Knowledge is the kind of thing we can recognize when we see it, but whose true nature is hard to pin down. Someone who believes something that happens to be true by a lucky guess, or for the wrong reasons, doesn’t know that thing. Epistemology is the study of issues having to do with knowledge. What kinds of facts make the difference between someone who does know something and someone who just has a true belief about it? What kinds of things can we have knowledge of? How does that work? How can we be sure that we know anything at all – after all, we could be in the position of a person in “The Matrix” or a similar virtual reality machine, and we would have no way to know.

In this course, we will study classical and contemporary philosophical discussions of these kinds of epistemological issues. The class will be a combination of lecture and discussion, and all students will be expected to contribute. You will learn about philosophical concepts and methods in both writing and in discussion. In-class discussions will be conducted with respect and a mutual interest in solving these problems, so that all views will be open to thoughtful criticism. Students will be tested on how well they have learned the views and arguments of the authors studied, and they will also formulate their own original arguments for their own positions.