

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Fall 2009, PHIL 345

Office Hours: Tu, 1-2, 3:30-4:30, Th, 1-2

Office: Wheatley 5-008

Professor Steven Levine

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Course Description

This course is a survey of contemporary issues and debates in the theory of knowledge. While we will consider all types of knowledge (a priori knowledge, testimony, etc.), our main focus will be on empirical knowledge. We will concentrate on three questions: 1) On whether the tradition definition of knowledge as justified true belief is correct or whether other accounts of knowledge (reliabilist or defesibility accounts) are more satisfactory, 2) On whether skepticism, which questions whether there can be any knowledge at all, is a logically coherent position, and 3) On whether the various positions philosophers formulate to defeat skepticism, i.e., foundationalism, coherentism, and contextualism, can actually do the job.

Required Texts (available at the Bookstore)

M. Williams, *Problems of Knowledge (PK)*

S. Bernecker and F. Dretske, *Knowledge*

Course Outline (This is subject to revision)

Week	Date	Class Theme and Activities	Assignment
Week 1	Sep. 8 10	Introduction to Epistemology	<i>PK</i> , Introduction, 1-12
Week 2	Sep. 15 17	The Analysis of Knowledge and the Gettier Problem	<i>PK</i> , Chapter 1, 13-26 Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', 13-15
Week 3	Sep. 22 24	Non-Justificatory Positions: Externalism and Reliabilism	Nozick, 'Knowledge and Skepticism', 349-353 Goldman, 'Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge', 86-102 <i>PK</i> , 28-31
Week 4	Sep. 29 Oct. 1	Critique of Reliabilism	Brandom, 'Insights and Blindspots of Reliabilism', <i>download at my website</i> Bonjour, 'Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge', 185-87 <i>PK</i> , Chapter 2, 31-37
Week 5	Oct. 6 8	Responses to the Gettier Problem: Indefesibility Accounts and the Stability of Knowledge	Paxton and Lehrer, 'Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief', 31-36 <i>PK</i> , Chapters 3 and 4, 38-57

Week 6	Oct. 13 15	Ancient Skepticism First Paper Due	Sextus Empiricus, <i>download at my website</i> PK, Chapter 5, 58-68
Week 7	Oct. 20 22	Cartesian Skepticism	Stroud, 'The Problem of the External World', <i>download at my website</i> PK, Chapter 6, 69-80 (<i>Background reading: Descartes, Meditation 1</i>)
Week 8	Oct. 27 29	Foundationalism	Price, 'The Given', 235-244 Chisholm, 'The Directly Evident', 245-259
Week 9	Nov. 3 5	Critique of Foundationalism	Sellars, 'Does Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?', 260-265 PK, Chapters 7 and 8, 81-104
Week 10	Nov. 10 12	Coherentism Course Withdraw Deadline	Bonjour, 'The Elements of Coherentism' 128-148 PK, Chapters 10 and 11, 117-137
Week 11	Nov. 17 19	Contextualism and Skepticism	Austin, 'Other Minds', 339-346 PK, Chapter 13, 146-157
Week 12	Nov. 24	Contextualism and Skepticism continued Second Paper Due	Annis, 'A Contextualist Theory of Epistemic Justification', <i>download at my website</i> PK, Chapter 14, 159-171
Week 13	Dec. 1 3	Grounding Empirical Knowledge	PK, Chapters 15-16, 173-200
Week 14	Dec. 8 10	Open Class Final	

Assessable Tasks

In this class you will have a variety of ways of demonstrating your intellectual engagement with the course material, including 2 five to seven page papers and a comprehensive final exam. The final exam will take the form of short essays on the central issues discussed over the course of the semester.

Final Grade Calculation

First Paper: 30%

Second Paper: 30%

Final Exam: 30%

Class participation: 10%

Important Dates

The first paper is due on **October 15th**

The second paper is due on **November 24th**

The final is on **December 10th**

Attendance Policy

Your presence in class is a minimum condition of your success in this course. Attendance as well as lateness will be noted and factored into your final grade, as follows:

- 4 absences: final grade lowered by ½ grade (e.g. from B- to C+)
- 5 absences: final grade lowered by a full grade (e.g. from B- to C-)
- 6 absences: failure; no credit given

In general, the distinction between “excused” and “unexcused” absences is not recognized (an absence is an absence). Repeated lateness in arriving to class will count as an absence.

Other Important Information

- 1) Unless otherwise noted readings, handouts, assignments, and other announcements will be posted on **my website** which can be reached by clicking the link on my faculty page located on the UMB philosophy department website.
- 2) The readings for this class are listed above by the week. If homework is not explicitly assigned in class, these readings are your homework.
- 3) The reading schedule may change due to events. If it does I will update the schedule on my website. If you miss class, it is your responsibility for finding out about assignments announced in class.
- 4) I will only offer makeup exams in the event of emergencies or significant illness. In such cases, you must inform me before the time of the exam (if possible), and provide relevant documentation. Going on vacation is not a reason to reschedule an exam.
- 5) I only give incompletes if there is a really good reason like family emergency.
- 6) A paper will be penalized a half a grade if it is up to one week late. Thereafter it will be penalized a whole grade each additional week that it is late.

Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please contact the Ross Center for Disability Services. The Ross Center for Disability Services is located in the Campus Center, UL 211. You can contact them by calling: 617-287-7430 or sending an email to: ross.center@umb.edu. Once you have received your accommodation letters, please meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations as soon as possible.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism or cheating of any kind in the course of academic work will not be tolerated. Academic honesty includes accurate use of quotations, as well as appropriate and explicit citation of sources in instances of paraphrasing and describing ideas, or of reporting on research findings or any aspect of the work of others—including that of instructors and other students. These standards of academic honesty and citation of sources apply to all forms of academic work: examinations, essays, theses, oral presentations, and other projects. You can find more information about this on the university website at www.umb.edu/student_affairs/programs/judicial/procedures.