

**HURON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**  
*Philosophy 4992G: Relativism*  
**2017-2018**

**Winter Term, 2018**

**Prerequisites: none**

**Mondays, 12:30pm-2:30pm, W102**

**Wednesdays, 1:30pm-2:30pm, W102**

**Instructor: Dr. Steve Bland**

**Office: A304**

**Office hours: Thursdays, 12:30-2:30pm**

**Email: sbland2@uwo.ca**

This course will focus specifically on the doctrine of epistemic relativism, which is the view that justification and knowledge are relative to the practices that we use to evaluate beliefs. If relativism is true, then inconsistent beliefs can be equally well justified, and fundamental disagreements can fail to admit of impartial resolutions. So, for example, young earth creationists and natural scientists can be equally well justified in their beliefs about the age of the earth because there is no objective way of evaluating the different methods they use to arrive at their beliefs. This is a significant threat to the traditional aims of epistemology, and philosophy more generally. Since the principal argument for epistemic relativism makes use of a powerful sceptical argument, relativism and scepticism are often thought to stand or fall together. The purpose of this course is to determine whether or not this is true by investigating various anti-sceptical strategies of resisting epistemic relativism.

**COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

On successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Explain the connections between the arguments for scepticism and relativism.
2. Re-formulate anti-sceptical responses to epistemic relativism.
3. Explain and defend a position on the credibility of epistemic relativism.

**CLASS METHODS**

This course consists of two lectures/seminars per week. Although much of the lecture/seminar will be delivered by the instructor, students will be expected to attend class **having done all of the readings and prepared to contribute to class discussions.**

You are welcome to use a laptop to take notes in class, though you should be aware that students who do so tend to do worse on average than students who take notes with pen and paper. However, if you are caught using your laptop for any purpose that is unrelated to the course, you will lose 10% of your participation grade, and this penalty will apply every time you are found doing so. When you use your laptop for social or entertainment purposes, you distract others, and do yourself a disservice. It is **NOT ACCEPTABLE** behavior and it **WILL NOT BE TOLERATED** in my classroom.

Do not take your phone out at any point during class. Every time you are caught looking at your phone, you will lose 10% of your participation grade. If there are extenuating circumstances that necessitate you checking your phone during class, please inform me BEFORE the beginning of class.

## **TEXTS**

Below is a list of the **required readings**. The books have been placed on 2 hour reserve at the Huron Library. All other resources are available online.

Barnes, B. and Bloor, D. (1982). Relativism, rationalism and the sociology of knowledge. In M. Hollis and S. Lukes (eds.) *Rationality and Relativism* (pp. 21-47). Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Sankey, H. (2012). Scepticism, relativism and the argument from the criterion. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science A*, 43: 182-190.

Sosa, E. (2009). Reflective knowledge in the best circles. In *Reflective Knowledge*, Volume II (pp. 178-210). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lynch, M. (2010). Epistemic circularity and epistemic disagreement. In A. Haddock, A. Millar, and D. Pritchard (eds.) *Social Epistemology* (pp. 262-277). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sankey, H. (2010). Wicraft, relativism and the problem of the criterion. *Erkenntnis*, 72, 1-16.

Luper, S. (2004). Epistemic relativism. *Philosophical Issues*, 14: 271-295.

Siegel, H. (2011). Epistemological relativism: arguments pro and con. In *A Companion to Relativism*, ed. S.D. Hales (pp. 201-218). Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford.

Wittgenstein, L. (1969). *On Certainty*. Edited by G.E.M. Anscombe & G.H. von Wright. Translated by Denis Paul and G.E.M. Anscombe. Harper & Row Publishers: New York.

Williams, M. (2007). Why (Wittgensteinian) contextualism is not relativism. *Episteme* 4(1): 93-114.

Pritchard, D. (2011). Epistemic relativism, epistemic incommensurability, and Wittgensteinian epistemology. In S. Hales (ed.) *A Companion to Relativism* (pp. 266-285). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Seidel, M. (2014). *Epistemic Relativism: A Constructive Critique*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

## METHODS OF EVALUATION

10% Class participation

The quality of small, advanced seminars depend in no small part on the informed contributions of their constituent students. For this reason (and others), it will be expected that students will have read the requisite material before class and attend each class prepared to discuss the material. **Any student with an attendance record of less than 70% will receive a grade of 0% for participation.**

10% Forum Posts (due at the end of every week)

You are responsible for posting at least one question or comment in the Forum section of OWL **by the end of every week**. These posts should engage the material covered in class. They can be questions about something that is unclear to you, objections to any of the views discussed, suggestions about how to extend a theory, comments about where to find other relevant information on the topics under consideration, or responses to something that someone else has said. Forum posts will be evaluated on the basis of their relevance, insight, and capacity to generate discussion. **You will not receive credit for forum posts about lectures you did not attend.**

40% Reading Reports (due January 24<sup>th</sup>; February 5<sup>th</sup>; February 26<sup>th</sup>; March 5<sup>th</sup>)

You will be responsible for submitting four assignments of approximately 1,000 words that answer a specific question about an assigned reading.

The due dates for these assignments are **tentative** and **subject to change**. Consult OWL for updated information.

40% Final essay (due April 11<sup>th</sup>)

You must submit an essay of approximately 4,000 words that critically scrutinizes one or more of the responses to epistemic relativism that is considered in the course.

LATE PENALTY: 3% per day in the first week after the due date. No assignments will be accepted more than one week late.

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Readings</b>
1	Introduction: Relativism and Epistemic Disagreements	None
2	Scepticism and Relativism	Barnes and Bloor, "Relativism, rationalism and the sociology of knowledge" Howard Sankey, "Scepticism, Relativism, and the Problem of the Criterion"

3	Externalism	Ernest Sosa, “Philosophical Scepticism and Epistemic Circularity” Michael Lynch, “Epistemic Circularity and Epistemic Incommensurability”
4	Particularism	Howard Sankey, “Witchcraft, Relativism and the Problem of the Criterion”
5	Generalism	Steven Luper, “Epistemic Relativism”
6	The Incoherence Objection	Harvey Siegel, “Epistemological Relativism: Arguments Pro and Con”
7	Relativism Without Scepticism	Ludwig Wittgenstein, <i>On Certainty</i>
8	Interpreting Wittgenstein	Michael Williams, “Why (Wittgensteinian) Contextualism is not Relativism” Duncan Pritchard, “Epistemic Relativism, Epistemic Incommensurability, and Wittgensteinian Epistemology”
9	Epistemic Pluralism	Markus Seidel, <i>Epistemic Relativism</i> , Chapter 3



## Appendix to Course Outlines

### **Prerequisite Information**

Students are responsible for ensuring that they have successfully completed all course prerequisites. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Provost and Dean to enrol in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

### **Conduct of Students in Classes, Lectures, and Seminars**

Membership in the community of Huron University College and the University of Western Ontario implies acceptance by every student of the principle of respect for the rights, responsibilities, dignity and well-being of others and a readiness to support an environment conducive to the intellectual and personal growth of all who study, work and live within it. Upon registration, students assume the responsibilities that such registration entails. The academic and social privileges granted to each student are conditional upon the fulfillment of these responsibilities.

In the classroom, students are expected to behave in a manner that supports the learning environment of others. Students can avoid any unnecessary disruption of the class by arriving in sufficient time to be seated and ready for the start of the class, by remaining silent while the professor is speaking or another student has the floor, and by taking care of personal needs prior to the start of class. If a student is late, or knows that he/she will have to leave class early, be courteous: sit in an aisle seat and enter and leave quietly.

Please see the *Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities* at:

<http://www.huronuc.ca/CurrentStudents/StudentLifeandSupportServices/StudentDiscipline>

## **Technology**

It is not appropriate to use technology (such as, but not limited to, laptops, cell phones) in the classroom for non-classroom activities. Such activity is disruptive and is distracting to other students and to the instructor, and can inhibit learning. Students are expected to respect the classroom environment and to refrain from inappropriate use of technology and other electronic devices in class.

## **Academic Accommodation for Medical/Non-Medical Grounds**

Students who require special accommodation for tests and/or other course components must make the appropriate arrangements with the Student Development Centre (SDC). Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at:

[http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/?requesting\\_acc](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/?requesting_acc)

### **(a) Medical Grounds for assignments worth 10% or more of final grade: Go Directly to Academic Advising**

University Senate policy, which can be found at

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/accommodation\\_medical.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf),

requires that all student requests for accommodation on medical grounds for assignments worth 10% or more of the final grade be made directly to the academic advising office of the home faculty (for Huron students, the “home faculty” is Huron), with supporting documentation in the form (minimally) of the Senate-approved Student Medical Certificate found at:

[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/medicalform\\_15JUN.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform_15JUN.pdf).

The documentation is submitted in confidence and will not be shown to instructors. The advisors will contact the instructor when the medical documentation is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the medical challenge as expressed on the Student Medical Certificate and in any other supporting documentation. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified of the presence of medical documentation, and will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation. The instructor will not normally deny accommodation where appropriate medical documentation is in place and where the duration it describes aligns with the due date(s) of assignment(s). Before denying a request for accommodation on medical grounds, the instructor will consult with the Provost and Dean. The instructor’s decision is appealable to the Provost and Dean.

### **(b) Accommodation on Medical Grounds for assignments worth less than 10% of final grade: Consult Instructor Directly**

When seeking accommodation on medical grounds for assignments worth less than 10% of the final course grade, the student should contact the instructor directly. The student need only share broad outlines of the medical situation. The instructor **may** require the student to submit documentation to the academic advisors, in which case she or he will advise the student and inform the academic advisors to expect documentation. The instructor may **not** collect medical documentation. The advisors will contact the instructor when the medical documentation is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the medical challenge as expressed on the Student Medical Certificate and in any other supporting documentation. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified of the presence of medical documentation, and will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation. The instructor will not normally deny accommodation where appropriate medical documentation is in place and where the duration it describes aligns with the due date(s) of assignment(s). Before denying a request for accommodation on medical grounds, the instructor will

consult with the Provost and Dean. The instructor's decision is appealable to the Provost and Dean.

**(c) Non-medical Grounds: Consult Instructor Directly**

Where the grounds for seeking accommodation are not medical, the student should contact the instructor directly. Late penalties may apply at the discretion of the instructor. Apart from the exception noted below, academic advisors will not be involved in the process of accommodation for non-medical reasons.

Where a student seeks accommodation on non-medical grounds where confidentiality is a concern, the student should approach an academic advisor with any documentation available. The advisors will contact the instructor after the student's request is received, and will outline the severity and duration of the challenge without breaching confidence. The student will be informed that the instructor has been notified that significant circumstances are affecting or have affected the student's ability to complete work, and the student will be instructed to work as quickly as possible with the instructor on an agreement for accommodation. Before denying a request for accommodation where documentation has been submitted to an academic advisor, the instructor will consult with the Provost and Dean. The instructor's decision is appealable to the Provost and Dean.

**Statement on Academic Offences**

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:  
[http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic\\_policies/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_undergrad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf)

**Statement on Academic Integrity**

The International Centre for Academic Integrity defines academic integrity as "a commitment, even in the face of adversity, to five fundamental values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. From these values flow principles of behaviour that enable academic communities to translate ideals to action." (CAI Fundamental Values Project, 1999).

A lack of academic integrity is indicated by such behaviours as the following:

- Cheating on tests;
- Fraudulent submissions online;
- Plagiarism in papers submitted (including failure to cite and piecing together unattributed sources);
- Unauthorized resubmission of course work to a different course;
- Helping someone else cheat;
- Unauthorized collaboration;
- Fabrication of results or sources;
- Purchasing work and representing it as one's own.

**Academic Integrity: Importance and Impact**

Being at university means engaging with a variety of communities in the pursuit and sharing of knowledge and understanding in ways that are clear, respectful, efficient, and productive. University communities have established norms of academic integrity to ensure responsible, honest, and ethical behavior in the academic work of the university, which is best done when sources of ideas are properly and fully acknowledged and when responsibility for ideas is fully and accurately represented.

In the academic sphere, unacknowledged use of another's work or ideas is not only an offence against the community of scholars and an obstacle to academic productivity. It may also be understood as fraud and may constitute an infringement of legal copyright.

A university is a place for fulfilling one's potential and challenging oneself, and this means rising to

challenges rather than finding ways around them. The achievements in an individual's university studies can only be fairly evaluated quantitatively through true and honest representation of the actual learning done by the student. Equity in assessment for all students is ensured through fair representation of the efforts by each.

Acting with integrity at university constitutes a good set of practices for maintaining integrity in later life. Offences against academic integrity are therefore taken very seriously as part of the university's work in preparing students to serve, lead, and innovate in the world at large.

A university degree is a significant investment of an individual's, and the public's, time, energies, and resources in the future, and habits of academic integrity protect that investment by preserving the university's reputation and ensuring public confidence in higher education.

**Students found guilty of plagiarism will suffer consequences ranging from a grade reduction to failure in the course to expulsion from the university. In addition, a formal letter documenting the offence will be filed in the Provost and Dean's Office, and this record of the offence will be retained in the Provost and Dean's Office for the duration of the student's academic career at Huron University College.**

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com.

Computer-marked multiple-choice tests and/or exams may be subject to submission for similarity review by software that will check for unusual coincidences in answer patterns that may indicate cheating.

Personal Response Systems ("clickers") may be used in some classes. If clickers are to be used in a class, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that the device is activated and functional. Students must see their instructor if they have any concerns about whether the clicker is malfunctioning. Students must use only their own clicker. If clicker records are used to compute a portion of the course grade:

- the use of somebody else's clicker in class constitutes a scholastic offence,
- the possession of a clicker belonging to another student will be interpreted as an attempt to commit a scholastic offence.

### **Policy on Special Needs**

Students who require special accommodation for tests and/or other course components must make the appropriate arrangements with the Student Development Centre (SDC). Further details concerning policies and procedures may be found at:

[http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/?requesting\\_acc](http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/ssd/?requesting_acc)

### **Attendance Regulations for Examinations**

A student is entitled to be examined in courses in which registration is maintained, subject to the following limitations:

- 1) A student may be debarred from writing the final examination for failure to maintain satisfactory academic standing throughout the year.
- 2) Any student who, in the opinion of the instructor, is absent too frequently from class or laboratory periods in any course will be reported to the Provost and Dean of the Faculty offering the course (after due warning has been given). On the recommendation of the Department concerned, and with the

permission of the Provost and Dean of that Faculty, the student will be debarred from taking the regular examination in the course. The Provost and Dean of the Faculty offering the course will communicate that decision to the Provost and Dean of the Faculty of registration.

### **Class Cancellations**

In the event of a cancellation of class, every effort will be made to post that information on the Huron website, <http://www.huronuc.ca/AccessibilityInfo> (“Class Cancellations”).

### **Mental Health @ Western**

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health @ Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

### **Academic Advising**

For advice on course selections, degree requirements, and for assistance with requests for medical accommodation [see above], students should contact an Academic Advisor in Huron’s Student Support Services ([huronsss@uwo.ca](mailto:huronsss@uwo.ca)). An outline of the range of services offered is found on the Huron website at: <http://www.huronuc.ca/CurrentStudents/AcademicAdvisorsandServices>

Department Chairs and Program Directors and Coordinators are also able to answer questions about their individual programs. Their contact information can be found on the Huron website at: <http://www.huronuc.ca/Academics/FacultyofArtsandSocialScience>