

Philosophy 406 Epistemology Syllabus

TR 12:30-1:50

Office hours and contact information

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Summary

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and justified belief. Towards that end, we will examine: proposed definitions of knowledge or criteria for the possession of knowledge and their shortcomings; how beliefs must be structured in order to justify other beliefs; whether justification is mind independent or not; how we might identify epistemic virtues and how they might be used to determine the epistemic status of various beliefs; how knowledge and justification are anchored in the world, or in testimony, memory, and perception; and finally how we might attempt to rebut skepticism.

Learning goals:

1. Students will be able to articulate alternative views associated with different positions in epistemology, i.e. foundationalism, coherentism, etc.
2. Students will be able to articulate the main arguments mustered for and against different positions.
3. Students will be able raise their own criticisms of different positions in epistemology.
4. Students will be able to write a research paper on a topic in epistemology.

Required Texts

- Kim, Sosa, Fantl, & McGrath (eds.), *Epistemology*, 2nd ed. (Blackwell, 2008). Numbers in parentheses below refer to chapters of this book.

Grading

10% attendance, 10% participation, 20% presentations, 15% essay, 45% final paper.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. You get two unexcused absences. Additional unexcused absences will incur 5% reduction in final grade per absence up to a total of 10%. Absences will be excused after the fact only in case of extreme circumstances that could not have been anticipated. Moreover, proof of extreme circumstances is required. Absences may be excused before the fact and is up to my discretion. In all cases, please talk to me about any foreseeable problems as soon as you anticipate them. I'm far more lenient when you are forthright about your problems. You are expected to arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class. Three late arrivals count as one absence. If you have to leave early, please tell me at the beginning of class and sit close to the exit to minimize the disturbance to the class. You are expected to give your full attention to the class. Cell phones or other means of communication should be silenced for the duration of class. You will be asked to leave if you are doing anything not relevant for class, e.g. reading the newspaper, sleeping, doing work for other classes, etc. Three offenses of this type will count as one absence.

Participation: Active participation is essential for learning philosophy. Our primary purpose in this class is to explore conceptual space by means of rational argumentation. I want to hear from you.

A range: The student is fully engaged and highly motivated. This student is well prepared, having read the assigned texts, and has thought carefully about the texts' relation to issues raised in lecture and section. This student's ideas and questions are substantive (either constructive or critical); they stimulate class discussions. This student listens and responds to the contributions of other students.

B range: The student participates consistently in discussion. This student comes to section well prepared and contributes quite regularly by sharing thoughts and questions that show insight and a familiarity with the material. This student refers to the materials discussed in lecture and shows interest in other students' contributions.

C range: The student meets the basic requirements of section participation. This student is usually prepared and participates once in a while but not regularly. This student's contributions relate to the texts and the lectures and offer a few insightful ideas, but do not facilitate a discussion.

D range: The student comes to class, but often unprepared. This student's contributions are often unrelated to the topic at hand, provide no insightful ideas, and do not facilitate discussion.

F range: The student often does not come to class, or, if he or she does, he or she generally neither participates nor makes any insightful contributions related to the topic at hand

Presentations: You will be required to present on two articles in class. These will be made in groups of three (two for honors) students. For your presentation you will have to have an excellent command of the article you are presenting on as you will be leading discussion. The presentations should have two parts: 1. A summary of the main problems the author(s) deal(s) with and their proposed solutions (taking not more than 1/2 hour) and 2. a set of problems formulated by your group for discussion. You should provide a handout (with your names written on it) to me and the class with a list of the problems for discussion. To be clear, a problem is a reason for thinking the author's argument is defective in some way, i.e. defective premises or weak inductive argument structure. In addition, some of your questions might relate the article being discussed to previous work we have discussed. *I expect to see a copy of your handout, including discussion questions, three days in advance of your presentation so I can give you feedback.* I am happy to meet with you to help you understand what's going on in your presentation article.

A range: You present an accurate reconstruction of the problem that the author is dealing with, an accurate and charitable reconstruction of the arguments pertaining to that problem, and a careful criticism of the author's arguments via your discussion questions. You take an active role leading discussion of the paper by responding to student's comments. In particular, you will have anticipated responses to your discussion questions, especially how you think the author(s) might respond, and use those to draw out more elaborate comments about student's responses or to generate further discussion.

B range: You present a reasonable reconstruction of the problem that the author is dealing with, a charitable reconstruction of the arguments pertaining to that problem, and some criticism of the author's arguments via your discussion questions. You will lead discussion of the paper and respond to student's comments.

C range: You state the topic of the paper without articulating the problem that the author intends to address. You provide a summary of the paper (mere chronology without isolating the main arguments). You provide discussion questions that are related to the text, but aren't primarily geared to addressing possible weaknesses in the author's argument. You ask questions, but don't develop discussion.

D range: You misconstrue the author's main claims in some significant respect. You provide a poor summary or reconstruction of the argument. You do not provide any discussion questions, or, if you do, such questions are to a large extent irrelevant to the problem at stake.

F range: You fail to provide a reconstruction of the paper, and, if you provide discussion questions, such questions are irrelevant to the problem at hand.

Essay: You will be required to write a brief essay ~1000 words (give or take 100 words or so). **The essay is due on October 13th at the beginning of class.** I will assign an essay topic. The topic will be on material we have already covered in class. I will expect

you to provide an analysis much like we do in class. Critically evaluate arguments, address the strengths and weaknesses of a particular position, etc. Most importantly, make sure you read the assignment carefully and do what is asked of you. See below for further grading criteria. Submit your essay via email.

Final Paper: You will be required to write a paper of at least 3000 words (4000-honors) pages on a topic of your choosing. You must submit your paper topic along with an abstract, and a list of at least four sources for consideration **by Tuesday November 10th**. You must use at least one primary source (from a reputable collection of papers or philosophy journals) that we *have not used in class* (reference works, encyclopedia articles, etc. do not meet this requirement), in a non-trivial way AND WHICH WAS PUBLISHED AFTER 2000. No papers can be on the same topic.

An excellent way to write a research paper is to find a disagreement in the literature, two authors who engage each other's work and have a disagreement, and then to adjudicate the dispute in your paper. It is by far the easiest way to get a substantial paper.

We will be workshopping your papers the final three weeks or so of class. You will do two presentations of your final papers. Each will count for 5% (half a letter grade!). I expect you to be well-prepared for these presentations, to take notes regarding the suggestions made by the class, and to institute these suggestions before the next presentation and in your final paper. **The final papers will be due via email at 9am, Monday Dec 19th**.

Paper / Essay evaluation:

All papers must utilize appropriate citations. Use guidelines found at <http://journal.philsci.org/formatting-guidelines> .

Six criteria for evaluating a paper:

- Substance,
- Thesis and argument structure, including introduction and conclusion,
- Use of supporting material and evidence,
- Quality of analysis, including the crucial distinction between unsupported assumptions and value judgments vs. analysis and argumentation,
- Use of quality sources,
- Quality of writing including grammatical correction, clarity, concision and persuasiveness.

A range: This paper is outstanding in form and content. The material covered in class is understood in depth: the student shows that s/he has a command on, including a critical understanding of, the material. The thesis is clear and insightful; it is original, or it expands in a new way on ideas presented in the course. The argument is unified and coherent. The evidence presented in support of the argument is carefully chosen and deftly handled. The analysis is complex and nuanced. The sources are original texts or

quality scholars' literature. The student utilizes appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation as well as a clear, precise, and concise style.

B range: The argument, while coherent, does not have the complexity, the insight, or the integrated structure of an A range paper. The material covered in class is well understood: the student does not make any mistake on the materials but does not show great depth in critical understanding. The paper's thesis is clear and the argument is coherent. The paper presents evidence in support of its points. The sources are original texts or quality scholars' literature. The student utilizes appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation as well as a clear, precise, and concise style.

C range: This paper has some but not all of the basic components of an argumentative essay (i.e., thesis, evidence, coherent structure). For example: the paper features a clear misunderstanding of some of the material covered in class, or the thesis is not clear or incoherent, or the argument is not coherently structured, or evidence in support of the thesis is lacking, or only non-scholarly sources are used. The student still utilizes appropriate grammar/spelling/punctuation as well as an appropriate argumentative writing style.

D range: This paper features very few of the basic components of an argumentative essay. It may be rather poorly written and proofread.

F range: This paper does not qualify as an argumentative essay and/or it is very poorly written and proofread.

Attendance and Etiquette

Attendance is crucial in this course. It is impossible to learn philosophy without doing it, i.e. engaging in philosophical discussion. You are expected to arrive on time, stay for the duration of class and participate in discussion. If you have to leave early, please tell me at the beginning of class and sit close to the exit to minimize the disturbance to the class. Cell phones should be turned off for the duration of class. You will be asked to leave if you are doing anything not relevant for class, e.g. reading the newspaper, sleeping, doing work for other classes, texting, tweeting, browsing the internet, etc.

If you do have to miss a class, it is YOUR responsibility to find out what was covered, learn that material, and prepare for the next class appropriately. Moodle will be the primary means by which I convey what material is covered and what you are responsible for preparing.

Academic Misconduct

You are strictly held to the University of Montana Student Conduct Code (<http://www.umt.edu.SA>). The exams are closed-note: you may not consult anything but

your own mind in order to answer questions on the exam. You may not use cell-phones, or any electronic devices to aid you, nor fellow students, nor fellow students' answers on exams, etc. You will receive no credit for any exam that you cheat on. Your conduct will also be reported to the Dean.

Special Needs

Students with disabilities will receive reasonable modifications in this course related to those disabilities. Your responsibilities are to request them from me with sufficient advance notice, and to be prepared to provide verification of disability and its impact from Disability Services. Please speak with me after class or during my office hours to discuss the details. For more information, visit the Disability Services for Students website at www.umt.edu/dss/. Please inform me if you have any accessibility issues.

Drop policy

I adhere to the UM policy on dropping courses. Between the first and 45th instructional day, it is entirely your decision whether to drop the course or not. If you want to drop course between the 46th instructional day and the last instructional day prior to finals week, and you want me to recommend the drop, you will have to provide reasons that you should be allowed to drop the course. Acceptable reasons demonstrate that some (post 45th instructional day) circumstance *out of your control* interferes with your ability to complete the course. Simply not having done the work required of you, or belief that you do not think that you can get the grade you want, or that you need such and such grade to maintain your financial aid, are not sufficient reasons for me to recommend dropping the course after the 45th instructional day, though they might be prior to the 45th day.

Tentative Schedule

Below is a list of readings to be read in chronological order. Numbers refer to chapters in your textbook. Reading assignments will be given at the end of each class. If you miss class, you can find the reading assignments on Moodle.

What we will call the classic epistemological position is a combination of: (a) the “traditional conception” of knowledge as justified true belief; (b) the foundationalist conception of the structure of epistemic justification; and (c) the internalist conception of the nature of epistemic justification. In the first half or so of this course (sections I-III below), we will examine these three main components, together with challenges to them and proposed alternatives. In the second part of the course (section IV), we will look at some further recent alternatives and at some additional epistemological issues.

I. The traditional conception of knowledge and the Gettier problem

- Gettier (15)
- Harman (16)
- Zagzebski (17)

II. The structure of epistemic justification: foundationalism vs. coherentism

- Chisholm (7)
- Sellars (8)-Duwell only
- Sellars (9) - Duwell only
- BonJour (10)
- Davidson (11)
- Haack (12)
- Reynolds (60)

III. The nature of epistemic justification: externalism vs. internalism

- Feldman & Conee (24)
- Goldman (26)
- BonJour (28)
- Goldman (29)
- Feldman & Conee (31)

IV. Further topics (as time permits—readings more likely to be omitted if time runs short are flagged with a question mark)

A. *Virtue epistemology.*

- Plantinga (32)
- Zagzebski (33)
- Greco (34)
- Pritchard (35) (?)

B. *Naturalized epistemology and a priori justification*

- Quine (39) - Duwell only
- Kim (40)
- Bealer (44)- Duwell only.
- Kornblith (46)

C. Knowledge and justification based on testimony (and memory?).

- Baker (54)
- Fricker (55)
- Burge (56)
- Lackey (57)
- Huemer (58)

D. The contextualist response to skepticism

- DeRose (47)
- Lewis (48)
- Cohen (49)
- Hawthorne (52)