

Ignorance, Power, and Politics: Perspectives from Feminist and Political Epistemology



SYLLABUS

VU Amsterdam Summer School

July 2024



Any general questions for the Summer School support team? Contact amsterdamsummerschool@vu.nl.

Course Details

Title	Ignorance, Power, and Politics: Perspectives from Feminist and Political Epistemology
Coordinator(s)	Solmu Anttila, Sonja Riegler
Other lecturers	
Study credits	2 ECTS
Form(s) of tuition	On campus,
Approximate contact hours	32,5
Approximate self-study hours	23,5

Teaching staff (in order of appearance)

Solmu Anttila, Sonja Riegler

Course description

This course provides a comprehensive introduction to the philosophy of ignorance, one of the fastest growing subdisciplines of philosophy. In the course, we discuss and learn about the significance of ignorance in politics and in connection to issues of social power. We will utilise especially political and feminist epistemology, though all perspectives are welcome. This course prepares the participants with a foundation to do philosophical research on these topics.

The course is structured into four parts. 1) The first part of the course provides an overview of current classificational debates on ignorance in traditional, social, political, and feminist epistemology. 2) The second part of the course investigates normative dimensions of ignorance: When is ignorance repressive? Are there potential positive, liberatory forms of ignorance? 3) The third part of the course addresses questions regarding ignorance, culpability, and responsibility: when are we culpable for our ignorance, and when are we not? 4) The fourth part of the course applies the previous three parts to specific cases of science scepticism and ignorance in social media environments.

Key questions

- What is ignorance?
- What are the social and political dimensions of ignorance?

- Is ignorance always oppressive? If so, why? and if not, when not?
- Does ignorance have positive aspects/functions? Can ignorance fulfil liberatory goals?
- When is an agent culpably ignorant of their actions, meaning when is ignorance itself blameworthy?
- How can we identify and combat complex cases of ignorance in science scepticism and social media deception?

Learning objectives

Grasp of synthesising various philosophical traditions described above and their argumentation styles

Assignments and Assessment

Students will not hand in essays or take a final exam, but will be required to keep a "research diary" in which they discuss what they have learned, the questions that interest them, what they do not understand, what they think about the readings and course content, and connections they make between the readings, real-world issues and events, and their own experiences. We stress that students should try their best to connect issues discussed in the course to their own lives as material to cover in the research diary. This research diary serves as 40% of the students' grades, and is evaluated on the level of its engagement with the course material. At the end of the summer school, students will get the chance to present and discuss the content of their research diaries. In the presentation, students should raise the most interesting questions, connections, and applications that they raised in their research diary, and how they might develop their thoughts in possible future research projects. The presentation of the research diary comprises 30% of the students' grades. Students are expected to actively participate in in-class discussion. Participation and attendance comprise 30% of the students' grades. Though students are expected to attend all meetings, a minimum of 80% attendance is a requirement to pass the course.

Provisional reading list

1) What is ignorance?

Day 1

El Kassar, Nadja (2018): "What Ignorance Really Is. Examining the Foundation of Epistemology of Ignorance", in: *Social Epistemology*, 32:5, 300-3

McGoey, L. (2012). The logic of strategic ignorance. *The British journal of sociology*, 63(3), 533-576.

Day 2

Alcoff Martin, Linda (2007): "Epistemologies of Ignorance". In: *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. Sullivan, Shannon and Tuana, Nancy (Eds.). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Mills, Charles (2007): "White Ignorance". In: *Race and Epistemologies of Resistance*. Sullivan, Shannon and Tuana, Nancy (Eds.). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Day 3

II) The Normative Dimensions of Ignorance - Ignorance and Epistemic Oppression

Dotson, Kristie (2011): "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing", in: *Hypatia* 26:2, 236-257

Dotson, K. (2014). Conceptualizing epistemic oppression. *Social Epistemology*, 28(2), 115-138.

Fricker, M., Peels, R., & Blaauw, M. (2016). Epistemic injustice and the preservation of ignorance. *The epistemic dimensions of ignorance*, 160-177.

Day 4

III) Ignorance, Responsibility, and Culpability

Ch. 4 Medina, José (2013): *The Epistemology of Resistance*. New York: Oxford University

Kevin Lynch (2016): "Willful Ignorance and Self-deception", In: *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, Vol 173, 505-523

Day 5

IV) Applied cases: Industry, Science, and Epistemic Bubbles

Tuana, N. (2004). Coming to understand: Orgasm and the epistemology of ignorance. *Hypatia*, 19(1), 194-232.

Oreskes, N., & Conway, E. M. (2008). Challenging knowledge: How climate science became a victim of the cold war. In Proctor R. & Schiebinger, L (eds.). *Agnotology: The making and unmaking of ignorance*. Stanford University Press: Stanford.

Course Schedule

Monday, Day 1: 10–15

Tuesday, Day 2: 10–17

Wednesday, Day 3: 10–12.30

Thursday, Day 4: 10–17

Friday, Day 5: 10–15

