

Epistemology

Professor: Christopher Hom
E-mail: christopher.hom@ttu.edu
Website: Blackboard

Office: PHIL 265D
Office Hours: T, Th 2-3:30
Office Phone: 834-8743

Course Description:

Epistemology studies the nature and scope of knowledge. This course will examine the closely related concepts of knowledge, belief, certainty, justification, rationality, inference, and perception, and what (if any) social component is there for these epistemic concepts. The central questions in this course are:

- What is knowledge (as opposed to belief or opinion)?
- Are we capable of knowledge, and to what extent?
- When is it rational to have a particular belief?
- What, if anything, justifies logic, science, and perception as sources of knowledge?
- Should epistemology be a branch of cognitive science?
- What (if any) social component is there to knowledge?
- What is epistemic bias, and how do we overcome it?
- How do epistemic concepts factor into issues about race and gender?

These questions will be asked within a traditional analytic framework, and students will be exposed to the central problems, positions and themes in contemporary epistemology.

Attendance at lectures is mandatory. Your likelihood of failing the class increases substantially with every lecture you miss. If you think you will miss more than three lectures this semester, this is probably not the class for you.

Expected Learning Outcomes:

1. Acquisition of effective, critical thinking/writing skills.
2. Understanding of basic issues in contemporary epistemology.
3. Application of (1-2) in clear, concise written work.

Methods for Assessing the Expected Learning Outcomes:

One short paper, one longer paper, writing workshops for each paper, weekly reading questions, midterm exam, and in-class discussion.

Meeting Time: T, TH 12:30 – 1:50 PM

Location: PHIL 164

Texts: *Epistemology: An Anthology*, E. Sosa, J. Kim, J. Fantl, and M. McGrath, Eds. (2nd edition) [Additional articles on the syllabus (*) will be made available on Blackboard.]

Assignments: One short paper (3-5 page) paper (15%)
 One longer (7-9 page) paper (25%)
 Weekly reading questions (25%)
 Midterm examination (25%)
 Attendance & Course participation (10%)

Course Schedule

(Syllabus subject to revision – ‘*’ readings on Blackboard)

I. Introduction – Descartes’ Project

Lec 1: Introduction (8/30)

Lec 2: Cartesian skepticism (9/1)

Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meds I & II*

Lec 3: Moore’s response (9/6)

Moore, “Proof of the External World”, “Four Forms of Skepticism”,
“Certainty”

Lec 4: Cartesian foundationalism (9/8)

Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meds III – VI* (*suggested*)

II. Justification

Foundationalism

Lec 5: Chisholm, “The Myth of the Given” (9/13)

Lec 6: Bonjour, “Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?” (9/15)

Coherentism

Lec 7: Davidson, “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge” (9/20)

Gettier Problem

Lec 8: Gettier “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” (9/22)

Lec 9: Klein, “A Proposed Definition of Propositional Knowledge” (9/27)

Harman: “Thoughts” (selections)

Internalism vs. Externalism

Lec 10: Goldman, “What is Justified Belief?” (9/29)

Lec 11: Bonjour, “Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge” (10/4)

Lec 12: Goldman, “Internalism Exposed” (10/6)

Lec 13: *Writing Workshop – 1st draft of Paper 1 Due* (10/11)

III. Problems for Knowledge

Skepticism & Dogmatism

Lec 14: Unger, “An Argument for Skepticism”* (10/13)

Contextualism

Lec 15: DeRose, “Solving the Skeptical Problem” (10/18) – **PAPER 1 DUE**

Deductive & Inductive Reasoning

Lec 16: Carroll, “What the Tortoise Said to Achilles”* (10/20)

Goodman, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*, §III-IV*

Lec 17: **MIDTERM EXAM (10/25)**

Perception

Lec 18: Noë, “Is the Visual World a Grand Illusion?”* (10/27)

IV. Social & Cognitive DimensionsNaturalized epistemology (11/1)

Lec 19: Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized”

Kim, “What is ‘Naturalized Epistemology’?”

Issues of Gender & Race

Lec 20: Antony, “Quine as Feminist: The Radical Import of Naturalized Epistemology” (11/3)

Lec 21: Gendler, “On the Epistemic Cost of Implicit Bias”* (11/8)

Lec 22: Steele & Aronson, “Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans”* (11/10)

Lec 23: Leslie, “The Original Sin of Cognition: Fear, Prejudice and Generalization”* (11/15)

Social Epistemology

Lec 24: Goldman, “Foundations of Social Epistemics”* (11/17)

Lec 25: Fricker, “Rational Authority and Social Power: Towards a Truly Social Epistemology”* (11/22)

THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY (11/24)

Lec 26: *Writing Workshop – 1st draft of Paper 2 Due* (11/29)

Lec 27: Nichols, et al., “Metaskepticism: Meditations on Ethno-Epistemology”* (12/1)

Lec 28: Conclusion (12/6) – **PAPER 2 DUE**

General Course Policy

Attendance and Participation (10%)

You are expected to come to class every day having read and understood the assigned material. There is less reading in this course than in most other humanities courses, but you have to read more closely than in other courses. You should plan on rereading sections after lecture to be sure that you have understood the concepts.

Attendance to lectures will be taken each day. **Five or more unexcused absences is grounds for failing the course.**

Reading Questions (25%)

There will be weekly short-answer questions posted to Blackboard that will cover material *prior* to lecture. They will usually be posted on Friday and must be completed before the start of the next Tuesday lecture. Essentially, I want to make sure that you are reading the material carefully and are coming to lecture with a basic understanding of the assigned texts. For more guidance on reading a philosophy paper, you can consult James Pryor's website:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/reading.html>

Papers (15% / 25%)

There will be one short (3-5 page) and one longer (7-9 page) essay. Essay topics will be handed out in class. Topics will generally ask you to explain and argue for different philosophical views from readings and lectures. We will discuss writing philosophy papers in greater detail, but in general I expect a high degree of precision and clarity. Everyone should consult James Pryor's website for his "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper". The link can be found at:

<http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>

Drafts will be due in class prior to the deadline for writing workshops. Failure to submit the first draft on time will result in a *two-thirds of a grade penalty* on the final draft (e.g. 'A-' to a 'B').

Midterm Exam (25%)

The format for the exam is short essay. We will discuss the exam in greater detail as the date approaches.

Students are required to pass every graded component in order to pass the course.

There will be no late papers accepted or alternate exam time without a serious, documented family or medical emergency. Notify Professor Hom within 24 hours of such an emergency, as the situation permits.

Students With Disabilities

Any student who, because of a disabling condition, may require some special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact me as soon as possible so that the necessary accommodations can be made. Students should present appropriate verification from AccessTECH in the Student Counseling Center in West Hall. To preserve confidentiality, you may ask to speak to me in private, or notify me by email.

Academic Integrity

Given the recent rise in cases of academic misconduct, I make it a general policy to refer all such cases to the Dean's office with a recommendation for the fullest sanctions, as well as automatic failure for the course. Please familiarize yourself with TTU's policy on academic integrity and come speak with either me or your TA if you have any questions:

<http://www.depts.ttu.edu/studentjudicialprograms/academicinteg.php#>