

Theory of Knowledge: Internalism, Externalism, and Skepticism

University of Houston
Phil 3335 (24365)
AH 201
Mon-Wed 1:00pm-2:30pm

Instructor: Dr. Luis R.G. Oliveira
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Office Hours: Mon and Wed, 2:30pm - 4:30pm.

Course Description: *Epistemology* is the philosophical study of knowledge. Philosophers working in this area (epistemologists) ask questions such as: Do we really know anything? Do we know anything, in particular, about the world outside our minds? If so, how do we know it? What is it, exactly, that turns a mere belief into real knowledge? The traditional approach to these questions—called *Internalism*—attempts to answer them by appealing only to features that are internal to the perspective of the believer. The first part of this course is an introduction to a variety of these attempts. An alternative approach—called *Externalism*—attempts to answer these questions by appealing to features that are external to the perspective of the believer. The second part of this course is an introduction to a variety of these alternative attempts. Throughout the course, however, the possibility of having to accept negative answers to these questions will hover constantly over our heads. That is the threat of *Skepticism*.

Course Objectives: This course has three goals and your success in it will be measured by how well you achieve them. The *first goal* of the course is introducing you to central topics in the philosophical study of knowledge. On the midterm and final exams, you will be expected to display the knowledge that you have acquired in this class. The *second goal* of the course is developing the philosophical skill of critical thinking. You will be encouraged to exercise this skill during classroom discussion, and you will be required to apply it on short assignments. The *third goal* of the course is developing the important skills of reading comprehension and clear writing. The readings, short assignments, and the exams, all provide you with an opportunity to get better and better at understanding complex texts and effectively communicating your own ideas. Altogether, this class will challenge you to *receive, process,* and *convey* philosophical ideas about knowledge.

Required Text: *All readings will be made available as PDFs on the course webpage*

Course Requirements:

Participation (5%)
Short Assignments (40%) ----- See below for due dates
Midterm Exam (25%) ----- Wed (03/07)
Undergrads: Final Exam (30%) ----- Date TBD
Grad Students: Final Paper (30%) ----- Date TBD

Grade Curve: Your final letter grade will be assigned in accordance to the following curve:

A+	97-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	65-59
A	93-96	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	60-64
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	F	0-59

Course Policies

Short Assignments: There are 4 short assignments. The purpose of these assignments is developing and exercising the skills of critical thinking and clear writing. For each assignment, you will be directed to a short passage and asked to (a) clarify the argument in that passage, and (b) state your thoughts on it. All assignments should be submitted through Blackboard. *You are not allowed to miss any assignment.*

Midterm Exam: There is a midterm exam. The midterm exam has a “three sections” structure: a section where you will be expected to give *very short* answers (1 sentence); a section where you will be expected to give *short* answers (1 paragraph); and a section where you will be expected to *explain and evaluate an argument*. One week before the exam, you will be provided with a list of possible questions (a “study guide”) from which the exam questions will be selected. We will discuss the study guide in a review section during the class meeting before the exam.

Final Exam (undergrads only): There is a final exam. (There is no final paper for undergrads.) The final exam also has a “three sections” structure: a section where you will be expected to give *very short* answers (1 sentence); a section where you will be expected to give *short* answers (1 paragraph); and a section where you will be expected to *explain and evaluate an argument*. One week before the exam, you will again be provided with a list of possible questions (a “study guide”) from which the exam questions will be selected. This is not a cumulative exam. We will not, however, have a review section for the final exam.

Final Paper (grad students only): There is a final paper. (There is no final exam for grad students.) The purpose of this paper is to provide you with an opportunity to develop one of your own ideas about the class material at length. You must engage with at least one of the course readings, but you are also expected to incorporate relevant material that you have researched and studied on your own. This final paper should be between 10-15 pages long (12pt Times, double) or 3k-5k words.

Late Submissions: With the exception of *well-documented* emergencies, your grade on short assignments will suffer a 2-points deduction per late day. (This is equivalent to losing 10% of your grade for that assignment per day.) No exceptions will be made for excuses such as: “I am too busy,” “I found it hard to understand,” “I am going through a hard time in my life,” and so on. You should come talk to me in advance about any of these issues.

Participation: I do not take attendance in my classes. This means that missing classes *will not* affect your attendance grade. When you come to class, however, you will be required to follow certain common sense rules. Minimally: (a) you cannot use your phone, (b) you cannot carry unrelated conversations during class, (c) you cannot use your computer for class-unrelated activities, and (d) you cannot take naps during class-time. Violation of these rules will affect your participation grade.

Grade Complaints: I am happy to talk to you about your grade throughout the course. If you are *confused* about why you received the grade that you did, or if you *disagree* with the grade that you received, then you should come see me during office hours, or schedule an appointment. There is, however, a procedure that you will be expected to follow. First, you are expected to *read the comments*, if any, that are available on your work. Second, you are expected to *write down* either your questions or your complaints about your grade. Third, you are expected to *email me* those questions or complaints in advance. This procedure will add speed and clarity to our conversation.

Office Hours and Appointments: You are encouraged to make good use of my office hours. I am here to help you succeed in this course, and I am more than happy to review your lecture notes, to explain difficult material a second time, and to discuss any questions or insights that you may have. I love talking about philosophy and it will be my pleasure to discuss any aspect of it with you.

Disabilities: If you have the need for disability-related services, please get in touch with the University of Houston's *Center for Students with Disabilities*. I will be happy to work with you and the center in arranging for reasonable accommodations: <http://www.uh.edu/csd/>

Academic Honesty: Do not cheat. Punishment will be harsh if you do. You're expected to be familiar with the University of Houston's policies: <http://www.uh.edu/provost/policies/honesty/>

Class Schedule

Introduction

- Jan 17 - Class Intro
Jan 22 - Logic and Critical Thinking

Background

- Jan 24 - The Traditional Account of Knowledge ----- Noah Lemos, *ITK* (p. 1-13)
Jan 29 - Epistemic Justification ----- Noah Lemos, *ITK* (p. 13-21)
Jan 31 - The Regress Problem ----- Laurence Bonjour, *SEK* (p. 17-24)

PART I: INTERNALISM ABOUT KNOWLEDGE

Int #1: Foundationalism

- Feb 5 - Foundationalism ----- Noah Lemos, *ITK* (p. 44-61)
Feb 7 - The Sellarsian Dilemma ----- Laurence Bonjour, *EJ* (p. 14-21) - **Assignment #1**

Int #2: Coherentism

- Feb 12 - Coherentism ----- Laurence Bonjour, *SEK* (p. 89-101)
Feb 14 - The Doxastic Presumption ----- Laurence Bonjour, *SEK* (p. 101-110)

Int #3: Infitism

- Feb 19 - Infitism ----- Peter Klein, *HKIRR* (p. 297-305)
Feb 21 - The Finite Minds Objection ----- Peter Klein, *HKIRR* (p. 306-316) - **Assignment #2**

Int #4: Conservatism

- Feb 26 - Skeptical Challenges ----- Crispin Wright, *WNFF* (p. 167-175)
Feb 28 - Two Kinds of Entitlement ----- Crispin Wright, *WNFF* (p. 175-200)

Midterm Week

- Mar 05 - Review Session
Mar 07 - *Midterm Exam*

PART II: EXTERNALISM ABOUT KNOWLEDGE

Abandoning Internalism?

- Mar 19 - Justification is not *Sufficient* ----- Ed Gettier, *JTBK* (p. 121-123)
Mar 21 - Justification is not *Necessary* ----- Hilary Kornblith, *KNNJ* (p. 5-23)

Ext #1: Process Reliabilism

- Mar 26 - Innate Knowledge ----- Alvin Goldman, *IK* (p. 111-120)
Mar 28 - Misconstruals and Misconceptions ----- Fred Adams and David Kline, *NR* (p. 433-441)

Ext #2: Sensitivity Theory

- Apr 02 - Truth-Tracking ----- Robert Nozick, *PE* (p. 172-185)
Apr 04 - Cases and Complications ----- Robert Nozick, *PE* (p. 186-196) - **Assignment #3**

Ext #3: Safety Theory

- Apr 09 - Sensitivity and Safety ----- Ernest Sosa, *HDOM* (p. 141-145)
Apr 11 - Better Safe than Sensitive ----- Ernest Sosa, *HDOM* (p. 145-149)

Ext #4: Virtue Epistemology

- Apr 16 - Two Knowledge Puzzles ----- John Greco, *KCTB* (p. 111-121)
Apr 18 - Credit Attribution ----- John Greco, *KCTB* (p. 121-134) - **Assignment #4**

Externalism and Skepticism

- Apr 23 - Is Externalism Missing the Point? ----- Barry Stroud, *UHK* (p. 99-121)
Apr 25 - Maybe Not ----- Ernest Sosa, *RK* (p. 154-177)

Final Exam

- Apr 30 - Review Session

Final Exam or Final Paper: TBD

Bibliography

1. Adams, Fred and Kline, David (1987). "Nomic Reliabilism: Weak Reliability is not Enough"
2. Bonjour, Laurence (1985). *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*
3. Bonjour, Laurence and Sosa, Ernest (2003). *Epistemic Justification*
4. Gettier, Edmund (1963). "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"
5. Goldman, Alvin (1975). "Innate Knowledge"
6. Greco, John (2003). "Knowledge as Credit for True Belief"
7. Klein, Peter (1999). "Human Knowledge and the Infinite Regress of Reasons"
8. Kornblith, Hilary (2008). "Knowledge Needs No Justification"
9. Lemos, Noah (2007). *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*
10. Nozick, Robert (1981). *Philosophical Explanations*
11. Pritchard, Duncan (2005). *Epistemic Luck*
12. Sosa, Ernest (1999). "How to Defeat Opposition to Moore"
13. Sosa, Ernest (2011). *Reflective Knowledge: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, Volume II*
14. Stroud, Barry (2000). *Understanding Human Knowledge: Philosophical Essays*
15. Wright, Crispin (2004). "Warrant for Nothing (And Foundations for Free)?"

Selected Further Reading

1. Alston, William (1989). *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*
2. Audi, Robert (2010). *Epistemology*
3. Dretske, Fred (1981). *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*
4. Feldman, Richard (2003). *Epistemology*
5. Feldman, Richard and Conee, Earl (2004). *Evidentialism*
6. Fumerton, Richard (1995). *Metaepistemology and Skepticism*
7. Goldman, Alvin (1986). *Epistemology and Cognition*
8. Goldman, Alvin (2012). *Reliabilism and Contemporary Epistemology: Essays*
9. Greco, John (2006). *Achieving Knowledge*
10. Klein, Peter and Turri, John (2014). *Ad Infinitum: New Essays on Epistemological Infinitism*
11. Kornblith, Hilary (2002). *Knowledge and its Place in Nature.*
12. Kornblith, Hilary (2014). *A Naturalistic Epistemology: Selected Papers*
13. Plantinga, Alvin (1993). *Warrant: The Current Debate*
14. Plantinga, Alvin (1993). *Warrant and Proper Function*
15. Poston, Ted (2014). *Reason and Explanation: A Defense of Explanatory Coherentism*
16. Russell, Bertrand (1913). *Theory of Knowledge*
17. Sosa, Ernest (2007). *A Virtue Epistemology: Apt Belief and Reflective Knowledge, Volume I*
18. Stroud, Barry (1984). *The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism*
19. Williams, Michael (2001). *Problems of Knowledge*
20. Zagzebski, Linda (1996). *Virtues of the Mind*

Warning: You should be very careful with information acquired through the Internet. Be wary of simply searching for help on issues discussed in class. Most of the stuff that you will find originates from people who have less education than you, and it often ranges from poorly informed opinion to complete and utter nonsense. If you do search the Internet for additional information, you *must* keep to reputable publications (but be critical even then!). For philosophical matters in general, here are two trustworthy online resources: the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://plato.stanford.edu/>) and the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/>). Despite its other values, Wikipedia *is not* an adequate resource for serious academic work.

Mental Health: Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) can help students who are having difficulties managing stress, adjusting to college, or feeling sad and hopeless. You can reach CAPS (www.uh.edu/caps) by calling 713-743-5454 during and after business hours for routine appointments or if you or someone you know is in crisis. No appointment is necessary for the "Let's Talk" program, a drop-in consultation service at convenient locations and hours around campus. http://www.uh.edu/caps/outreach/lets_talk.html