

Phil9020: Inquiry

Instructor: David Thorstad

Office Hours: Tu/W 5-6PM, Furman 113,

<https://calendly.com/dthorsta/office-hours>

1. About this course

The epistemology of inquiry studies the processes of inquiry which produce belief and other doxastic attitudes. This course will cover two topics within the epistemology of inquiry: the norms and metaphysics of inquiry. Within the metaphysics of inquiry, we will ask about the conditions under which agents count as inquiring, the relationship between inquiry and suspension of judgment, and the connections between inquiry and a class of interrogative attitudes including curiosity, wondering and doubt. As for the norms of inquiry, we will discuss recent normative proposals governing evidence gathering, double-checking, closing inquiry, and related activities. We will also discuss general topics in the normativity of inquiry, including the relationship between norms of inquiry and epistemic norms.

Some distinctive features of this course include the inclusion of four guest lectures; a historically-grounded approach; and interdisciplinary overlap with work in cognitive science. Seminar participants are warmly invited (but not required) to attend a scholarly workshop on inquiry to be held at Vanderbilt in Summer 2024.

2. Course materials

All readings are on the course site. There is no need to purchase any materials for this course.

3. Course structure

3.1. Course meetings

This is a discussion-based seminar. We will discuss about two papers each meeting, with a break in the middle of each meeting. Often, discussion will be led by you (see below) or by myself. Three of our discussions will be led by external guests, presenting their own work. It may be possible to secure additional guest presentations if these prove helpful. I will close each course meeting with a few brief notes to contextualize the following week's readings.

3.2. Assignments

I (Ongoing) Discussion leading (10%): Each enrolled student will sign up to lead class discussion on one assigned paper. The purpose of discussion leadership is to lead a productive and stimulating discussion that stays adequately grounded in the text while raising ample opportunities for philosophical discussion of issues that arise.

II (**Dec 7**) **Final paper presentation (20%)**: Our last meeting will be dedicated to presentations of final papers. The exact length of presentations will be determined as soon as enrollments stabilize. Presentations should give an accessible overview of the project, including its contents and motivations, and will be followed by a brief discussion.

III (**Dec 15**) **Final paper (70%)**: All enrolled students should submit a final paper, between 5,000 to 10,000 words, covering any topic in the philosophy of inquiry. Please seek prior permission if you would like to submit a longer or shorter paper.

3.3. Assignment submission

I **Submitting assignments**: Please submit papers through the course website.

II **Late assignments**:

i **Discussion leading**: Students are responsible for arranging an alternate date to lead discussion in the event that they cannot lead discussion on the required date. So long as an adequate substitute can be arranged, there will be no penalty for cancellation.

ii **Final paper presentations**: If you are unable to present your paper during the Dec 7 meeting, please contact me a minimum of 48 hours before to arrange a special presentation. If you can contact me by November 28, it may be possible to arrange an in-class presentation on November 30. Presentations postponed less than 48 hours before Dec 7 may incur a late penalty at my discretion.

iii **Final papers**: I do not plan to accept late papers without explicit prior approval. I would strongly encourage you to submit final papers several days in advance of the deadline.

4. Schedule

4.1. August 25: Introduction

No assigned readings.

4.2. The zetetic turn

August 31: The zetetic turn in epistemology

Gilbert Harman, *Change in view*, Ch1.

Jane Friedman, "The epistemic and the zetetic."

September 7: The zetetic turn in bounded rationality

Herbert Simon, "From substantive to procedural rationality."

Abelard Podgorski, "Rational delay."

4.3. Logic and reasoning

September 14: Philosophers on logic and reasoning

Gilbert Harman, *Change in view*, Ch2.

Jaakko Hintikka, “Is logic the key to all good reasoning?”

September 21: The probabilistic turn

Mike Oaksford and Nick Chater, *Bayesian rationality: The probabilistic approach to human reasoning*, Ch4.

Mike Oaksford and Nick Chater, “A rational analysis of the selection task as optimal data selection.”

4.4. Mind

September 28: Clutter avoidance

Gilbert Harman, *Change in view*, short excerpt from Ch6.

Jane Friedman, “Junk beliefs and interest-driven epistemology”.

Kourken Michaelian, “The epistemology of forgetting.”.

October 5: Double-checking

Jane Friedman, “Checking again”

Elise Woodard (guest), “Why double-check?”

October 12: Saliency

Ege Yumusak (guest), “The epistemic conception of saliency”.

Susanna Siegel, “Low inquiry”.

4.5. Question-directed attitudes and the aim of inquiry

October 26: Introducing question-directed attitudes

Peter Carruthers, “Basic questions.”

Dennis Whitcomb, “Curiosity was framed.”

November 2: Suspension of judgment

Jane Friedman, “Why suspend judging?”

Matthew McGrath, “Being neutral: suspension of judgment, agnosticism, and inquiry.”

November 9: Transitional attitudes

Julia Staffel (guest), *Unfinished business* (excerpts).

Peirce, “The fixation of belief”

November 16: The aim of inquiry

I Arianna Falbo (guest), “Inquiring minds want to improve.”

II Christoph Kelp, “Theory of inquiry.”

November 30: The epistemic and the zetetic

I (Please review Friedman, “The epistemic and the zetetic”).

II Jane Friedman, “Zetetic epistemology”.

III David Thorstad, “Inquiry and the epistemic.”

December 7: Paper presentations

Reserved for in-class presentations.

5. Course policies

5.1. Office hours

My office hours are 5-6PM on Tuesday and Wednesday in Furman 113. Because I have a large number of students in my introductory course this term, I’m using calendly to pre-book meeting slots (<https://calendly.com/dthorsta/office-hours>). You don’t have to pre-book a slot, and I do apologize for the short length of bookable slots, but bookings will get priority.

5.2. Accessibility

This class respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities. If there are circumstances that make our learning environment and activities difficult, if you have medical information that you need to share with me, or if you need specific arrangements in case the building needs to be evacuated, please let me know. I am committed to creating an effective learning environment for all students, but I can only do so if you discuss your needs with me as early as possible. I promise to maintain the confidentiality of these discussions. If appropriate, also contact Student Access Services to get more information about specific accommodations.

5.3. Academic integrity

I take academic dishonesty very seriously. Please don’t cheat in this class.