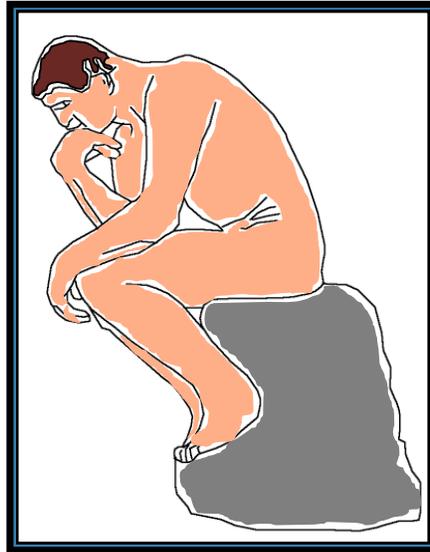


THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
Undergraduate Course Outline 2018

PHIL3501G: Epistemology



Fall Term 2018

Tues. 1:30-2:30 p.m.; Thurs. 1:30-3:30 p.m.
Physics and Astronomy Bldg. Room 106

Instructor: Jacqueline Sullivan
4151 Stevenson Hall

Office hours: Tues. 3-4:00 p.m.; Thurs. 4-5:00 p.m.
Best way to reach me: jsulli29@uwo.ca

DESCRIPTION

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy directed at understanding what knowledge is and how we acquire it. Of central importance is the issue of *epistemic justification*—when, if ever, are we justified in claiming that a belief or proposition counts as *knowledge*? Throughout the 20th century, analytic epistemologists have provided different and competing responses to this question. The general approach that they take to this question, namely, to specify necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge, is referred to as “The Standard Analytic Approach”.

However, philosophers critical of standard approaches have sought alternative ways of understanding what knowledge is and how we come to have it. For example, some have turned to those sciences that study human cognitive processes (e.g., cognitive psychology) in order to identify those reasoning strategies most likely to be “knowledge-producing”. These philosophers take what is referred to as a “Naturalistic Approach”.

However, one limitation of naturalized approaches to knowledge is that their legitimacy is to a significant extent contingent on whether those sciences that study human cognitive processes are knowledge generating. This can only be determined if the methods by which these sciences produce knowledge claims are subjected to adequate scrutiny. Additionally, it depends on assessing how best scientists might work together to collectively to obtain knowledge. The domains of philosophy intended to serve these functions are the “Epistemology of Experiment” and “Social Epistemology” respectively. Philosophers who work in these areas are interested in determining when investigative strategies used in science are knowledge generating, when they fail to be, and why. Findings from such analyses are often used as a basis for making suggestions about how to improve these strategies.

In this course, we will consider representative examples of each of these four types of approaches to understanding what knowledge is and how we acquire it. While we will concern ourselves primarily with assessing the merits and failings of paradigmatic examples of each approach, our ultimate goal is to use the fruits of our analyses to answer for ourselves the questions of what knowledge is and when, if ever, we are justified in claiming that we have it.

TEXTS

- (1) Williams, Michael. *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- (2) Additional readings (journal articles) will be made available as pdfs on Owl. These are primary readings

OBJECTIVES

Students who successfully complete this course will have developed a detailed understanding of a subset of traditional and contemporary approaches to the issues of knowledge and epistemic justification, the ability to critically evaluate these positions, and the capacity to formulate and defend a position on a topic in contemporary epistemology that interests them.

REQUIREMENTS

Attendance & Participation:	20%
Exam 1 (Nov 1): (Short answer)	25%
Exam 2 (Dec 6 (on material covered Nov 6-Dec 4): (Short answer)	25%
Term Paper (3000-3500 words maximum due Nov 29):	30%

Papers will be accepted up to 7 days after the scheduled due date without penalty. After 7 days, papers will lose 5 points/day. All papers are to be submitted via the “Turn It In” link on the OWL course website.

The instructor will provide explicit directions as well as possible topics for the papers. Students may design their own topic; the instructor just needs to approve it. We will set aside class time to talk about the paper—how it is to be structured, what the precise requirements. The instructor is willing to provide feedback on outlines and drafts in person or via email (jsulli29@uwo.ca). Soft deadlines for submitting preliminary outlines and drafts will be built into the final version of the syllabus.

Lecture notes for each class will be posted on OWL shortly after each class.

AUDIT

Students wishing to audit the course should consult with the instructor prior to or during the first week of classes.

The **Department of Philosophy Policies** which govern the conduct, standards, and expectations for

student participation in Philosophy courses is available in the Undergraduate section of the Department of Philosophy website at <http://uwo.ca/philosophy/undergraduate/policies.html>. It is your responsibility to understand the policies set out by the Senate and the Department of Philosophy, and thus ignorance of these policies cannot be used as grounds of appeal.

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Tentative Schedule of Classes
(Reading assignments will likely be changed slightly on final syllabus)

Part I : Problems of Knowledge

Sept 6 (Th) – Course Introduction & Overview
Williams, Introduction pp. 1-12

Sept 11 (T) – **What is Knowledge? –*The Standard Analysis***
Chapter 1, pp. 13-27

Sept 13 (Th) – **The Gettier Problem and Some Responses to it**

- Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge” (1963), *Analysis*, 26: 144-6. [OWL]
- Williams, Chapter 2-3, pp. 28-47

Optional readings:

- Alvin Goldman (1967), “A Causal Theory of Knowing”, *Journal of Philosophy* 64: 355-72. [OWL]
- Robert Nozick (1981), Chapter 3 of *Philosophical Explorations* (Oxford). [OWL]

Sept 25 (T) – **What do attempts to solve the Gettier problem reveal about the standard analysis of knowledge?**

- Williams, Chapter 4, pp. 48-57

Optional readings:

- Peter Klein “A Proposed Definition of Propositional Knowledge”[OWL]

Tentative Schedule of Classes
(Reading assignments will likely be changed slightly on final syllabus)

Sept 27 (Th) – **Confronting the Classical and Cartesian Skeptics: Is Knowledge Even Possible?**

- Williams, Chapter 5&6, pp. 58-80

Optional readings:

- Excerpts from Sextus Empiricus [OWL]
- Excerpts from Descartes' *Meditations*[OWL]
- Excerpts from Hume's *Enquiries*[OWL]

Oct 2 (T) – **How does Foundationalism respond to the Skeptical Challenge?**

Roderick Chisholm (1964) "The Myth of the Given" [OWL]

*****Possible paper topics posted on OWL*****

Oct 4 (Th) – **How does Foundationalism respond to the Skeptical Challenge? (cont'd)**

- Williams, Chapter 7-8, pp. 81-104

Oct 8-14 FALL STUDY BREAK

Oct 16 (T) – **Is Foundationalism a satisfactory response to the Skeptical Challenge?**

- Williams, Chapter 9, pp. 105-116

Oct 18 (Th) – **How does Coherentism respond to the Skeptical Challenge?**

- Williams, Chapters 10-12, pp. 117-145

Optional reading:

- Donald Davidson (1989) "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" [OWL]

Oct 23 (T) – Diagnosing Skepticism and Responses to It

- Williams, Chapter 13 pp. 128-137

Oct 25 (Th) – **Contextualism's response to Classical Skepticism**

- Williams, Chapters 11, pp. 138-145 & Chapters 13-14, pp. 146-172

Optional reading:

- Williams, Chapter 15

Oct 30 (T) – Exam 1 Review

Tentative Schedule of Classes
(Reading assignments will likely be changed slightly on final syllabus)

Nov 1 (Th) - Exam 1 (in class)

Nov 6 (T) - **What is Naturalized Epistemology?**

- Quine, W.V, “Epistemology Naturalized” (1969) [OWL]

Optional Reading:

- Jaegwon Kim “What is “Naturalized Epistemology?””(1988) [OWL]

Nov 8 (Th) - **Reliabilism**

- Alvin Goldman, “What is Justified True Belief?” (1976) [OWL]
- Alvin Goldman, “Epistemic Folkways and Scientific Epistemology” (1992)

Nov 13 (T) – **Warrant & Proper Function**

Alvin Plantinga, “Warrant: A First Approximation” (1992)[OWL]

Nov 15 (Th) – **Cognitive Relativism**

- Stich, S. “Reflective Equilibrium, Analytic Epistemology, and the Problem of Cognitive Diversity”, (1988) [OWL]
- Jennifer Nagel, Valerie San Juan & Raymond A. Mar (2013). “Lay Denial of Knowledge for Justified True Beliefs,” *Cognition* 129: 652-661. [OWL]

Nov 20 (T) – **Social Epistemology**

- Jennifer Lackey (2008). Excerpts from *Learning from Words: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [OWL]

Nov 22 (Th) – **Social Epistemology**

- Philip Kitcher (1990) “The Division of Cognitive Labor”, *Journal of Philosophy* 87(1): 5-22. [OWL]

Nov 27 (T) – **Probabilistic Epistemology**

- Sarah Moss (2013) “Epistemology Formalized”, *Philosophical Review* 122(1): 1-43. [OWL]

Tentative Schedule of Classes
(Reading assignments will likely be changed slightly on final syllabus)

Nov 29 (Th) –Replication and the Replicability Crisis in Psychology

Deborah Mayo (1991) “Novel Evidence and Severe Tests”, *Philosophy of Science* 58: 523-552. [OWL]

Nancy Cartwright (1991) “Replicability, Reproducibility, and Robustness: Comments on Harry Collins”, *History of Political Economy* 23:1. [OWL]

FINAL PAPER DUE

Dec 4 (T) – Review for Exam 2

Dec 6 (Th) – Exam 2