

Philosophy 419: Epistemology

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Office Hours: Tuesday 8:50-9:50, Thursday 8:50-9:50

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Course Location and Time: LEA 110, Tuesday & Thursday 10:00-11:30

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a survey of central issues in contemporary epistemology and offers a comprehensive overview of both classical and present-day topics in analytic epistemology. It is divided into four substantive units (not including the introductory material covered in the first week):

- Unit 1. Knowledge and Scepticism
- Unit 2. The Semantics of 'Knowledge'-Ascriptions
- Unit 3. Evidence and Justification
- Unit 4. Further Topics (induction and *a priori* knowledge)

Typically, we will spend 2-3 weeks on any given unit. We will begin with a general introduction to epistemology as a philosophical discipline and consider Gettier's famous counterexamples to the view that knowledge is justified true belief. In Unit 1 we will then discuss revised analyses of knowledge (causal and counterfactual analyses) and the problem of scepticism (Do you know that you are reading these lines, given that you might be merely dreaming?). In Unit 2 we turn our attention to more recent epistemological issues and study the semantics of 'knowledge'-ascriptions. In this unit we will discuss the view that the predicate 'knows *p*' changes its content with the ascriber's context (epistemic contextualism) and the view that knowledge is sensitive to the subject's context (subject-sensitive invariantism). Unit 3 is then concerned with evidence and justification and the relationship between the two, while Unit 4 is devoted to 'Further Topics'—in particular to the topics of internalism and the problem of induction.

REQUIREMENTS

Students who take this course must ***complete readings on time*** and must ***participate in class***. Students are expected to have their texts with them at each class, and students may be called upon at random to discuss or explain parts of the week's readings. Moreover, students must prepare and hand in ***at least two general questions about the reading each week***. Warning: this ***course will move rather quickly***, so students must take care not to fall behind. The course presupposes knowledge of sentential ***logic*** and first order predicate logic (Prerequisite: Introduction to Deductive Logic 1). Knowledge of ***probability theory*** is desirable but not necessary.

FORMAT

There will be two lectures per week, although as much as possible will be devoted to discussion. Normally, the first class of each week will involve a presentation of the relevant literature and the second will consist of discussions in small 'tutorial groups'. Students are required to ***prepare short presentations*** for their tutorial groups. Moreover, students must submit ***at least two general questions about the reading by Wednesday noon each week***.

ASSESSMENT

There will be one mid term exam, which will be 40% of the total mark, and a final essay, which will be 60% of the total mark. Late papers will be downgraded at a rate of 1/3 of a grade per day (e.g. from A- to B+, C to C-), including weekend days/holidays. Evidence of a consistent lack of preparation (including non-attendance without a medical excuse) results in a deduction of up to 5% from the course grade. Requests for extensions will be considered (but not automatically granted) only when requested at least 24 hours before the paper is due and substantiated at the time of request by a doctor's note documenting illness. Extensions will not be more than seven days. Failure to hand in two questions about the week's reading by Wednesday noon of any given week may lead to 1.5% downgrading of the final course grade per week. Class participation will not be formally graded, but enthusiastic and well-informed participation will be taken into account in borderline cases.

Students are urged to read Jim Pryor's excellent guidelines on how to read and write philosophy: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html> and <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

WEBCT

The webpage for this course is located at <http://www.mcgill.ca/webct/>. It will be used to post the syllabus, readings, and periodic announcements. There is also a discussion function, and you are encouraged to post questions there. I will check regularly and respond to questions. Please feel encouraged to answer each other's questions and to discuss actively on WebCT! You must check the course webpage regularly. If you have technical problems with WebCT, contact ICT customer support at: <http://www.mcgill.ca/mycourses/students/help/>.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures.

(see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/) for more information). NB: In cases of doubt I will use the turnitin plagiarism detection software to determine whether submissions are plagiarized.

TEXTBOOKS

This course does not use a textbook, but many of the articles to be read can be found in the following anthology (henceforth 'Bernecker and Dretske (2000)'):

- Bernecker, S. and Dretske, F. (eds.), *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology* (OUP, 2000).

For useful introductory reading see the following textbooks and always read up on the topics discussed in class on the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

- Dancy, J., *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* (Blackwell, 1985).
- Everitt, N. and Fisher, A., *Modern Epistemology* (McGraw-Hill, 1994).
- Also *always* look at the [Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) and the [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) for the topics we discuss.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

N.B. Readings given under a particular week are the readings that apply to that week of classes. Students are expected to have completed **all** of the readings before the Tuesday class (with the exception of 1st week, in which reading is to be completed before the Thursday class).

Date	Topic	Assigned Readings
Unit 0: Introduction		
week 0	Introduction A	No reading.
1 st week (07. & 09. Sept)	Introduction B <i>Q: Is knowledge justified true belief?</i>	- Bernecker, S. and Dretske, F., 'Justified True Belief', in: Bernecker & Dretske 2000: 3-6. - Ayer, A.J., 'Knowing as Having the Right to Be Sure', in: Bernecker & Dretske 2000: 7-12. - Gettier, E. L., 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', <i>Analysis</i> 23 (1963), 121-123. Reprinted in Bernecker & Dretske 2000: 13-15. - Feldman, F., 'An Alleged Defect in Gettier Counter-Examples', <i>Australasian Journal of Philosophy</i> 52 (1974), 68-69. Reprinted in Bernecker & Dretske 2000.
Unit 1: Knowledge and Scepticism		
2 nd week (14. & 16. Sept)	Causal and Reliabilist Theories of Knowledge	- Goldman, A., 'A Causal Theory of Knowing', <i>Journal of Philosophy</i> 64 (1967), 357-372. Reprinted in Bernecker & Dretske 2000. - Armstrong, D., <i>Belief, Truth and Knowledge</i> (CUP, 1973), pp. 162-83. Reprinted as 'The Thermometer Model of Knowledge', in Bernecker & Dretske 2000.
3 rd week (21. & 23. Sept)	Counterfactual Theories <i>Q: Can knowledge be analysed in terms of Nozick's notion of truth-tracking?</i>	- Nozick, R., <i>Philosophical Explanations</i> (Harvard University Press, 1981), 167-78. Excerpts reprinted in Bernecker & Dretske 2000. - BonJour, L., 'Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge', <i>Midwest Studies in Philosophy</i> 5 (1980): 53-73. Reprinted in Bernecker and Dretske 2000. - Williamson, T., <i>Knowledge and Its Limits</i>, ch. I.3, esp. pp 31-33.
4 th week (28. & 30. Sept)	Scepticism <i>Do you know that you have hands? Do you know that you're not a brain in a vat? Do sceptical arguments make unreasonable demands on knowledge?</i>	- Descartes, R. (1641), Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation I, Sections 1-8. (pp. 1-2 in Bennett's edition). - Moore, G. E., 'Proof of an External World', <i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i> 25 (1946). Reprinted in Huemer (ed.) and in Moore's <i>Philosophical Papers</i> (Allen & Unwin 1959), 127-50. - Unger, P., 'A Defense of Skepticism' <i>The Philosophical Review</i> 80 (1971): pp. 198-219. Reprinted in Bernecker & Dretske 2000.
Unit 2: The Semantics of 'Knowledge'-Ascriptions		
5 th week (05. & 07. Oct)	Epistemic Contextualism <i>Q: Is the predicate 'know' context-sensitive? Can contextualism resolve sceptical puzzles?</i>	- Lewis, D., 'Elusive Knowledge', <i>Australasian Journal of Philosophy</i> 74 (1996): 549-67. Reprinted in Lewis's <i>Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology</i> (CUP, 1999), in Bernecker and Dretske 2000. - Schiffer, S., 'Contextualist Solutions to Scepticism', <i>Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society</i> 96 (1996): 317-333.
6 th week (12. & 14. Oct)	Subject-Sensitive Invariantism	Stanley, J., <i>Knowledge and Practical Interests</i>, Oxford: OUP, 2006, chs. 5-6.

	<i>Q: Do one's practical interests influence what one knows?</i>	- Hawthorne, J., <i>Knowledge and Lotteries</i>, Oxford: OUP, 2003, ch. 4. - DeRose, K., 'The Problem with Subject-Sensitive Invariantism', in: <i>Philosophy and Phenomenological Research</i> 68(2) (2004), pp. 346-350.
7 th week (19. & 21. Oct)	Revision & Midterm Exam	no reading
21. Oct. 10-11:30 am: <i>MIDTERM EXAMINATION</i>		
Unit 3: Evidence and Justification		
8 th week (26. & 28. Oct)	Coherentism and Foundationalism <i>Q: Must knowledge have infallible foundations? Must it have any sort of foundation?</i>	- Price, H.H., <i>Perception</i>, London: Methuen, 1950. Relevant passages reprinted as 'The Given' in Bernecker and Dretske 2000. - Chisholm, R.M., 'The Directly Evident'. Reprinted in Bernecker and Dretske 2000. - Sellars, W., 'Does Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?' Reprinted in Bernecker and Dretske 2000.
9 th week (02. & 04. Nov)	Evidence as Knowledge <i>Q: Does E=K? What could one's evidence be if not one's knowledge?</i>	- Feldman, R. and Conee, E., 'Evidentialism', in: <i>Philosophical Studies</i> 48(1985): 15-34. - Williamson, T., Knowledge and Its Limits, Oxford: OUP, 2000, ch. 9 – 'Evidence'.
10 th week (09. & 11. Nov)	Essay Consultation	no reading
11 th week (16. & 18. Nov)	Revision / Group Presentations	no reading
Unit 4: Further Topics		
12 th week (23. & 25. Nov.)	Reliabilism, Internalism and Proper Basing <i>Q: What does it mean for a belief to be based on a reason? Is the basing relation epistemologically significant?</i>	- Goldman, A., 'What is Justified Belief?', in: Pappas, G. (ed), <i>Justification and Knowledge</i>, Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979. - Korcz, K.A., 'Recent Work on the Basing Relation', in: <i>The American Philosophical Quarterly</i> 34(2) (1997): 171-191.
13 th week (30. Nov & 02. Dec)	Induction <i>Q: Must we justify our inductive practices? If so, why? And how can we?</i>	- Hume, D. (1748), A Treatise of Human Nature, Book 1, Part III, esp. §§11-14. - Russell, B., The Problems of Philosophy (OUP, 1959), ch. 6, pp. 60-69. Reprinted in Bernecker and Dretske 2000. - Reichenbach, H., 'The Pragmatic Justification of Induction', reprinted in Bernecker and Dretske 2000. - Goodman, N., <i>Fact, Fiction and Forecast</i> (Harvard UP, 1954), pp. 72-83. Reprinted in Bernecker and Dretske 2000.
02. Dec. 12 noon: <i>ESSAY DEADLINE</i>		

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University's control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.