

PHIL 540 — Seminar in Epistemology (Knowledge and Oppression)

Graduate Seminar, 2020W1: September–December 2020

Course Meetings: Thursdays 2:00-5:00 pm (online seminar discussion)

Instructors: Jonathan Ichikawa and Alison Wylie

Office Hours: by appointment

This is a graduate seminar, primarily intended for graduate students in philosophy. The topic is the relationship between epistemology and oppression, especially the ways in which epistemic factors can contribute to broad social injustices and, reciprocally, how standing conditions of injustice can configure what counts as knowledge and epistemic authority.

Topics and texts:

The selection of topics and readings for this seminar is still in progress; **the syllabus that follows is subject to revision**. We have organized this draft syllabus around three key texts: José Medina's *Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (2013), Sally Haslanger's Spinoza Lectures, *Critical Theory and Practice* (2017), and Mary Kate McGowan's *Just Words: On Speech and Hidden Harm* (2019). Linked to each of these texts is a selection of articles commenting on them or engaging the issues they raise. You'll also find a set of supplemental readings appended to the proposed schedule of weekly readings.

The central questions we anticipate addressing are:

- *How have the epistemic effects and mechanisms of oppression been conceptualized?*
- *What counts as ideology and how does it work?*
- *Who is responsible for epistemic injustice, and for epistemic repair?*
- *When is speech oppressive, and how does it oppress?*

Eligibility:

This course is primarily for MA and PhD philosophy students. We are also open to including others on a case-by-case basis. If you are an advanced undergraduate or a graduate student in another discipline, you may require instructor approval to join the seminar; please get in touch with us before registering. If you are interested in *auditing* the course you should also contact us.

Course Expectations:

This is a discussion-driven graduate seminar. The seminar meetings will be structured around student presentations and discussion, so it is essential that you attend all course meetings, read all required readings, come prepared to discuss them and ready to participate. Don't expect to merely listen and learn.

UBC guidelines for term 1 instruction require that this seminar be offered online. Given the emphasis on discussion, we encourage synchronous attendance. If, however, you cannot join the seminar at the time it is scheduled, please contact us to discuss asynchronous options.

Assessment:

You will be assessed on the basis of your performance on regular weekly assignments, including presentations (40%), and a final (6000 word) research paper and related material (60%). (See "course requirements" below for the details).

Course requirements:

Regular Weekly Work:

These assignments give structure to the week between seminar meetings, and prepare everyone for high-quality discussions.

- (a) **Pre-class reactions (15%).** You are expected to prepare a brief written reaction to one of the required readings each week; aim for 200-400 words. The format for reactions is open-ended; for example, you might give a summary or raise a question, develop an additional argument or objection, draw out implications of the author's argument, or apply it to a case they don't consider. The deadline for posting is **noon Wednesdays**, the day before class. The grade for this component is the average of the grades assigned for your top 10 weekly reactions. This means you can skip up to two weeks without penalty.
- (b) **Responses to pre-class reactions (5%).** Your pre-class reactions will be shared with your classmates through "ComPAIR" on Canvas (detailed instructions to come), and you will be given access to a subset of their reactions; you are asked to post your responses to these reactions online by the time the class meets on Thursday. The grade for this assignment is the number of responses completed to an adequate quality, divided by 10 so that, again, you can skip up to two weeks without penalty.
- (c) **Summary reports (5%).** You will be responsible, on a schedule to be settled near the start of term, for writing up a retrospective summary of at least two seminar discussions in the course of the term. These summaries should be roughly 500-1000 words, they should record the central insights and questions raised in the course of the seminar discussion, and they should contextualize this discussion with respect to the relevant readings so that they make sense as standalone documents. These will be made available to the class at large. The deadline for summary reports is the Sunday night after each Thursday seminar.
- (d) **Main presentation – required reading (10%).** Everyone in the seminar will give a presentation of 15-20 minutes on the readings assigned for discussion in the seminar meeting when they present. It is fine for your presentation to overlap with a written reaction to the readings you will discuss, but your presentation should not be merely a reading of your submitted reaction. It should also not be merely or primarily a summary of the assigned reading(s); the point is to share your own ideas about these readings in a way that prompts discussion of them. The use of visual aids such as handouts or slides is encouraged.
- (e) **Secondary presentation – supplementary reading (5%).** A presentation of 5-10 minutes introducing the group to a reading related to the topic of the seminar meeting you choose, but not one of the required readings. These may be drawn from the list of "supplemental readings," or they may be readings you found by following citations or that you came to independently. Your presentation should give the seminar an idea of what the reading you choose is about, and how it is connected to issues we've focused on in the seminar.

Final Essay

- (f) **Essay Preliminaries (10%).** Prepare an extended abstract for your essay, indicating the main issues you will discuss, and outlining central views and arguments relevant to them. You may optionally include in your preliminaries draft material for some sections of the paper you outline. These preliminaries should be no more than 1,500 words, and they are due on **November 13**.
- (g) **Peer Feedback on Essay Preliminaries (10%).** You will be assigned another student's preliminaries and asked to offer critiques and suggestions for improvement. While you may choose to meet personally to discuss these suggestions, your feedback should also be prepared in written form; this will be the basis for the grade for this assignment. The deadline for your feedback is **November 20**. The instructors will also give you feedback on your preliminaries.
- (h) **Final Paper (40%).** An original research paper of approximately 6,000 words on a central topic of the course. It should include significant philosophical engagement with some of the required readings. You are welcome to engage with other readings as well, but it is the required readings for which you will be held responsible. The deadline is **December 11**.

Schedule of Course meetings with required readings:

September 10: Conceptualizing Oppression

- Iris Marion Young, “Five Faces of Oppression,” in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990)
- Linda Alcoff, “Sotomayor’s Reasoning,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* (2010)
- Nancy Hartsock, “The Feminist Standpoint,” in Harding and Hintikka (eds.) *Discovering Reality* (1983)
- Alison Wylie, “Why Standpoint Matters,” in Figueroa and Harding (eds.) *Science & Other Cultures* (2003)

September 17: Epistemic Resistance

- José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, chs. 1–2
- Charles Mills, “White Ignorance,” in Sullivan and Tuana (eds), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (2007)

September 24: Gaslighting

- Kate Abramson, “Turning Up the Lights on Gaslighting,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 28 (2014)
- Nora Berenstain, “White Feminist Gaslighting,” *Hypatia* (forthcoming). Available at <https://philarchive.org/rec/BERWFG>

October 1: Social Responsibility

- José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, chs. 3–4
- Nora Berenstain, “Epistemic Exploitation,” *Ergo* 3.2 (2016)

October 8: Epistemic Repair

- José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance*, chs. 5–6
- Kristie Dotson, “A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression,” *Frontiers* 33.1 (2012)

October 15: Epistemic Agency

- Lauren Leydon-Hardy “Predatory Grooming and Epistemic Infringement” in Jennifer Lackey (ed.), *Applied Epistemology*
- Aidan McGlynn, “Objects or Others? Epistemic Agency and the Primary Harm of Testimonial Injustice,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Justice* (2020)

October 22: Ideology 1

- Sally Haslanger, “Social Construction: The ‘Debunking’ Project,” in *Resisting Reality* (2012)
- Sally Haslanger, *Spinoza Lecture 1*

October 29: Ideology 2

- Sally Haslanger, *Spinoza Lecture 2*
- Charles Mills, “Ideal Theory as Ideology,” *Hypatia* 20.3 (2005)

November 5: Language and Power

- Mary Kate McGowan, *Just Words*, chs. 1–3

November 12: Language, Knowledge, and Power

- David Lewis, “Scorekeeping in a Language Game,” *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 8.1 (1979)
- Jonathan Ichikawa, “Contextual Injustice,” *Kennedy Institute of Ethics* 30.1 (2020)
- Rima Basu, “Radical Moral Encroachment: The Moral Stakes of Racist Beliefs,” *Philosophical Issues* 29.1 (2019)

November 19: Oppressive Speech 1

- Rae Langton and Caroline West, “Scorekeeping in a Pornographic Language Game,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 77.3 (1999)
- Mary Kate McGowan, *Just Words*, chs. 4–5

November 26: Oppressive Speech 2

- Mary Kate McGowan, *Just Words*, chs. 6–7

December 3: Democracy

- Elizabeth Anderson, “The Epistemology of Democracy,” *Episteme* 2.1-2 (2006)
- Amandine Catala, “Democracy, Trust, and Epistemic Justice,” *The Monist* 98 (2015)

Supplemental Readings

These are recommended supplemental readings. It is not assumed or expected that you will read them, but they may be useful in developing your term papers and they are good choices for secondary presentations.

Conceptualizing “oppression”

- Marilyn Frye, “Oppression,” and “In and Out of Harm’s Way,” in *The Politics of Reality* (1983)
- Nancy Hartsock, “Feminist Standpoint Theory,” in Harding & Hintikka (eds), *Discovering Reality* (1983)
- Patricia Hill Collins, “Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment,” in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge* (1990)
- Patricia Hill Collins, “Learning from the Outsider Within,” *Social Problems* (1986/1991)
- Linda Alcoff, “Who’s Afraid of Identity Politics?,” in Moya and Hames-Garcia (eds), *Reclaiming Identity* (2000)
- Derek Bell, “Rules of Racial Standing,” *Faces at the Bottom of the Well* (1992)
- Glen Coulthard, “The Politics of Recognition in Colonial Contexts,” in *Red Skin, White Masks* (2014)
- Walter Mignolo, “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2002)
- Ann Cudd, “How to Explain Oppression,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (2005)
- Amy Allen, “Rationalizing Oppression,” *Journal of Power* (2008)

Social constructionist analysis and ideologiekritik

- Sally Haslanger, “What is a (social) Structural Explanation?,” *Philosophical Studies* (2015)
- Sally Haslanger, “Social Structure, Narrative and Explanation,” *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* (2015)
- Robin Zheng, “Bias, Structure, and Injustice: A Reply to Haslanger” *Feminist Philosophical Quarterly* (2018)
- Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (1981)
- Ian Hacking, “Why Ask What?,” in *The Social Construction of What?* (1999)
- Ian Hacking, “Making Up People,” *London Review of Books* (2006)
- Amia Srinivasan, “Genealogy, Epistemology, Worldmaking,” *Aristotelian Society Proceedings* (2019)
- Tommie Shelby, “Ideology, Racism and Critical Social Theory” *Philosophical Forum* (2003)

Epistemic injustice

- Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*
- Kristie Dotson, “Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression,” *Social Epistemology* (2013)
- Medina, Fricker, Mills posts on hermeneutical injustice, *Social Epistemology and Review Collective* (2013)
- Sally Haslanger, “What is Knowledge and What It Ought to Be: Feminist Values and Normative Epistemology,” in *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique* (2012)
- Sally Haslanger, “Racism, Ideology and Social Movements,” *Res Philosophica* (2017)
- Bianca Crewe and Jonathan Ichikawa, “Rape Culture and Epistemology” in Lackey (ed.), *Applied Epistemology* (forthcoming)
- Robin Dembroff and Dennis Whitcomb, “Content-Focused Epistemic Injustice”, *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* (forthcoming)
- Andrew Peet, “Epistemic Injustice in Utterance Interpretation”, *Synthese* (2017)

Language and Harm

- Jennifer Saul, “Politically Significant Terms and Philosophy of Language: Methodological Issues”, *Out from the Shadows* (2012)
- Jennifer Saul, “Racial Figleaves, the Shifting Boundaries of Permissibility, and the Rise of Donald Trump,” *Philosophical Topics* (2017)
- Elizabeth Barnes, “Gender and Gender Terms”, *Nous* 2020
- Tallia Mae Bettcher, “Trans Women and the Meaning of ‘Woman’”, in Power et al. (eds.), *The Philosophy of Sex* (2013)
- Carrie Jenkins, “All Hearts in Love”, *Routledge Handbook of Love in Philosophy* (2019)
- Lynne Tirrell, “Toxic Speech”, *Philosophical Topics* (2017)
- Rae Langton, *Sexual Solipsism* (2009)
- Catherine MacKinnon, *Only Words* (1993)

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