

PHIL 332-Issues in Epistemology

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Course description

What norms govern our behaviour as epistemic agents—as possessors of knowledge? We might approach this question in at least the following two ways.

First, what norms govern an attribution of knowledge? In contemporary epistemology, answers to this question are typically couched in terms of epistemic *justification* or *warrant*. If you believe that p (that it is raining, that it is Tuesday, that Harper is in the next room, or whatever), what justifies you in believing that p ? Are you in a cognitive position that epistemically permits you to hold this belief? If the answer is yes, and p is true, then attributing knowledge to you—so the standard analysis goes—is appropriate. There is much debate about what norms license epistemic justification (that is, what gives us a ‘yes’ answer to this last question, and indeed how this question should even be posed). Here we will look at contemporary discussions of internalism, externalism, skepticism, contextualism, and epistemic virtue.

Second, we might focus on the kinds of cognitive states or reasoning that we engage in as epistemic agents. Belief is the most obvious candidate here. So the question then becomes, what norms constrain the way we form beliefs? What kind of a thing/state/property is a belief? Do beliefs (properly) function to provide us with knowledge? How much control do we have over our belief formation, and how does this square with the justificatory demands that epistemologists theorize? Here we will look at literature on concepts of belief, rationality, and doxastic involuntarism. We will also briefly consider some alternatives to analyzing knowledge in terms of belief.

Text

All readings are available electronically: half available via UT libraries online (via JSTOR, etc.) and the other half available via the course blackboard website. See attached ‘Course Readings’ list for details.

Assignments/Requirements:

10% Attendance/discussion/participation	
25% Short paper 1	DUE 14 OCT (Questions distributed 7 Oct)
25% Short paper 2	DUE 18 NOV (Questions distributed 11 Nov)
40% Final exam	DATE TBA

The short papers might also be thought of as take-home exams. You will be given a short list of questions, from which you will choose and respond to one. The questions will be distributed in class, and the papers are to be submitted the following week at the start of class. Your responses should be concise and to the point, and should be somewhere in the range of 750-1250 words (3-5 pages).

The final exam will be comprehensive and essay-style, but like the short papers, you will have choices between questions.

General:

This is a writing intensive course. All of the work/examinations will be written. Your papers will be graded not only on content, but also on grammar, writing mechanics, style, etc.

All paper/exam dates are listed on this syllabus. Therefore, late work/exams are allowed only if arranged at least one week prior to the scheduled due date/exam date. Unexcused late work will be penalized accordingly.

If you require special test-taking or note-taking accommodations, please see me.

(Tentative) Reading/discussion schedule:

Introduction / foundations

- 9 Sept.** Syllabus/course introduction
Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*

NORMS OF KNOWLEDGE ATTRIBUTION

Externalism and internalism

- 16 Sept.** Goldman, 'What is Justified Belief'
Fumerton, 'The Internalism/Externalism Controversy'
- 23 Sept.** Chisolm, 'The indispensability of internal justification'
Alston, 'An internalist externalism'
Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?'

Norms, the folk, and science

- 30 Sept.** Pollock, 'Epistemic norms' (to p. 205)
Group discussion

- 7 Oct.** Goldman, 'Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology'
Quine, 'Naturalized Epistemology'
***Short paper 1: Essay questions distributed**

Epistemic virtue

- 14 Oct.** Greco, 'Virtues and Vices of Virtue Epistemology'
Zagzebski, 'The Search for the Source of Epistemic Good'
***Short paper 1 due**

Context and epistemic standards

- 21 Oct.** Lewis, 'Elusive Knowledge'
Group discussion

NORMS, BELIEFS, AND COGNITION

Belief: disposition and/or state?

- 28 Oct.** Braithwaite, 'The Nature of Believing'
- 4 Nov.** Armstrong, 'Beliefs as States'

Belief and representation

- 11 Nov.** Dretske, 'The epistemology of belief'
Optional background: Dretske, 'Representational systems'
Group discussion
***Short paper 2: Essay questions distributed**

Voluntariness of belief

- 18 Nov.** Bennett, 'Why is belief involuntary?'
Alston, 'The Deontological Conception of Epistemic Justification'
***Short paper 2 due**

Belief and acceptance

- 25 Nov.** Cohen, L.J., 'Belief and acceptance'

Recent alternatives

- 2 Dec.** Williamson, 'A State of Mind'
Group discussion

Resources:

All of the readings will be primary sources. Needless to say, much of this material will be challenging. You might find some of the following resources helpful.

-For good introductory books on theories of knowledge and epistemology, try Williams, M. (2001) *Problems of Knowledge*, Oxford University Press or Bonjour, L. (2002) *Epistemology*, Rowman and Littlefield.

-For resource-style texts on epistemology, try either *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology* (1999) ed. Greco, J. and Sosa, E. or *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology* (2002) ed. Moser, P.

-For general philosophy resources, I suggest both *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, (1999) ed. Audi, R. and *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, (1994) ed. Blackburn, S. Online, try the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu/>