARTED

In the first module, we'll cover the basics: what philosophy is, what cross-cultural philosophy is, what an argument is, and what kinds of questions epistemologists investigate. We'll also conduct an in-class close reading of a short philosophical paper.

9/15 **(1)** Intro & Syllabus; What is philosophy

9/17 **(2)** What is epistemology; **WORKSHOP**: *What (even) is an argument*

(No Class 9/19)

9/22 **(3)** Cross-cultural philosophy

9/24 **(4) WORKSHOP**: *How to read philosophy*

MODULE II. WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

In the second module, we'll explore the nature of knowledge, beginning with the traditional definition of knowledge as justified true belief. We'll then examine thought experiments that challenge this and similar views, along with philosophical responses to those challenges.

9/26 **(5)** The Traditional Account of Knowledge: Justified True Belief *(Quiz 1)*

9/29 **(6)** Dharmottara, Gettier; The Method of Cases *(Quiz 2)*

9/30 **(7) WORKSHOP**: *How to write philosophy;* **In-class writing #1**
    • **NB**. Class meets during X-hour

10/1 **(8)** Responses; Conceptual Analysis *(Quiz 3)*

10/3 **(9)** Śrīharṣa and Gaṅgeśa; X-Phi *(Quiz 4)*

MODULE III. SKEPTICISM EAST & WEST

In the third module, we'll engage with skeptical challenges from around the world and examine philosophical responses to them.

10/6 **(10)** Al-Ghazālī; Zhuangzi *(Quiz 5)*

10/7* **(11) In-class writing #2**
    • **NB**. Class meets during X-hour

10/8 **(12)** Descartes *(Quiz 6),* **WORKSHOP**: *How to talk philosophy*

10/10 **(13)** Responses to the skeptic: Moore, Vogel, Zhuangzi *(Quiz 7)*

10/13 **(14)** Review; Developments *(Quiz 8)*

10/15 **(15)** Context-sensitive knowledge

10/17   (16) Midterm in class

MODULE IV. SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE

The fourth module will focus on sources of knowledge, beginning with an overview of a classical Indian debate and then exploring three key sources—perception, inference, and testimony—in more detail.

10/20   (17) Pramāṇa-śāstra: the classical Indian debate on knowledge sources *(Quiz 9)*

10/22   (18) Perception *(Quiz 10)*

10/24   (19) Inference

10/27   (20) Testimony *(Quiz 11)*

10/28*   (21) In-class writing #3
  • **NB**. Class meets during X-hour

MODULE V. KNOWLEDGE, CONTEXT, AND INTERACTION

The fifth module challenges the idea that to be objective is to remove yourself from the object of inquiry. Drawing from Daoist and Pragmatist traditions, as well as contemporary decolonial and Indigenous perspectives, the module emphasizes the importance of relationships—between subjects, environments, and systems of thought—in shaping knowledge.

10/29   (22) Objectivity *(Quiz 12)*

10/31   (23) Daoist relationalism

11/3   (24) American pragmatism; Conceptual Engineering

11/4*   (25) In-class writing #4
  • **NB**. Class meets during X-hour

11/5   (26) Decolonizing knowledge

11/7   (27) Alternative epistemologies

11/10* (28) In-class writing #5

MODULE VI. WRAPPING UP

The sixth module centers on review and application. As part of this module, you will present your public philosophy projects to the rest of the class, showcasing your ability to communicate philosophical ideas to a broader audience.

11/12   (29) Review / Catch-up / In-Class Group Work

11/14   (30) Public Philosophy Project Presentations in class (Gallery Walk)

11/17   (31) Final review