

PHIL U272: Philosophy of Knowledge
Loyola University of New Orleans, Fall 2015, Ben Bayer

Course description

This course focuses on a philosophic question that is important to every other intellectual discipline: how do we know what we know? Questions covered may include: Is knowledge something forged independently by individual inquirers, or is it inherited from a social tradition? Does it have foundations in our observations of the world, as in natural science, or in purely intellectual axioms, as in mathematics? Has our knowledge any solid "foundations" at all, or is it more like a living, organic whole? What are the implications of different answers to these questions for science, religion, and our commonsense view of the world? **In particular**, we will explore these questions using examples from the history of science, especially the controversy surrounding the discoveries of Galileo and his disagreement with the church.

Course goals learning objectives:

1. To develop students' ability to read and interpret primary texts in the history of philosophy on a central philosophical topic.
2. To develop students' ability to communicate their interpretation of this topic in writing and to logically evaluate arguments studied concerning this topic.
3. To develop students' appreciation for how major fundamental philosophical world views affect their assessment of a central philosophical topic.
4. To develop students' appreciation for the importance of a central philosophical topic to their own lives, and the importance of subjecting their own views on this topic to logical evaluation.

Grading

Quizzes	15%
Online participation	15%
Paper #1	20%
Paper #2	20%
First exam	15%
Second exam	15%

Required text

- Course pack, available exclusively at the Loyola Bookstore (\$66.25)
- *A copy will be made available on reserve.*

LECTURE AND READING SCHEDULE

(CP # refers to course pack page numbers. Assigned readings may be shortened as the semester progresses.)

Introduction

Monday, August 24th

Introduction

Wednesday, August 26th

Why there are philosophical problems about knowledge

- Bayer, "Why We Need Logic" (CP 1–9)

The scientific revolution and its critics

Friday, August 28th

Background and introduction to Galileo

- WT Jones, "Science and Scientific Method" (CP 10–20)

Monday, August 31st

Background and introduction to Galileo (continued)

- WT Jones (continued)

Galileo's case using the senses and reason to investigate the universe

- Galileo Galilei, from *Dialogue concerning the Two Chief World Systems* (Blackboard online reserves)

Wednesday, September 2nd

Galileo's case using the senses and reason to investigate the universe (continued)

- Galileo Galilei, from *Dialogue concerning the Two Chief World Systems* (continued)

Friday, September 4th

Galileo's self-defense

- Galileo Galilei, "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina" (CP 21–25)

Wednesday, September 9th

Galileo's self-defense

- Galileo Galilei, "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina" (continued)

Bellarmino's critique and his modern defenders

- Cardinal Bellarmine, "Letter to Foscarini" (CP 26–27)

Friday, September 11th

Bellarmino's critique and his modern defenders (continued)

- Paul Feyerabend, "Galileo and the Tyranny of Truth" (CP 28–36)

Monday, September 14th

Bellarmino's critique and his modern defenders (continued)

- Paul Feyerabend, "Galileo and the Tyranny of Truth" (continued)
- Rorty, from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (CP 37–39)

Wednesday, September 16th

Bellarmino's critique and his modern defenders (continued)

- Rorty, from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (continued)

Friday, September 18th

Attempts at reconciliation

- Pope John Paul, "Lessons of the Galileo Case" (CP 40–43)
- Pope Benedict XVI, from "The Crisis of Faith in Science":
<http://ncronline.org/news/ratzingers-1990-remarks-galileo>

The birth of epistemology

Monday, September 21st

The need for method in an era of scientific change

- Rene Descartes, from Part I of the *Discourse on Method* (CP 44–46)

Wednesday, September 23rd

The need for method in an era of scientific change

- Rene Descartes from *Discourse on Method* (continued)

The need for independent reflection in an era of controversy

- John Locke, "Epistle to the Reader" and "Introduction" from *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (CP 47–50)

Friday, September 25th

The need for independent reflection in an era of controversy

- John Locke, from *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (continued)

Monday, September 28th

The rejection of the need for a “theory of knowledge”

- Richard Rorty, from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (CP 51–55)

The foundations of knowledge

Wednesday, September 30th

We need to reconstruct our knowledge from its foundations

- Rene Descartes, from Part II, *Discourse on Method* (CP 56–59)
- Rene Descartes, from Rules 1–2, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (CP 60–61)

Friday, October 2nd

The foundation of knowledge is in non-sensory intuition

- Rene Descartes, from Second Meditation, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (CP 62–63)
- Rene Descartes, Rules 3–4, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (CP 64–65)

Monday, October 5th

The foundation of knowledge is in non-sensory intuition (continued)

- Rene Descartes, from *Meditations on First Philosophy and Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (continued)

Avoiding reliance on others and reconstructing knowledge from foundations

- John Locke, from Book I and Book IV, *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (CP 66–72)

Wednesday, October 7th

Avoiding reliance on others and reconstructing knowledge from foundations (continued)

- John Locke, from *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (continued)

Friday, October 9th

Our knowledge is based on ideas derived from the senses

- John Locke, from Book I and Book III, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, (CP 73–77)

Wednesday, October 14th

The search for foundations confuses causal explanation with justification, cognition

- Richard Rorty, from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (CP 78–87)

Skepticism and its critics

Friday, October 16th

Justifying our knowledge requires methodical doubt

- Rene Descartes, from First Meditation, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (CP 88–92)

Monday, October 19th

Justifying our knowledge requires methodical doubt (continued)

- Rene Descartes, from *Meditations on First Philosophy* (continued)

Wednesday, October 21st

Justifying our knowledge requires methodical doubt (continued)

- Rene Descartes, from First Meditation, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (continued)

Doubt should not be arbitrary

- Leonard Peikoff, “Maybe You’re Wrong” (CP 93–96)

Friday, October 23rd

Doubt should not be arbitrary

- Leonard Peikoff, “Maybe You’re Wrong” (continued)

Wednesday, October 28th

Observations do not determine which of our beliefs to retain or abandon

- W.V. Quine and Joseph Ullian, “Belief and Change of Belief,” “Observation,” from *The Web of Belief* (CP 97–104)

Friday, October 30th

Scientific theories cannot establish realistic truths by crucial experiments

- Pierre Duhem, from *To Save the Phenomena* (CP 105–109)

Monday, November 2nd

Scientific theories are not underdetermined by evidence

- Margarita Levin, “Upholding Truth: Objectivity versus Solidarity” (CP 110–116)

Wednesday, November 4th

Observational data is theory-laden, and no belief is “foundational”

- Russell Hanson, “Observation,” from *Patterns of Discovery* (CP 117–130)

The nature of consciousness and the senses

Friday, November 6th

The mind and its ideas are better known than the body

- Rene Descartes, from Second Meditation, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (CP 131–133)

Monday, November 9th

The mind and its ideas are better known than the body

- Rene Descartes, from *Meditations on First Philosophy* (continued)

The mind grasps external things by their causal relationship with and resemblance to ideas

- John Locke, from Book I, *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (CP 138–141)

Wednesday, November 11th

The mind grasps external things by their causal relationship with and resemblance to ideas

- John Locke, from Book I, *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (continued)

We cannot get outside of our heads to compare ideas to things they resemble

- George Berkeley, from *Principles of Human Knowledge* (CP 129–132)

Friday, November 13th

We cannot get outside of our heads to compare ideas to things they resemble

- George Berkeley, from *Principles of Human Knowledge* (continued)

Monday, November 16th

Consciousness, sensory perception, and the form/object distinction

- Harry Binswanger, from *How We Know* (CP 142–154)

Wednesday, November 18th

Consciousness, sensory perception, and the form/object distinction (continued)

- Harry Binswanger, from *How We Know* (continued)

Evidence vs. faith

Friday, November 20th

We have an obligation to base our beliefs on evidence

- John Locke, “Of Enthusiasm,” from Book IV, *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV (CP 155–159)

Monday, November 23rd

We must be unwavering in basing our beliefs on evidence

- W.K. Clifford, “The Ethics of Belief” (CP 160–163)

Monday, November 30th

We should make exceptions to the principle of basing our beliefs on evidence

- William James, “The Will to Believe” (CP 164–171)

Wednesday, December 2nd

We should make exceptions to the principle of basing our beliefs on evidence

- William James, “The Will to Believe” (continued)

It is acceptable to believe more than what is traditionally based on “evidence”

- Alvin Plantinga, “Is Belief in God Properly Basic?” (CP 172–182)

Friday, December 4th

It is acceptable to believe more than what is traditionally based on “evidence”

- Alvin Plantinga, “Is Belief in God Properly Basic?” (continued)

Relativism and its critics

Monday, December 7th

Rationality is culturally relative

- Richard Rorty, “Dismantling Truth: Solidarity versus Objectivity” (183–190)

Wednesday, December 9th

The argument from the fact that we can’t get outside our head is the worst argument in the world

- James Franklin, “Stove’s Discovery of the Worst Argument in the World” (CP 191–200)