

Philosophy A220: Epistemology
Loyola University of New Orleans
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Course description

One of questions central to almost every other question in philosophy is how we know what we know. Since at least the time of Descartes, philosophers have been entertained doubts about whether knowledge of the external world is possible, or if it is, whether it extends as far as modern science has claimed that it extends. This course will survey some of the most basic questions in epistemology by first briefly examining their roots in early modern philosophy, and then examining in detail the debate about these questions in the last forty years among Anglo-American “analytic” philosophers. After we examine the statements of key epistemological questions by Descartes and Locke, we will begin our discussion of contemporary debates by looking at the debate over skepticism, the challenge by some philosophers that possibly we know nothing of the external world at all. We’ll look at a variety of contemporary responses to the problem, including metaphysical appeals to common sense and the refinement of the standards for knowledge claims. This will raise questions about the meaning of the concept of “knowledge” itself, which we will explore in connection with the infamous Gettier problem. Some have claimed that philosophers’ demand to ground knowledge claims in “foundational” forms of knowledge sets the bar for knowledge too high and thereby threatens skepticism, so we will also explore the debate between foundationalists and anti-foundationalists about epistemic justification. This will then naturally raise questions about what it means to say a belief is justified, which will occasion an examination of “internalist” vs. “externalist” answers to that question. Time permitting, we will explore alternative epistemological views that challenge traditional Anglo-American thinking about theory of knowledge, including especially Quine’s naturalized epistemology and the recent strain of virtue epistemology.

Course goals

By the end of the course, I hope that students will

1. Acquire some respect for (and when writing papers, exemplify) the clarity and logical rigor of contemporary work in epistemology.
2. Understand the basic concepts of and broad trends in contemporary epistemology, and see why epistemology is central to other philosophical questions and even relates to cultural controversies.
3. Be able to write a serious analytical paper of their own, drawing on your personal research and thinking about a topic we will have covered in the class.

Required texts

- Ernest Sosa, Jaegwon Kim, Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath (Eds.), *Epistemology: An Anthology*, 2nd edition, Blackwell Publishing, 2010, ISBN 978-1405169660
- Laurence Bonjour, *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses*, 2nd edition, Rowman and Littlefield, 2010, ISBN 978-0742564190
- Additional essays on Blackboard

Lecture and reading schedule (tentative)

(SKFM = page numbers from Sosa, Kim, Fantl and McGrath, *Epistemology: An Anthology*)

Introduction and early modern sources of contemporary topics

Monday, August 26th

Introduction

Wednesday, August 28th

Early rationalist theory of knowledge

- Bonjour, Ch.1& 2, pp. 1-6; 9-22
- Descartes, from *Discourse and Meditations*. Read on Blackboard: <http://is.gd/XZPhCt>

Friday, August 30th

Early rationalist theory of knowledge (continued)

- Descartes, from *Discourse and Meditations* (continued)

Monday, September 2nd—NO CLASS—LABOR DAY HOLIDAY

Wednesday, September 4th

Early moderate empiricist theory of knowledge

- Bonjour, Ch. 6, pp. 97-117
- Locke, from *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Read on Blackboard: <http://is.gd/BBYD6i>

Friday, September 6th

Early moderate empiricist theory of knowledge (continued)

- BonJour, Ch. 7, pp. 119-148
- Locke, from *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (continued)

Skepticism

Monday, September 9th

Introduction to skepticism after Descartes

- Introduction to Part I, SKFM pp. 3-5
- Stroud, “The Problem of the External World,” SKFM pp. 7-25

Wednesday, September 11th

Introduction to skepticism after Descartes (continued)

- Stroud, “The Problem of the External World” (continued)

Friday, September 13th

Metaphilosophical common sense

- Bonjour, Ch. 12, pp. 237-46
- Moore, “Proof of an External World,” SKFM pp. 26-38
- Moore, “Four Forms of Skepticism,” SKFM, pp. 29-30
- Moore, “Certainty,” SFKM, pp. 31-34

Monday, September 16th

Metaphilosophical common sense (continued)

- Bonjour, Ch. 12, pp. 237-46 (continued)
- Moore readings (continued)

Wednesday, September 18th

Epistemic closure and relevant alternatives

- Bonjour, Ch. 12, pp. 246-49
- Introduction to Part IV, SKFM, pp. 233-35
- Dretske, “Epistemic Operators,” SKFM, pp. 237-45

Friday, September 20th

Evidentialist standards for epistemic possibility

- Bayer, “Epistemic Possibility for Epistemologists, à la Evidentialism.” Read on Blackboard: <http://is.gd/XYhKmt>

Monday, September 23rd

Contextualist critiques of the reality of knowledge as a kind

- Bonjour, Ch. 12, pp. 249-56

- Williams, “Epistemological Realism” (see email instructions for condensation)

Wednesday, September 25th

Contextualist critiques of the reality of knowledge as a kind

- BonJour, Ch. 12, pp. 249-56 (continued)
- Williams, “Epistemological Realism” (continued)

The concept of “knowledge”

Friday, September 27th

An influential challenge to a traditional definition of “knowledge”

- BonJour, Ch. 3, pp. 23-45
- Introduction to Part III, SKFM, pp. 190-91
- Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?,” SKFM pp. 192-93

Monday, September 30th

EXAM #1

Wednesday, October 2nd

Answering Gettier by redefining “justification”

- Ichikawa and Steup, “The Analysis of Knowledge” (selections). Read on Blackboard: <http://is.gd/3KQM8c>

Friday, October 4th

Gettier’s problem as inherent in the traditional framework

- Zagzebski, “The Inescapability of the Gettier Problem,” SKFM pp. 207-212

Monday, October 7th

“Knowledge” as an undefined primitive

- Williamson, “A State of Mind,” SKFM pp. 213-229 (see email instructions for condensation)

Wednesday, October 9th

“Knowledge” as an undefined primitive

- Williamson, “A State of Mind” (continued)

The structure of justification

Friday, October 11th

Introduction to 20th century foundationalism

- BonJour, Chapter 9, pp. 177-86
- Discussion of the regress argument and Schlick’s foundationalism

Wednesday, October 16th

Anti-foundationalism

- Sellars, “Does Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?,” SKFM pp. 94-98

Monday, October 14th—NO CLASS—FALL BREAK HOLIDAYS

Friday, October 18th

Anti-foundationalism (continued)

- Sellars, “Does Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?” (continued)
- BonJour, “Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?,” SKFM pp. 109-20

Monday, October 21st

Anti-foundationalist coherentism

- BonJour, Ch. 9, pp. 186-96
- Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," SKFM, pp. 124-132

Wednesday, October 23rd

Anti-foundationalist coherentism

- Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" (continued)

Thursday, October 24th

PAPER #1 DUE, 11:59pm

Friday, October 25th

Foundationalism renewed

- BonJour, Ch. 9, pp. 196-202
- Bayer, "A Role for Abstractionism in a Direct Realist Foundationalism." Read on Blackboard:
<http://is.gd/cuqXdv>

Monday, October 28th

Foundationalism renewed

- Bayer, "A Role for Abstractionism in a Direct Realist Foundationalism" (continued)

Justification and consciousness

Wednesday, October 30th

Reliabilist externalism

- BonJour, Ch. 10, pp. 203-10
- Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?," SKFM pp. 333-45

Friday, November 1st

Reliabilist externalism (continued)

- Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?" (continued)

Monday, November 4th

Critiques of externalism

- BonJour, Ch. 10, pp. 210-17
- Bonjour, "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge," SKFM p. 363-76

Wednesday, November 6th

Critiques of externalism (continued)

- BonJour, "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge" (continued)

Friday, November 8th

Mentalist internalism

- Feldman and Conee, "Evidentialism," SKFM pp. 310-19

Monday, November 11th

Critiques of mentalist internalism

- Goldman, "Internalism Exposed," SKFM pp. 379-90

Wednesday, November 13th

Critiques of mentalist internalism (continued)

- Goldman, "Internalism Exposed" (continued)

Friday, November 15th

Accessibilist internalism

- Bayer, “Internalism Empowered.” Read on Blackboard: <http://is.gd/xesz1T>

Monday, November 18th

Accessibilist internalism (continued)

- Bayer, “Internalism Empowered” (continued)

Wednesday, November 20th

EXAM #2

Alternative approaches [tentative]

Friday, November 22nd

Replacing foundationalist epistemology with psychology

- Bonjour, Ch. 11, pp. 221-35
- Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized,” SKFM pp. 528-36

Monday, November 25th

Replacing foundationalist epistemology with psychology (continued)

- Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized” (continued)
- *Optional*: Antony, “Quine as Feminist: The Radical Import of Naturalized Epistemology,” SKFM pp. 552-78

Wednesday, November 27th – Friday, November 29th—NO CLASS—THANKSGIVING HOLIDAYS

Monday, December 2nd

Critiques of naturalized epistemology

- Kim, “What is ‘Naturalized Epistemology’?,” SKFM pp. 539-48

Wednesday, December 4th

Critiques of naturalized epistemology (continued)

- Kim, “What is ‘Naturalized Epistemology’?” (continued)
- *Optional*: Bayer: “How Not to Refute Quine.” Read on Blackboard: <http://is.gd/BrhWVh>

Friday, December 6th

Virtue epistemology

- Zagzebski, “Virtues of the Mind,” SKFM 442-451

Saturday, December 7th

FINAL PAPER DUE, 11:59pm