

**Philosophy 342: Introduction to Epistemology
Traditional and Social Epistemology
Fall 2013**

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Course Website: <https://sites.google.com/site/joshdipaolo/teaching/fl3epistemology>

“Philosophy, like all other studies, aims primarily at knowledge...The value of philosophy is, in fact, to be sought largely in its very uncertainty. The man who has no tincture [trace] of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the cooperation or consent of his deliberate reason. To such a man the world tends to become definite, finite, obvious; common objects rouse no questions, and unfamiliar possibilities are contemptuously rejected. As soon as we begin to philosophize, on the contrary, we find that even the most everyday things lead to problems to which only very incomplete answers can be given. Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty what is the true answer to the doubts which it raises, is able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom. Thus, while diminishing our feeling of certainty as to what things are, it greatly increases our knowledge as to what they may be; it removes the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never travelled into the region of liberating doubt, and it keeps alive our sense of wonder by showing familiar things in an unfamiliar aspect.”

--Bertrand Russell, “The Value of Philosophy” in *Problems of Philosophy*

Course Description: Epistemology is the study of knowledge and reasonable belief. Traditionally it has attempted to answer questions such as: What is knowledge? What is reasonable or justified belief? What can we know? Can we know anything? The discipline traditionally focuses on individual subjects. More recently, a branch of epistemology, known as *social epistemology*, has developed that asks questions about the more social aspects of reasonable belief and knowledge. For instance: When do I know or reasonably believe something on the basis of someone’s telling me that it is so? If others, who I trust, disagree with me on some topic, how should that affect my beliefs on that topic? Given that much of our knowledge (about science, technology, mathematics, and economics, for example) comes from the experts, what should I believe when the experts disagree? In this course, we will address all of these questions (and more).

Prerequisite: At least one college level course in philosophy, preferably including Phil 110 or its equivalent.

Goals for this course:

- To familiarize you with central topics in traditional and social epistemology.
- To demonstrate the richness of epistemology.

- To help you develop skills necessary for writing, thinking, and speaking about philosophy.

Required Books

- *Epistemology: An Anthology 2nd Edition*, Eds. Sosa, Kim, Fantl & McGrath
 - ISBN: 1405169664
- *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings*, Eds. Goldman & Whitcomb
 - ISBN: 0195334612

Assigned readings not in these books will be available on the course website.

Recommended Books:

(These books will not be assigned reading. But if you would like some good introductions to epistemology, these are the ones I recommend.)

- *Epistemology: Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (1st or 2nd edition), Laurence Bonjour
- *Epistemology*, Richard Feldman

Course Requirements

Attendance/Participation	5%
In Class Writing Assignments	5%
Exam 1	20%
Exam 2	20%
Problem Sets	25%
Final Paper	
Stage 1:	10%
Stage 2:	15%

Attendance/Participation: Attendance and participation are mandatory. You are granted 3 excused absences. You will lose ½ a percentage point from your final grade for each unexcused absence. Contact me if you know you will exceed your allotted excused absences and you believe you have a good excuse. Merely showing up to class does not suffice for attendance. You must be prepared to discuss the day’s readings and assignments.

- Reason for this requirement: First, the material we will cover in this course is difficult. If you do not regularly attend class you are unlikely to learn fully all that you can. Second, your perspective is unique and valuable; so is the perspective of your peers. It is my hope that we will learn from each other in discussing the material. Obviously, for discussions to go well students must attend regularly.

In Class Writing Assignments: Occasionally, you will be asked to perform short writing assignments in class. These will range from descriptions of your personal experiences to answering questions about the day’s assigned reading to critically evaluating an argument discussed in class or in the readings. These will be graded on a credit/no credit basis. (An especially thoughtful or interesting assignment may earn you a “credit plus.”)

- Reason for this requirement: These assignments are primarily meant to provide you with an opportunity to reflect on the course content or demonstrate your understanding of the course content in a “low stakes” setting. In other words, you get to show me what you got without risking much! The secondary purpose of these assignments is to ensure that you remain involved in the course by providing you with incentive to stay on top of the readings, lectures, and discussions.

Exams 1 & 2: Each exam will cover one unit of the course. (So there will be an exam covering traditional epistemology and an exam covering social epistemology.) The exams will be mixtures of true/false and multiple choice questions, short answer questions, and longer essay questions.

- Reason for this requirement: The exams are meant to assess your grasp of the course content and to allow you to demonstrate what you’ve learned.

Problem Sets: You will be assigned several problem sets throughout the semester. These will range from explaining an important distinction, identifying the contradictories of statements, extracting arguments from texts, to evaluating arguments. These will be graded on a credit/no credit basis. (Again, an especially thoughtful or interesting problem set may earn you a “credit plus.”)

- Reason for this requirement: This is one of the most important elements in the course. These problem sets are aimed at developing skills necessary to write a good critical philosophy paper and, more generally, to become a better philosopher. They provide you with practice and feedback on these skills, in a relatively “low stakes” setting. If you master the skills developed in these problem sets, you will be able to write an excellent critical philosophy paper.

Final Paper: The final paper will be a short 5-7 page critical essay. You will be required (1) to read one or more epistemology articles that have not been discussed in class, (2) to extract and explain an argument from one of these articles, and (3) to criticize this argument by providing compelling reasons to doubt its soundness. (I will provide you with further guidance and explanation regarding the final paper later in the semester.)

There are two stages to the final paper. The first stage requires you to submit your **best** attempt at completing the final paper. A mere “draft” will not be accepted. I will comment on this paper and we can discuss my comments if you like. The second stage requires you to submit your **best** attempt at revising the paper in light of my comments. Merely turning in the exact same paper or even a paper nearly identical to the original will not be acceptable.

- Reason for this requirement: The final paper provides you with an opportunity to demonstrate your development of philosophical skills while allowing you to showcase your originality, creativity and thoughtfulness.

Communication:

Office Hours: Though I won’t spend office hours going over things you missed due to unexcused absence, I am happy to spend time covering course material that you are struggling with or would just like to discuss. I enjoy spending time with students who are

interested in learning about philosophy—especially epistemology! Some of the concepts we will learn will be very difficult. Don't expect to understand everything the first time. Don't be afraid to come talk to me about stuff you don't understand. (Some people learn better when discussing things one on one. Determining whether you're like that is important to success in college generally. I'm happy to spend office hours with you if you're like this.) Even if you don't need extra help, feel free to stop by to chat about anything from class or relating to philosophy.

Note: My office is not wheelchair accessible. Please let me know if you would like me to make accommodations regarding meetings.

Contact Policy: Aside from my office hours, I'm most easily reached at the email address above. I check my email frequently and will respond promptly within 24 hours to most inquiries. Please note, while I will most likely read your email within a couple hours of its being sent, I may not reply immediately. If you do not receive a reply within 24 hours, please talk to me in class or send another email as a reminder.

Laptop Policy: Laptops are permitted in class, but must be used solely for class purposes. I reserve the right to prohibit laptop use if I feel laptops are not being used for class purposes and to count students absent for violating the laptop policy.

Special Needs: Please speak with me as soon as possible if you require special arrangements for attending class or doing assignments. I want you to succeed, so please talk to me about anything you think might be grounds for special arrangements.

Disclaimer: I reserve the right to alter this syllabus at any time.

Tentative Schedule Below.

(E) = Reading in *Epistemology: An Anthology*

(SE) = Reading in *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings*

(O) = Reading available online on course website

Tentative Schedule

(E) = Reading in *Epistemology: An Anthology*
 (SE) = Reading in *Social Epistemology: Essential Readings*
 (O) = Reading available online on course website

Day/Date	Topic	Reading
Wed 9/4	Course Introduction	
Fri 9/6	Epistemology/Standard View Introduction	
Mon 9/9	Background: Gettier Problem	Gettier "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" (E)
Wed 9/11	Background: Gettier Problem	Reread: Gettier "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"
Fri 9/13	Background: Gettier Problem	Reread: Gettier "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"
Mon 9/16	Background: Cartesian Epistemology	Descartes "Meditation 1" (O)
Wed 9/18	Background: Cartesian Epistemology	Descartes "Meditation 2" (O)
Fri 9/20	Background: Cartesian Epistemology	No New Reading
Mon 9/23	Regress Problem	BonJour "Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?" (E) Up to Section 2
Wed 9/25	Foundationalism	BonJour "Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?" (E) Section 2- last full paragraph in first column on p. 118
Fri 9/27	Problems for Foundationalism	Reread BonJour "Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?" (E) Section 4- last full paragraph in first column on p. 118
Mon 9/30	Coherentism & Its Problems	Feldman "Evidentialist Theories...: Coherentism" (O)
Wed 10/2	Evidentialism	Conee & Feldman "Evidentialism" (E)
Fri 10/4	Internalism vs. Externalism	No New Reading
Mon 10/7	Problems for Internalism	Goldman "Internalism Exposed" (E)
Wed 10/9	Reliabilism	Goldman "What is Justified Belief?" (E)
Fri 10/11	Reliabilism	Continue Goldman "What is Justified Belief?" (E)
Mon 10/14	No School	
Tue 10/15 Monday Schedule	Applications of Reliabilism	Reading TBD
Wed 10/16	Problems for Reliabilism	No New Reading
Fri 10/18	Problems for Reliabilism	No New Reading
Mon 10/21	Virtue Epistemology	Greco "Virtues and Vices of Virtue Epistemology" (E)
Wed 10/23	Review/Catch-up	No New Reading
Fri 10/25	Exam 1	No New Reading
Mon 10/28	Social Epistemology Introduction	Goldman "A Guide to Social Epistemology" (SE)
Wed 10/30	Conceptions of Social Epistemology	No New Reading
Fri 11/1	Testimony	Lackey "Testimony: Acquiring Knowledge from Others" (SE)
Mon 11/4	Testimony	No New Reading
Wed 11/6	Silence	Goldberg "If That Were True I Would Have Heard About it By Now" (SE)
Fri 11/8	Silence	No New Reading
Mon 11/11	No School	
Wed 11/13	Disagreement	Feldman "Reasonable Religious Disagreements" (SE)
Fri 11/15	Disagreement	No New Reading
Mon 11/18	Class is Cancelled; Josh is out of town	
Wed 11/20	Disagreement	Reading TBD
Fri 11/22	Experts	Goldman "Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust?" (SE)
Mon 11/25	Experts	No New Reading
Wed 11/27	TBD	
Fri 11/29	No School: Thanksgiving Break	
Mon 12/2	TBD	
Wed 12/4	Catch-up/Review	
Fri 12/6	Exam 2	