

PHILOSOPHY 350: EPISTEMOLOGY

Version of September 14, 2016 (UPDATED SCHEDULE)

Course Number: 350
Time: TR 1:10-2:25
Location: CLA 305
Instructor: Thomas Blanchard
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Office Hours: Tuesday 3-5
Wednesday 12-1 and 4-5
Thursday 9:30-10:30
and by appointment
Location: CLA Room 128

1. Course Description and Objectives

Epistemology is the systematic study of the nature, scope and limitations of human knowledge. In this course, we will look at traditional (and less traditional) questions and topics about knowledge, mostly through the lens of contemporary analytic epistemology.

The course is roughly divided in two parts. In the first eleven weeks of the class, we will mostly concentrate on the most central and traditional topics in epistemology. These topics include (but are not limited to): How do we know (and *do* we know) that we are not dreaming right now, or that we are not brains in a vat? What is the right definition of knowledge? Are there 'basic' beliefs on which all other beliefs are based?

In the last four weeks of the class, we will look at two relatively new topics in epistemology. First we will look at *experimental epistemology* and the challenge it raises for the traditional methodology of analytic epistemology. Second, we will look at a range of topics in *social epistemology*, which aims to expand the scope of analytic epistemology by studying how our social nature affects what we can know and the political implications of our epistemic practices.

The first goal of this class is to make you familiar with the most important ideas and theories in epistemology, which have played a central role in philosophy in the last 50 years. A second goal is to help you hone your philosophical skills by making you read and discuss challenging philosophical texts. My third goal is to help you develop your ability to write clear and persuasive philosophical papers.

2. Prerequisites and General Requirements Met

The prerequisite for this class is the prior completion of at least one course in philosophy or consent of the instructor. If you haven't previously completed at least one philosophy course please come see me as soon as possible and we will talk about whether this class is right for you. This class fulfills the Writing requirement.

3. Book

We will use the following anthology:

Sosa, E., Kim, J., Fantl, J. and M. McGrath (2008). *Epistemology: An Anthology*. 2nd edition. Wiley-Blackwell. ISBN-13: 9781405169660

If you buy the book used on Amazon or elsewhere, make sure that the edition you buy contains all the readings we will do during the class.

We will also read and discuss a few texts that are not in the anthology. Those texts will be posted on Moodle.

4. Attendance Policy

The official attendance policy for this class is that attendance is mandatory. However, I will excuse four absences without penalty. More than four absences will negatively impact your course grade. A fifth absence will lower your grade by three percent, a sixth absence will lower your grade by six percent, a seventh absence will lower your grade by ten percent, and eight absences or more will likely result in a failing grade. Please come to classes on time. If you are late repeatedly, I may count this as an unexcused absence.

5. Grading Breakdown

The grade breakdown for this class is as follows:

Preparation and Participation:	10% of the grade
Discussion Questions:	10% of the grade
First Paper:	15% of the grade
Second Paper:	25% of the grade
Third Paper	25% of the grade
Peer Review	15% of the grade

Explanation of grades (from IWU's Catalog):

A, A-:	Credit for work of superior quality.
B+, B, B-:	Credit for work of good to very good quality.
C+, C:	Credit for work of acceptable but not distinguished quality.
C-:	Credit for work of marginal quality.
D:	Credit for work of poor quality.
F:	Failure.

Grading scale: 94-100 = A, 90-93 = A-, 87-89 = B+, 83-86 = B, 80-82 = B-, 77-79 = C+, 73-76 = C, 70-72 = C-, 60-69 = D, 0-59: F

The remainder of this section is an explanation of each component of the grade.

a) Preparation and Participation

Active participation is especially important in philosophy, more so than in other domains. Philosophical problems are best understood by actively thinking about them. As a result philosophy is best learnt by practicing it, which involves actively participating to the class. Participation has two main components. First, it involves participating to discussions involving the class as a whole, i.e. raising and answering questions about the readings and the topic of discussion. Second, we will do various small-group activities during the class, and I will monitor your participation to these activities. (Note that if you come to my office hours to discuss readings or papers, this will also count toward your participation grade.)

b) Discussion Questions

For almost every session, I will ask each of you to post one discussion question about the readings for that session. In your discussion question you can raise questions about a part of the paper that you don't understand, an argument that you have trouble following, an example which you think is flawed, and so on. You can also raise objections against the author's thesis or one of the arguments presented in the paper.

For each session, I will create a discussion thread on the Moodle page for this class. You can post your discussion questions there. Discussion questions should be posted by the end of the day preceding the session. I won't accept late discussion questions. You can miss up to three discussion questions without penalty.

c) Papers and Peer Review

You will write three papers in this class. The first paper will be a short one (about 3 pages double-spaced), and will be a response to a prompt given during the first weeks of the semester. The first paper will be due on **September 22**. The second and third papers should be at least 7 pages long (double-spaced). Those papers will be on topics of your choosing, although I will suggest possible paper topics. Before you start writing the first draft of the paper you should make sure to get my approval regarding your paper topic.

The process for the second and third papers will be as follows:

- You will write a **first draft** (at least 5 pages double-spaced).
- I will distribute your draft to two students who will be in charge of **reviewing** your paper.
- Each reviewer will write comments on your first draft (at least 2 pages long, double-spaced).
- Using this feedback, you will then write the **final version** of the paper (at least 7 pages long, double-spaced).

You will be graded in part on how well you have taken into account your reviewers' comments in writing your paper. Each of you will review four papers total (2 second papers and 2 final papers), and you will be graded on the quality of your peer reviews (15% of your total grade). The peer review process will be double-blind (the identity of the author will be unknown to your reviewers, and you will not know who your reviewers are).

Guidelines for peer review: Peer reviews should be substantive comments about the paper you are reviewing. In particular, they should address more than grammar and spelling; they should also address the content of the paper and how well the main thesis is supported by the author's argument. Don't hesitate to point out defects or problems with the paper! You will thereby do your fellow student a favor, by helping them make their final draft as good as possible. A good

rule of thumb for peer reviewing is to ask yourself why the paper you are reading is less than perfect and how it might be improved to make it perfect.

Important deadlines:

- You should send the **first draft** of the second paper to me by the end of the day **October 17**. I will then email the draft to your reviewers.
- **Peer reviews** should be emailed to me by **October 26**. I will then forward the reviews to the author.
- The **final draft** of the second paper is due by the end of the day on **November 3**.
- You should send the **first draft** of the third paper to me on **November 29**. I will then email the draft to your reviewers.
- **Peer reviews** should be emailed to me on **December 7**.
- The **final draft** of the third paper is due on **December 14**.

I will not accept any late work except for final versions of the papers. Late final versions will be penalized as follows. For each day late, I will deduct 1/3 of a letter grade from your paper grade. So an A paper would for instance become an A- paper after one day late, starting after the beginning of class on the due date.

6. Academic Integrity

I expect you to be familiar with IWU's Statement on Plagiarism, which can be found on the course webpage. It defines plagiarism as 'the intentional or inadvertent misrepresentation as one's own, the words, ideas, research data, formulae or artistic creations of another individual or collective body, without giving credit to the originator(s) of those words, ideas, data, formulae or artistic creations.' **Plagiarism is strictly prohibited.**

7. Disability Accommodation

If you have a disability, please come see me at the end of this class. We will discuss possible accommodations to help you get the most out of this class.

8. Schedule of Topics and Readings (UPDATED 09/15/16)

N. B. Readings in the anthology are indicated by 'SK'; readings on the course website are indicated by 'Moodle'.

Date	Topics and Assignments	Readings
Week 1	SKEPTICISM	
08.30	Introduction	No readings
09.01	Descartes and the Skeptical Challenge	Descartes , <i>Meditations</i> I and II (Moodle) Stroud , 'The Problem of the External World', pp. 7-11 (SK)

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Week 2	SKEPTICISM	
09.06	Descartes and the Skeptical Challenge	Stroud , 'The Problem of the External World', pp. 12-25 (SK)
09.08	Descartes and the Skeptical Challenge	No new readings
Week 3	SKEPTICISM	
09.13	Descartes and the Skeptical Challenge	No new readings
09.15	Moore's Response to Skepticism	Moore , 'Proof of an External World', 'Certainty' (SK) Soames , 'Moore on Skepticism, Perception and Knowledge' (Moodle)
Week 4	SKEPTICISM	
09.20	Inference to the Best Explanation as a Response to Skepticism	Vogel , 'The Refutation of Skepticism' (Moodle)
09.22	Closure and Skepticism First Paper Due	Nozick , 'Knowledge and Skepticism' (SK)
Week 5	OTHER THREATS TO KNOWLEDGE	
09.27	Disagreement	Feldman , 'Reasonable Religious Disagreements' (Moodle)
09.29	Bias and Irrelevant Influences	Vavova , 'Irrelevant Influences'
Week 6	THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE	
10.04	The Gettier Problem	Gettier , 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' (SK) Harman, ' <i>Thought</i> (Selections)' (SK)

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10.06	The Gettier Problem II	Goldman , 'A Causal Theory of Knowing' (Moodle)
Week 7	NATURE/STRUCTURE OF KNOWLEDGE	
10.11	Can We Solve the Gettier Problem?	Zagzebski , 'The Inescapability of Gettier Problems' (SK)
10.13	The Regress Problem and Foundationalism,	Sosa , 'The Raft and the Pyramid', pp. 145-7 (SK) Feldman , 'Selections from <i>Epistemology</i> ' (Moodle)
Week 8	THE STRUCTURE OF KNOWLEDGE	
10.18	First draft of second paper due on Oct 17 Foundationalism vs. Coherentism	BonJour , 'Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?' (SK)
10.20	Foundationalism vs. Coherentism	BonJour , 'The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism' (Moodle)
Week 9	INTERNALIST AND EXTERNALIST THEORIES OF JUSTIFICATION	
10.25	Evidentialism	Feldman and Conee , Evidentialism (SK)
10.27	Peer reviews due on October 26 Second Paper Meetings	No readings
Week 10	INTERNALIST AND EXTERNALIST THEORIES OF JUSTIFICATION	
11.01	Reliabilism	Goldman , 'What is Justified Belief?' (SK)
11.03	Final draft of second paper due Problems for Externalism	BonJour , 'Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge' (SK)
Week 11	INTERNALISM AND EXTERNALISM/EXPERIMENTAL EPISTEMOLOGY	

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11.08	Problems for Internalism	Goldman , 'Internalism Exposed' (SK)
11.10	Experimental Philosophy and the Challenge to Traditional Analytic Epistemology	Weinberg et al. , 'Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions' (SK)
Week 12	SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY	
11.15	Testimony	Fricker , 'Against Gullibility' (SK)
11.17	Epistemic Injustice	Fricker , 'Selections from <i>Epistemic Injustice</i> ' (Moodle)
Week 13	SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY	
11.22	Epistemic Injustice	No new readings
11.24	No class (Thanksgiving break)	
Week 14	SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY	
11.29	Testimony and Moral Knowledge, First draft of third paper due	Hills , 'Moral Testimony and Moral Epistemology' (Moodle)
12.01	The Epistemology of Democracy	Anderson , 'The Epistemology of Democracy' (Moodle)
Week 15	SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY	
12.06	Epistemology of Institutional Systems, Peer reviews due on 12.07	Fallis , 'Wikipistemology' (Moodle)
12.08	Third Paper Meetings	No readings
	Final draft of third paper due Dec 14	