

## Philosophy 227: Epistemology

Colorado College

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Fall 2008, Block 1

### 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 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> 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.

### 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, §23-26  
    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**