

Philosophy 227: Epistemology

Colorado College
Ben Bayer
Fall 2008, Block 1
9:00AM – Noon
Armstrong 225

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Office hours

Office: Armstrong 119
Hours: 1pm to 3pm, Mondays and Wednesdays, or by appointment.

Course description

Since the early modern period a distinctive approach to epistemological questions has emerged, one which focuses in particular on questions about what philosophers now call *justification*, i.e. questions about what is right and wrong in the way of believing. Questions about justification were pressing in the early modern period in part because of recent upheavals in science, but especially because of ongoing religious controversies. This course will survey the rise of modern epistemology and contemporary controversies surrounding its core questions.

We begin with Descartes and Locke, whose early modern theories famously sought to offer epistemic *guidance*, i.e. methods of self-consciously directing our minds in order to reach the truth. Their theories fell into disrepute in the 18th and 19th centuries, when philosophers came to doubt that our beliefs could be governed rationally in this manner. At this point late modern alternative accounts of epistemic norms began to emerge (in the work of Hume, Reid, Kant and James), accounts that identified the value or disvalue of beliefs in factors other than the value or disvalue of self-conscious choices. We will examine in particular how each of these figures applied their theories to questions concerning the rationality of religious belief, and discuss whether their approaches succeed or fail.

The late modern theories inspired approaches to epistemology that are popular to this day. We will end by examining contemporary theories that refine and clarify the basic questions about justification. These include: Can we as individuals justify our beliefs by reference to a basic source of knowledge (foundationalism), or can we only hope to make the beliefs we have stick together (coherentism)? Can we have firsthand awareness of when our beliefs are justified (internalism), or is “justification” simply an explanatory notion used by third party theorists (externalism, naturalism)? Is justification a matter between us and reality, or one between us and society (social contextualism)? Finally, is knowing a result of particular acts of justification, or is it an expression of underlying character of the knower (virtue epistemology)?

Course goals

By the end of the semester, I hope that you will

1. Understand the central importance of epistemic norms to theories of knowledge.
2. Understand how answer philosophical questions about epistemic norms can shed light on cultural controversies.
3. Understand how traditional theories of epistemic norms foreshadowed contemporary theories, and how contemporary literature can be used to understand classic texts more deeply.
4. Improve your textual interpretation skills.
5. Improve your analytic and argumentative skills.
6. Develop presentation/conversational skills in philosophy.

Grading

Quizzes (9)	10%
Twice-weekly written discussion questions (6)	10%
First short paper	20%
Exam	20%
Third section presentations	10%
Final longer paper	30%

Quizzes

At least nine pop quizzes (one every other day or so), scattered across the block, will be held at the beginning of class. These will be basic reading-comprehension quizzes, designed to ensure that you are doing the reading and understanding at least the basic points and overall conclusions of your readings. I am using your quiz grade as an alternative to attendance grades, so quizzes cannot be made up.

Discussion questions

Students should submit, in writing, at least six quality questions for discussion, two for each of the first three weeks. These should be either emailed to me before class, or raised in class (and handed in, in written form—no more than a paragraph—at the end of class). Questions should attempt to clear up important confusions about a philosophical theory, or raise serious objections to core elements of the theory. *Quality* questions should do more than ask about the meaning of a few isolated lines of text, or raise nit-picking questions about marginal arguments. Probably the best way to ensure the quality of your question is to raise it in class and explain why you think it's an important question. If one of your questions doesn't rise to the appropriate level of quality, I will let you know and you should write another. You'll have as many chances to ask these questions as we'll have classes. Apart from written questions, you are of course encouraged to participate in class discussions at all times, but the only credit you'll receive for this will come from the written questions you turn in at the end of class period.

Papers

Here are some general guidelines that apply to each of your papers:

- I strongly encourage you to visit me in office hours to discuss outlines and drafts of your paper.
- All papers must be turned in, in printed form, by **5pm** on the designated days, in my office.
- Exceptions to the above policy, such as extensions, must be negotiated **24 hours before** the due date.
- Late papers received by email on the due date will have **2 points** subtracted.
- Late papers received after midnight of the first due date will have **4 points** subtracted every 24 hours.
- Any emailed paper (negotiated or late, only) must contain a working attachment (.doc or .rtf format) to count as turned in. Avoid this problem by including the text of your paper in the body of the email.
- Papers (and exams, of course) must respect the Honor Code and avoid plagiarism. Review CC's understanding of plagiarism here:
<http://www.coloradocollege.edu/academics/honorcouncil/Resources.html>
<http://www.coloradocollege.edu/academics/honorcouncil/Constitution.html>

First short paper (4-5 pages)

Your first paper will be written on a topic drawn from our first section of readings, from Descartes and Locke. It will be mainly an interpretative paper, in which you will be asked to explain some central doctrine in either of these theories of knowledge. I will distribute paper topics in advance of our study of Descartes and Locke, so you should be thinking about which topic you would like to write on well in advance of our writing day on September 10th.

Final longer paper (8-10 pages)

This paper, which functions as your final exam, will draw on topics taken from the material that follows Descartes and Locke. Unlike the first paper, this paper will challenge you to one of three possible tasks: 1) Evaluate a core doctrine of one of the theories we have examined, 2) Evaluate one philosopher's critique of a previous theory, 3) Identify the elements of a traditional theory that fit into the rubric of contemporary views about knowledge and justification (e.g. Descartes' foundationalism, Hume's naturalism, Reid's reliabilism, etc.) Since this is a longer and more involved paper, I will expect you to choose your topic

Exam

Your only (mid-term) exam will cover all of the material from Descartes to James. The purpose of this exam is to help you master the content of the traditional theories of knowledge, so that you will be in a position to analyze them in more detail when we get to our third section on contemporary questions. The exam will be short-essay, and permit you to choose from among a number of possible questions.

Third section presentations

For the final section concerning contemporary topics, I will divide the class into five groups. Each group will be responsible for studying the readings for one of the contemporary topics together, and preparing presentations. We will spend at least an hour of each of the days in the final section listening to student presentations. If there are five students in each group, I expect each student to do a ten minute presentation, so it will be best to meet in advance and divide up topics to present. (In the time that remains on each of these days, I will lecture and fill in missing gaps in the presentation of the topics.) You are strongly

encouraged to use your work for these presentations in your final papers. E.g., if you present on a subject concerning the internalism/externalism debate, you should probably write a paper on that subject.

Grading scale:

96-100: A	81-85: B	66-70: C	51-55: D
91-95: A-	76-80: B-	61-65: C-	50 and below: NC
86-90: B+	71-75: C+	56-60: D+	

Other course guidelines

- If you have a documented disability and require accommodation, please inform me as soon as possible so that we can meet your needs. To obtain your documentation, register with Disabilities Services, in Tutt Library 152, or call 227-8285.
- If you have an emergency and need a leave of absence, please inform me as soon as possible so that we can negotiate due dates or exam dates, and contact Debra at 389-6689 to make an appointment with Associate Dean Morgan.

Texts

- René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, Hackett, Fourth Edition.
- Course pack available from CC Bookstore.
- Some readings may also be available on PROWL.

Lecture and reading schedule

Section 1: Two early modern normative epistemologies

Monday, September 1, 2008

- In class: Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Parts I, Hackett edition, pp. 1-6.
Online: <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/59>

Tuesday, September 2, 2008

- Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, Parts I, Hackett edition, pp. 6-18
- Rene Descartes, *Rules for the Direction of our Native Intelligence*, (pp. 1-5).
- Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations I and II, Hackett edition, pp. 59-68.
Online: <http://www.textfiles.com/etext/NONFICTION/descartes-meditations-746.txt>

Wednesday, September 3, 2008

- Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditations III - VI, Hackett edition, pp. 69-103.
Online: <http://www.textfiles.com/etext/NONFICTION/descartes-meditations-746.txt>

Thursday, September 4, 2008

- John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Selections, Course pack.
Epistle to the reader
Book I, Chapter I, Introduction, § 1-8
Chapter II, No Innate Speculative Principles, §1-5, §15-16
Chapter IV, Other Considerations concerning Innate Principles, §8, 22
Book II, Chapter I, Of Ideas in General, and their Original, §1-5, 24-5
Chapter II, Of Simple Ideas, §1-3
Book IV, Chapter I, Of Knowledge in General, § 1-9
Chapter II, Of the Degrees of our Knowledge, §1-4, 14

Friday, September 5, 2008

- John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Course pack.
Book IV, Chapter III, Of the Extent of Human Knowledge, §1-4, 26
Chapter IV, Of the Reality of Knowledge, § 1-7
Chapter IX, Of our Knowledge of Existence, §1-3
Chapter X, Of our Knowledge of the Existence of a God, §1-6
Chapter XI, Of our Knowledge of the Existence of Other Things, §1-8
Chapter XIII, Some Further Considerations Concerning our Knowledge, §1-2
Chapter XIV, Of Judgment, §1-4

Chapter XV, Of Probability, §1-6
Chapter XVI, Of Degrees of Assent, § 1-14
Chapter XVII, Of Reason, §17-24
Chapter XVIII, Of Faith and Reason, §1-11

Section 2: Early modern skeptical challenges, and later modern responses

Monday September 8, 2008

- David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Course pack.
Section I, Of the Different Species of Philosophy
Section II, Of the Origin of Ideas
Section III, Of the Association of Ideas
Section IV, Skeptical Doubts concerning the Operation of the Understanding

Tuesday, September 9, 2008

- David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Course pack.
Section V, Skeptical Solution of These Doubts
Section IX, Of the Reason of Animals
Section X, Of Miracles
Section XII, Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy

Wednesday, September 10, 2008

READING/WRITING DAY: FIRST SHORT PAPER DUE

Thursday, September 11, 2008

- Thomas Reid, *Inquiry into the Human Mind and the Principles of Common Sense*, Course pack.
Chapter I, Section III, The Present State of This Part of Philosophy (pp. 76-80)
Section IV, Apology for Those Philosophers (pp. 80-1)
Section VII, The System of All These Authors is the Same, and leads to Scepticism (pp. 86-7)
Chapter VI, Section III, Of the Visible Appearances of Objects (pp. 169-73)
Section XX, Of Perception in General (pp. 287-94)
Section XXIV, Of the Analogy between Perception and the Credit We Give to Human Testimony (pp. 323-330, 333-4)
- Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Course pack.
Essay II, Chapter X, Of the Evidence of Sense, and of Belief in General (pp. 183-4)
Essay VI, Chapter V, First Principles, §6 (pp. 388-91).

Friday, September 12, 2008

- Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Course pack.
§1-2, 5-11 (pp. 15-19, 27-29, 32-37).
Critique of Pure Reason, Transcendental Doctrine of Method (pp. 567-72), Course pack.
Online <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/cgi-bin/cprframe.pl?query=20met1.htm,573> (pp. 573-60)
Online <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/cgi-bin/cprframe.pl?query=20met1.htm,574>
Trowing (Opinion), Knowing and Believing (pp. 657-666)
Online <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/cgi-bin/cprframe.pl?query=21met2-4.htm,645> (pp. 645-51)
The Architectonic of Pure Reason (pp. 667-668)
Online <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/cgi-bin/cprframe.pl?query=21met2-4.htm,653> (pp. 653-55)
Optional: *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Course pack.
Preface to the Second Edition (pp. 688-704)
Kemp-Smith translation, online:
<http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/cgi-bin/cprframe.pl?query=02pref-b.htm,017> (pp.17-33)

Monday, September 15, 2008

- William James, *The Will to Believe*, Course pack.

Tuesday, September 16, 2008

EXAM

Section 3: Contemporary views of epistemic norms

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

The critique of foundationalism, Course pack.

- Laurence Bonjour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* (pp. 3-33, 58-79)

Thursday, September 18, 2008

The critique of internalism, Course pack.

- Alvin Plantinga, "Justification in the 20th Century" (pp. 43-77)
- Alvin Goldman, "Internalism Exposed" (pp. 271-293)
- Optional: Hilary Kornblith, "Beyond Foundationalism and the Coherence Theory" (pp. 597-612)

Friday, September 19, 2008

Naturalistic pragmatism, Course pack.

- W.V. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (pp. 20-4, 34-6, 38-43)
- W.V. Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized" (pp. 69-90)
- Optional: W.V. Quine, "The Nature of Natural Knowledge" (pp. 67-81)

Monday, September 22, 2008

Social contextualism, Course pack.

- Wilfrid Sellars, "Does Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?" (pp. 293-300)
- David Annis, "A Contextualist Theory of Epistemic Justification" (pp. 213-219)

Tuesday, September 23, 2008

Virtue epistemology, Course pack.

- John Greco, "Agent Reliabilism," (pp. 273-296)
- Linda Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind* (pp. 1-3, 6-10, 25-9, 164-8, 267-273, 329-334)

Wednesday, September 24, 2008

READING/WRITING DAY: FINAL LONGER PAPER DUE