Phil 220-01:  
Metaphysics and Epistemology: Knowledge and Reality  
MW 10:30-11:45am  
RH 203

Description:

In this course we will focus on knowledge of the world we live in: Is such knowledge possible, and if so, how? What is the nature of that which is known? What is our relationship to it? In considering these questions, we will pay special attention to the interplay between the account given of what it is to know something and the account of the nature of that which is known. The central themes we encounter are the threat of skepticism on the one hand and the threat of subjectivism and relativism on the other.

Required Texts:

David Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Dover, 2004); ISBN: 0486434443  

Articles on course reserve in the library.

Requirements:

Class participation: Come prepared for class, having read all assigned readings at least twice.  
Short argument analysis exercise, due Friday Sept 10, by 5pm.  
Midterm paper, due Friday Oct 15, by 5pm.  
Final paper: outline due before Thanksgiving; final version due Friday Dec 3, by 5pm.

Grading:

Participation (10%); argument analysis (10%); midterm paper (30%); final paper (50%). All assignments must be completed to pass the course. Late papers get penalized one third of a letter grade for each day past due date, unless there is a documented medical emergency.
Class schedule (subject to change):

**Week 1: Introduction to the themes of the course: Knowledge and Reality**
- Aug 30: Themes; expectations
- Sept 1: The traditional theory of knowledge. Recommended: Plato's *Theatetus* (on reserve)
- Argument analysis exercise distributed

**Week 2: Troubling our basic assumptions: Cartesian skepticism**
- Sept 6: Cartesian skepticism; Descartes, *Meditations* 1
- Sept 8: Descartes *Meditations* 2
- Sept 10: Argument analysis due by 5pm

**Week 3: Varieties of skepticism: Cartesian and ancient**
- Sept 13: Descartes, *Meditations* 3-6
- Sept 15: Sextus, *Outline*, Book I

**Week 4: Varieties of Skepticism: Ancient skepticism**
- Sept 20: Sextus, *Outline*, Book II

**Week 5: Varieties of skepticism: Could we be brains in a vat?**
- Sept 27: Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, ch. 1
- Sept 29: Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, ch. 2; midterm paper topics distributed

**Week 6: Skepticism and idealism: Berkeley**
- Oct 4: Berkeley, first and second dialogue
- Oct 6: Berkeley, second and third dialogue

**Week 7: Skepticism and the nature of reality: Hume**

Midterm paper due by 5pm

**Week 8: Fall vacation**
- Oct 18: no class
- Oct 20: no class

**Week 9: The nature of reality: The idea of an independent reality**
- Oct 25: Barry Stroud, *The Quest for Reality*, chapters 1-3 (on reserve)
- Oct 27: Thomas Nagel *The View from Nowhere*, chapter VI. (on reserve)

**Week 10: The nature of reality: Putnam**
- Nov 1: Putnam *Reason, Truth and History*, ch. 3
- Nov 2: Putnam *Reason, Truth and History*, ch. 4
Week 11: Putnam continued
Nov 8: Putnam *Reason, Truth and History*, ch. 5
Nov 10: Putnam *Reason, Truth and History*, ch. 6

Week 12: The nature of reality (continued)
Nov 15: Putnam, *Reason Truth and History*, ch. 10
Nov 17: The nature of reality: Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, ch. 1

Week 13: Goodman continued
Nov 22: Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, ch. 5
Nov 24: Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, ch. 6

Outline of final paper due

Week 14: Final week
Nov 29: Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, ch. 7
Dec 1: Last class

Dec 3: Final paper due by 5pm in my box in the philosophy department

Week 15:
Dec 6: Vassar Friday Schedule; no class

Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please schedule an appointment with the instructor early in the semester to discuss any accommodation that may be needed for the course. All accommodations must be approved through the Office of Disability and Support Services (ext. 7584) as indicated in their accommodation letter.