



Epistemology, Philosophy 26

Brooklyn College

T: 6:30-9:50,

Professor Seeley, Office Hours: T, 2:30-3:45

Course Description:

What does it mean when we say that we know something? The answer to this question may seem simple to our commonsense understanding of everyday experience, but it has plagued philosophers since at least the time of Plato. One way to imagine the problem is to consider all of the beliefs, once thought to be well supported by science, or "known to be true," that we have come to reject as mistaken. For instance, we no longer believe that the Earth is at the center of the solar system. This kind of difficulty caused philosophers like Descartes to set out to find the source of certainty among his beliefs, or the foundations of knowledge

In this course we will examine the philosophical issues surrounding our understanding of the nature of knowledge and rationality. What is the definition of knowledge? Is there a distinction between appearances and reality? Is there a limit to what we can know? Is there a distinction between rational support and knowledge? The course will approach theories of knowledge from both a historical and contemporary perspective. Answers to the above questions will be discussed from the points of view of skepticism, foundationalism, and coherentism. This is a good course for students who are also interested cognitive science, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of science.

Requirements:

You will be asked to write a 4 page response paper early in the term; a 6 page mid-term paper; and a 6 page final paper. In addition there will be a comprehensive final exam.

Texts:

- The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings, Louis Pojman, Wadsworth, 1999, 2nd Edition. (**P**)
- Readings on **eDisk**

SCHEDULE OF READINGS:

Topic 1: The Analysis of Knowledge

Plato	Theaetetus(excerpts) (eDisk)
Gettier	"Is Justified True Belief Knowledge" (P)
Goldman	"A Causal Theory of Knowing" (P)
Lehrer& Paxson	"Undefeated True Justified Belief" (P)
Harman	"Inference to the best Explanation" (P)

Topic 2: Skepticism and Knowledge of the External World

Russell	"Appearance& Reality" (P)
Descartes	Meditation I (P)
Locke	<i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> (excerpts) (P)
Berkeley	<i>Principles of Human Knowledge</i> , Part 1, §1– 33, §86 – 91(eDisk)
Hume	<i>Treatise</i> , II.2, "Skepticism Regarding the Senses" (P)

Topic 3: Epistemic Justification

Foundationalism:

Audi	"Contemporary Foundationalism" (P)
Bonjour	"A Critique of Foundationalism," p. 212 – 223 (P)

Coherentism:

Bonjour	"The Coherence Theory of Empirical Knowledge" (eDisk)
Fumerton	"A Critique of Coherentism" (P)
Sosa	"The Raft and the Pyramid," p. 251 – 266 (P)

Reliabilism:

Goldman	"Reliabilism: What is Justified Belief" (P)
Lehrer	"A Critique of Externalism" (P)

Topic 4: A Priori Knowledge

Kant	<i>The Critique of Pure Reason</i> (excerpts" (P)
Ayer	"The A Priori" (P)
Ewing	"In Defense of A Priori Knowledge" (P)
Quine	"Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (P)

Topic 5: The Problem of Induction

Hume	<i>Enquiries</i> , IV & V (P)
Russell	On Induction (P)
Goodman	The New Riddle of Induction (eDisk)
	The Prospects for a Theory of Projection (eDisk)

Topic 6: Epistemology Naturalized

Quine	"Epistemology Naturalized" (P)
Kim	"What Is Naturalized Epistemology?" (eDisk)
Goldman	"Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology" (eDisk)
Stich	"Could Man Be an Irrational Animal" (eDisk)

Topic 7: Ethics of Belief

Locke	"On Enthusiasm" (P)
Clifford	"The Ethics of Belief" (P)
James	"The Will to Believe" (P)
Pojman	"Belief, Will, and the Ethics of belief" (P)