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## Syllabus for Metaphysics and Epistemology 250 / 350 ( Year Course )

The word "**metaphysics**" has a humble origin: it comes from a designation by Aristotle's copyists of the lectures which came "after" ( *μετά* ) the "things of nature" ( *τὰ φυσικά* ). "**Epistemology**" is a relatively late coinage, even though it comes from the Greek words *ἐπιστήμη* ( knowledge ) plus *λόγος* ( word, doctrine, system ); most of the pioneering 'epistemologists' we will study would have called themselves something else ( probably just "philosophers" ).

This brief etymology is supposed to provide initial motivation for a fourfold hypothesis ( which embodies my own idiosyncratic views ):

- 1 that what twentieth-century English-speaking academic philosophers call "metaphysics and epistemology" is historically conditioned and (re)constructed;
- 2 that the coverage of "metaphysics and epistemology" is historically ( and de facto ) very broad: philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of physics, philosophy of language and philosophy of mind all recapitulate classical arguments from their parent-fields, again and again ( and often without due awareness or attribution );
- 3 that the most vexed and problematic questions in this traditional dual subject are best interpreted as internal **boundary**-disputes, between its two complementary components ( where do "**metaphysical**" claims -- about "what there is" -- leave off, and "**epistemological**" ones -- about what we **think** or 'know' there is -- begin? Is adjudication of such questions itself a **metaphysical** or **epistemological** issue ); and finally,
- 4 that these and other problems posed implicitly and explicitly in 'classical' and contemporary texts are often contrived, but sometimes very deep, and not amenable to 'solutions'; for want of them, I believe, we keep begging the same questions in different specialized sublanguages and notations, and moving the loci of the **petitiones** around, to avoid prima facie refutations.

Alfred Hitchcock once remarked that all his movies had something in them he called "**The McGuffin**," something he rendered cleverly inconspicuous, which would render the plot straightforward to viewers who recognized it. The begged assumptions(s) in 4 are philosophers' McGuffins, I think. If you get into their textual plots, it can be fun to try to find them ( there may be many ). Once you do, however, you will probably want to rent another movie. But it is sometimes also fun to replay an old philosophical film, to refresh your memory, and look for nuances you missed before ( there may be many of these too ).

Unfortunately, this outlet must also impose a peculiar requirement that you write **reviews** of the tapes you rent ( or buy ).

I will base your marks primarily on two shorter ( 4-6 page ) papers and one longer one ( 8-12 pages ) each term. The longer ones will serve in principle as replacements for term-final exams, but I will also be glad to set in-class final examinations, should any of you prefer this.

Secondarily, I will also provide a premium ( redeemable with gratitude in borderline cases ) for steady class-attendance, and

for willingness to offer opinions about the texts, which I hope you will read, or at least glance over, before each class. The point is not to vet you for cleverness, or overreward conversational performance-artists. I simply want to avoid the ( utterly wretched ) role of politely-ignored philosophical talking head.

The paperbacks required for the course are listed below in rough chronological order, the order in which we will study them ( a rapid two-weeks-plus per text ). We will begin the fall with selections from Plato's epistemological writings, and finish at the end of the academic year with

5 some of Wittgenstein's exasperated ( and self-referential? ) suggestions that most of 'first philosophy' is ( literally ) just talk; followed by

6 more recent feminist assertions that ambitious metaphysical and epistemological claims are little more than male intellectuals' head- and power-trips.

A vous de décider.

### Texts

#### First Term

- 1 Plato's Epistemology, Humanities ( Kinko's )
- 2 A New Aristotle Reader, Princeton
- 3 Medieval Philosophy, Free Press
- 4 Descartes, Meditations, Notre Dame
- 5 Leibniz, Philosophical Essays, Hackett
- 6 Spinoza, Ethics, Hackett

#### Second Term

- 7 Berkeley, Philosophical Works, Everyman
- 8 Hume, Enquiries, Oxford
- 9 Kant, Prolegomena, Hackett
- 10 Wittgenstein, Tractatus, Routledge
- 11 Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations
- 12 Garry and Pearsall, eds., Women, Knowledge and Reality, Unwin and Hyman