

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)
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Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Knowledge

Fall 2025 | Dartmouth College

Instructor: Tiina C Rosenqvist
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[This is an abridged syllabus. Email me if you'd like to see the full one.]

1. Course Description

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2. Learning Outcomes

Through active participation in this course, you will develop an understanding of key issues and debates in epistemology, improve your overall critical thinking skills, and learn to construct, reconstruct, and evaluate philosophical arguments, both orally and in writing.

3. Course Structure and Teaching Methods

In-person sessions:

The standard format for the in-person sessions is lecture, discussion, and group work. You are expected to participate actively in discussions and other in-class activities.

Working in groups, you will present one 5-minute recap of a previous class session (including both lecture & discussion). You will also present your public philosophy group project to the rest of the class.

There will be a in-class midterm and a final exam.

Out-of-class activities:

You are expected to do the assigned readings before class. Note that reading philosophy is a skill that takes practice and hard work, and even seasoned readers often have to read a text multiple times to genuinely understand it. Don't feel discouraged if a passage doesn't immediately make sense. Try again. If you're still having trouble, bring it up in class or office hours.

You are also expected to complete short reading quizzes on Canvas before the in-person session, write two papers, and complete your group project.

4. Assignments & Assessment

Individual assignments (80%)

- Attendance & Participation —10%
- Canvas Reading Quizzes —10%
- Paper 1 (800-1,200 words) —10%
- Midterm —10%
- Paper 2 (1,200-1,600 words) —20%
- Final Exam — 20%

Group assignments (20%)

- Lecture/Discussion Recap — 5%
- Public Philosophy Project - 15%

5. Workshops

Throughout the semester, we will workshop various skills that you need in order to succeed in this course. The workshops are marked with the label "**WORKSHOP**" on the class schedule. We will practice reconstructing and evaluating arguments, reading philosophy, writing philosophy papers, and having discussions and debates about philosophical topics. So don't worry if this your first philosophy course; you're not expected to already know how to do these things. And if you've taken philosophy courses before, there's always room for improvement!

6. Selected 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 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.

Submission of Assignments

You are expected to submit all assignments on time. For paper assignments, you have a total of four 'late days' which can be used without penalty. Submitting a paper two hours late uses one late day, submitting a paper 25 hours late uses two late days, and so forth. Once your four late days are used up, penalties will apply (5% deduction per day), except in truly exceptional circumstances such as hospitalization. Assignments will not be accepted if they are more than seven days late

7. Class 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.

- (1) Intro & Syllabus; What is philosophy
- (2) What is epistemology; **WORKSHOP:** *What (even) is an argument*
- (3) Cross-cultural philosophy
- (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 view, along with philosophical responses to those challenges.

- (5) The Traditional Account of Knowledge: Justified True Belief (Quiz 1)
- (6) Śrīharaṣa, Dharmottara, Gettier (Quiz 2)
- (7) Responses (Quiz 3)
- (8) Indian epistemology (Quiz 4)
- (9) Catch-up / Review; **WORKSHOP:** *How to write a philosophy paper*

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) What can we know?; Zhuangzi (Quiz 5)
- (11) Al-Ghazālī (Quiz 6)
- (12) Descartes (Quiz 7), **WORKSHOP:** *How to talk philosophy*
- (13) Responses to the skeptic (Quiz 8)
- (14) The goals of skepticism (Quiz 9)
- (15) *Midterm (10%) 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.

- (16) Pramāṇa-śāstra: the classical Indian debate on knowledge sources (Quiz 10)
- (17) Perception (Quiz 11)
- (18) Inference (Quiz 12)
- (19) Testimony (Quiz 13)
- (20) Catch-up / Review

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.

- (21) Objectivity (Quiz 14)
- (22) Daoist relationalism (Quiz 15)
- (23) American pragmatism
- (24) Decolonizing knowledge (Quiz 16)
- (25) Alternative epistemologies

MODULE VI. WRAPPING UP

The sixth module centers on review. 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.

- (26) Public Philosophy Project Presentations in class (Gallery Walk)
- (27) Final review