

PHIL 9114A: TRUST AND TESTIMONY

Instructor: Prof. Carolyn McLeod E-mail: cmcleod2@uwo.ca Phone: (519) 661-2111 ext. 85877 Office Location: STvH 2137	Office Hours: TBA Class Times: Thurs. 2:30-5:30pm Class Location: STvH 1145 Course website: OWL
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Course Description:

Trust that is warranted is an important social good. Included here is what some call “epistemic trust,” that is, trust in the testimony of others. This course examines various philosophical issues about trust, testimony, or the overlap between the two. For example, we will look at the conceptual nature of trust and testimony, the value they have, and when trust, epistemic or otherwise, is warranted. We will consider both feminist and non-feminist perspectives on these topics. In particular, we will analyze the injustice that occurs when oppressive social stereotypes influence who people trust or whose testimony they accept. Our discussion will extend to philosophical topics that are distinct from but relevant to trust or testimony, including topics in epistemology (e.g., epistemic justification), in feminist philosophy (e.g., oppression and stereotyping), in moral theory (e.g., reactive attitudes), and in bioethics (the conditions for patient autonomy and well-being).

Some background reading: McLeod, C. “Trust,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, substantial revision 2015, originally published 2006, URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/trust/>.

Required Readings:

A selection of readings available on our OWL site

Fricker, M. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press. Available through The Bookstore at Western.

Requirements:

- 1) Reflections on readings (20%)
- 2) Presentation of reflections (10%)

- 3) Participation (10%)
- 4) Paper(s) (60%)—either two short papers (roughly 2500 words; worth 35% each) or one long paper (roughly 5000 words)

Reflections on Readings:

You must submit *four* one-page (and one-page only) “reflection papers.” You can submit as many as five, but only four will count.

Reflection papers are due online at 11:59pm the day before our class meeting.

Each paper must answer the following,

What, to your mind, is the *most difficult question*¹ raised in or by the required readings assigned for the class on which the paper is due—and why is that question difficult?

“Raised in or by” means that the question either is in the readings or came to your mind while doing the readings (i.e., it is raised *by* them).

Tips on reflection papers:

- Don’t focus on how someone ought to answer the question you raise. Instead, explain why the question is difficult: that is, why reasonable people could easily disagree about the answer.
- The assignment requires that you take a stance of curiosity rather than criticism.
- Pick a question that you truly believe to be difficult, which will make it easier for you to explain why it’s difficult.
- To be safe, you could begin your paper in the following way: “A difficult question raised in (or by) X reading is This question is difficult because”

The papers will be marked out of 5 and returned the following week. You will lose marks if the paper is longer than one page (double-spaced, 12-point font, 1-inch margins).

Presentations of Reflections:

Twice in the term, you will need to present a reflection paper to the class, not by reading it but by chatting through it with the class. You will then need to guide the class in a discussion of the difficult question that informs the paper. Each of these presentations and guided discussions will last no longer than 15 minutes. They will be graded out of 5 and worth 5% of your final mark. We will decide on a schedule for them

¹ By “difficult,” I mean a question for which there is no easy answer. If, after stating the question, you can provide a snappy answer, then the question is not a good one. It is not difficult.

at the beginning of the term. I also will give you more information then about how I will grade them.

Participation

As with most grad seminars, the aim of this seminar is for us to have lively, intelligent, and informed discussions with one another about the topics for this course. To achieve this aim, obviously you will need to come to class prepared to engage in discussions of this sort. You will lose marks on participation for being absent from class without having a legitimate excuse or for not paying attention in class.

In addition, you will need to post online a question for discussion about a required reading, along with a brief summary of that reading, by 11:59pm the day before each class. The exceptions are classes for which you decide to write a reflection paper. (I will also give you one week's grace, in which you do not need to post or submit anything.) Your post does not have to explain why your question is difficult or why it's worth discussing; however, in class, you may be asked to stimulate discussion about it, after first introducing it.

Paper(s):

You have two options here:

- 1) Write two papers that are approximately 2500 words long (and that do not exceed 3000 words);
- 2) Write one paper that is approximately 5000 words long (and that does not exceed 6000 words).

With both options, you should aim to do work that is polished and well researched. Your submission(s) should take the form of an electronic copy uploaded to our website.

On the first day of class, I will give you information about deadlines for the papers.

In terms of topics, you can devise topics in consultation with me and you should think about using one of your reflection papers as a starting point.

The following are grading criteria I use for undergraduate papers that I will have in mind while grading your papers:

[ARG]: Does the author use cogent arguments to support their position? Do the claims made in different parts of the paper follow from one another and are they consistent? [5 marks]

[ORG]: Does the author reveal a plan for the paper at the outset and then follow that plan? Does the paper have an explicit overall direction? [5 marks]

[CLR]: Is the author's position clear and is the paper clearly written overall? Could another student at the same level who is not enrolled in the course understand the paper? [5 marks]

[UND]: How well does the author understand and make judicious use of the material relevant to the paper that is on our reading list? How well do they appreciate the complexity of the issues involved? [5 marks]

(For this course, you will need to go beyond our reading list and do some research.)

[OPP]: Has the author dealt with important objections to their thesis? To what extent are they aware of the possible difficulties with this position? [5 marks]