

Topics in Epistemology

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Place & Time: TBD
Office Hours: TBD

Course Description: We know that what we see exists, that we are awake and not dreaming, that it is unlikely we will win the lottery, and that we have hands. Or do we? Much of what we take ourselves to know turns out to be surprisingly hard to defend once we press on it. In this advanced introduction to epistemology, we will discover why it is difficult to defend the truth of these commonsense claims.

The course is organized into three units, each built around a central question. The first unit asks whether we can refute the skeptic who claims that we know nothing at all. Here we will survey the difficulties that stand in the way of defining knowledge and of establishing that we are awake and not dreaming.

The second unit supposes that we do know something and asks how knowing *that* something is the case relates to knowing *how* to do something. Some philosophers hold that knowing how to ride a bike just is a matter of knowing that a certain way of proceeding is a way to ride a bike. Others deny this and treat know-how as a distinct capacity that no amount of know-that can capture. You will decide who has the better case.

The third unit asks whether we should trust the testimony of others to transmit knowledge to us. We will find that the transmission of knowledge through testimony raises several problems that affect our daily lives. Sometimes we wrongly discount the knowledge of certain individuals because of their social identity. Other times we should defer to individuals on certain topics because of theirs. And often we must decide whether a news outlet's word is enough for us to come to know.

By the end of the course, you may still believe you are awake and not dreaming, but you will no longer take the belief for granted.

Learning Objectives: By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- (1) grasp the central concepts and arguments introduced during the course;
- (2) read primary texts in epistemology critically by evaluating their arguments systematically;
- (3) state and reconstruct new arguments in epistemology on the topic of knowledge;
- (4) write a paper with a precise structure that succinctly defends a specific thesis by identifying its weaknesses and strengths;
- (5) engage with a hard problem substantively, in writing and in speech, so that the skills they develop in clear writing and eloquent speaking can generalize to other domains.

Assessment: Your grade comes from five components.

1. *Participation*: 10 points of your course grade. Your participation grade is conditional on two factors. The first is *attendance*: to earn full marks for this portion, you must attend all classes during the semester, with up to two absences permitted. Additional exceptions are granted on a case-by-case basis. The second is *contribution*: participation in class, and especially in discussion with your peers, is strongly encouraged. I understand, however, that some students may prefer not to speak in class. In those cases, you should send me a question about a specific part of the readings at least 24 hours before the class meeting.

2. *Argument Responses*: 20 points of your course grade. Almost every week we will discuss two arguments in class. There will be seven argument responses, one every two weeks. In each, I will ask you to restate schematically, in premise-conclusion form, one of the arguments discussed the previous week, and to present an objection and a reply. You need not explain the argument in full, but you must explain everything necessary to make the objection and reply intelligible. You may draw directly on our class discussion or develop your own response. Each argument response is closed-book and should take approximately 20 minutes in class. We will discuss a mock answer to an argument before the first argument response comes around.

3. *Outline*: 10 points of your course grade. By the end of Week 8, you will submit an outline of your final paper. You are encouraged to submit the outline as soon as you have a clear idea. The outline should lay out the paper's main argument together with a sketch of the main objections and replies you anticipate. The word limit is 1000 words. We will discuss the guidelines for how to write a philosophical outline before the assignment is due.

4. *Final Paper*: 25 points of your course grade. The final paper should adequately define a well-posed thesis and, in addition, present a substantial objection and a satisfactory reply. We will discuss the guidelines for how to write a philosophical paper before the assignment is due.

5. *Final Exams*: 35 points of your course grade. There are two final exams of equal weight.

- a. A written, closed-book exam in which you will complete a task similar to the argument responses, but more advanced, covering six arguments. You will reproduce the analysis done in class and, in addition, provide a full explanation of each argument beforehand.
- b. An oral exam on your final paper, in which I will ask you questions about its content, including objections and suggestions for improvement.

Further details on the scheduling of both exams will be provided later in the semester.

Schedule: below, you can find the plan for the semester. I marked optional readings with ‘*’.

Unit I: Knowledge and Skeptical Threats

Week 1, Epistemological Origins: Three Accounts of Knowledge

Plato, excerpts 151d–e, 163a–168c, 186c–187d, 200d–201c, 201d, from *Theaetetus*.
Perception True Opinion ... with an Account

Sophie-Grace Chappell and Francesco Verde, Sections 6.1, 6.3, 7.6, and 8 from the SEP entry *Plato on Knowledge in the Theaetetus*.

Week 2, Knowledge as Justified True Belief

Edmund Gettier, *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?*.

Michael Clark, *Knowledge and Grounds: A Comment on Mr. Gettier's Paper*.

*Julien Dutant, *The Legend of the Justified True Belief Analysis*.

Week 3, The Problem of Skepticism

René Descartes, *Meditation I: Of the Things of Which We May Doubt*.

Barry Stroud, Chapter 1 of *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*.

Week 4, Skepticism and Closure

Robert Nozick, Chapter 10 from *Philosophical Explanations*.

Jonathan Vogel, *Are There Counterexamples to the Closure Principle?*.

Week 5, Lotteries and Closure

John Hawthorne, Chapter 1 of *Knowledge and Lotteries*.

Unit II: Knowledge That and Knowledge How

Week 6, Anti-Intellectualism

Lewis Carroll, *What the Tortoise Said to Achilles*.

Gilbert Ryle, *Knowing How and Knowing That: The Presidential Address*.

Carlotta Pavese, Sections 1 and 2 from the SEP entry *Knowledge How*.

Week 7, Intellectualism: The Linguistic Strategy

Jason Stanley, *Knowing (How)*.

Andreas Ditter, *Why Intellectualism Still Fails*.

Week 8, Intellectualism: The Skill Strategy

Carlotta Pavese, *Knowing a Rule*.

J. Adam Carter & Bolesław Czarnecki, Section 3 of *(Anti-)Anti-Intellectualism and the Sufficiency Thesis*.

Week 9, The Role of Memory

Charles Wallis, Sections 1–5 from *Consciousness, Context, and Know-How*.

Felipe De Brigard, *Know-How, Intellectualism, and Memory Systems*.

Unit III: Knowledge in the Social World

Week 10, Epistemic Injustice

Jennifer Lackey, *Knowing from Testimony*.

Miranda Fricker, Chapter 1 of *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*.

Week 11, Socializing Justification

Laurence Bonjour, *Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge*.

Amia Srinivasan, *Radical Externalism*.

Week 12, Standpoint Epistemology

Michael Hannon, *Social Identity, Understanding, and Deference*.

Catharine Saint-Croix, *Zetetic and Epistemic Deference in Standpoint Epistemology*.

*Arianna Falbo, *The Zetetic*.

Week 13, Fake News

Harry Frankfurt, Chapter 10 of *On Bullshit*.

Regina Rini, *Fake News and Partisan Epistemology*.

Week 14, Epistemic Bubbles and AI

C. Thi Nguyen, *Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles*.

Mark Coeckelbergh, *AI and Epistemic Agency: How AI Influences Belief Revision and Its Normative Implications*.