

# Epistemology

PHIL-UA 76, Summer 2020  
Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays 11:30-1:05

## Course Instructor

Joshua Myers  
Email: joshualmyers@gmail.com

## Course Description

Epistemology is the philosophical study of knowledge and evidence. We will consider questions such as the following: Can we know anything? What is knowledge, and how does it differ from belief? What makes a belief justified? What are the different sources of justification? How do social structures and social identities affect knowledge transmission?

## Course Goals

- (1) Gain an understanding of central issues and positions in contemporary epistemology
- (2) Practice reading and critically evaluating philosophical texts
- (3) Enhance philosophical writing skills
- (4) Develop original viewpoints and evaluate arguments through discussion

## Requirements and Grading

**Active Participation (20%):** One of the best ways to practice doing philosophy is by engaging in discussion and dialogue, and by working through difficult ideas with your peers. Because of this, I expect students to actively participate each class by asking and answering questions, registering the ideas you are confused about, and engaging with the points raised by your classmates. Attendance also counts towards this portion of your grade. Students automatically receive one excused absence. More than three unexcused absences will result in failing the course.

**Pop Quizzes (5%):** In order for us to have good, engaging class discussions, it is crucial that you read each day's material before class. There will be pop quizzes in class throughout the course. These are here to further incentivize keeping up with the reading, and to help me correct common confusions or misunderstandings as they come up.

**Four Reading Responses (20%):** You will turn in four 1 page reading responses throughout the course, each worth 5% of your grade. You should submit no more than 1 reading response a week (since there are 6 weeks in the course, this means you may take 2 weeks off). Each reading response should focus on one reading from that week and (1) clearly state the main thesis that the author argues for, (2) summarize the argument that the author gives for that thesis, and (3) briefly evaluate the argument by raising an objection, noting any unclarities, or mentioning some of its strengths. Reading responses are due on Sundays at 5pm.

**Midterm Paper (20%):** Students will turn in a 3-4 page paper at the end of the third week of the course. The paper will be on a topic assigned by the instructor.

**Final Paper (35%):** Students will turn in a 5-7 page paper at the end of the course (worth 30%), with an outline due at the end of the fifth week (worth 5%). Your midterm and final paper should not be on the same topic (exceptions to this rule will be granted on a case-by-case basis).

## Reading Schedule

### Week 1: Knowledge and Skepticism

Tuesday 5/26: Feldman "The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge" - Chapter 2 of *Epistemology*

Wednesday 5/27: Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"

Goldman "A Causal Theory of Knowing" (focus on pages 357-368)

Thursday 5/28: Descartes, Meditations 1 and 2 from "Meditations on First Philosophy"

### Week 2: Responses to Skepticism

Monday 6/1: Feldman, "Skepticism (I)" - Chapter 6 of *Epistemology*

Moore, "Proof of an External World"

Tuesday 6/2: Vogel "Cartesian Skepticism and Inference to the Best Explanation"

Wednesday 6/3: Nozick, "Knowledge and Skepticism"

Thursday 6/4: Nozick cont.

### Week 3: The Nature of Justification

Monday 6/8: Huemer, "Foundations and Coherence"

Tuesday 6/9: Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?"

Wednesday 6/10: Feldman and Conee, "Evidentialism"

Thursday 6/11: Feldman and Conee, "Internalism Defended"

*Midterm paper due on Friday 6/12 at 5pm*

### Week 4: Epistemic Normativity

Monday 6/15: Zagzebski, "The Search for the Source of Epistemic Good"

Tuesday 6/16: Feldman, "Voluntary Belief and Epistemic Evaluation"

Wednesday 6/17: Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief"

James, "The Will to Believe"

Thursday 6/18: Kelly, "Epistemic Rationality as Instrumental Rationality: A Critique"

### Week 5: Social Epistemology

Monday 6/22: Kelly, "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement"

Tuesday 6/23: Christensen "Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News"

Wednesday 6/24: Lackey, "Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission"

Thursday 6/25: Fricker, "Epistemic Injustice and a Role for Virtue in the Politics of Knowing"

*Final paper outline due on Friday 6/26 at 5 pm*

### Week 6: Sources of Justification

Monday 6/29: Huemer, "The Problem of Memory Knowledge"

Tuesday 6/30: Schwitzgebel, "The Unreliability of Naïve Introspection"

Wednesday 7/1: Kind, "How Imagination Gives Rise to Knowledge"

Thursday 7/2: Conclusion and Review

*Final paper due on Sunday 7/5 at 5pm and no later than 11:59pm*