



## PHIL 3140: Epistemology

0.5 credit. Fundamental issues concerning the relation between evidence, rationality, and knowledge. Topics may include: skepticism, the nature of belief, the structure of justification, the relative contributions of reason and sense experience to knowledge, innate knowledge, the problem of induction, and the knowledge of other minds. Precludes additional credit for PHIL 2300. Prerequisite(s): 0.5 credit in philosophy and third-year standing in a philosophy program or permission of the department.

Winter 2019  
Tuesdays 6:05—8:55 p.m.  
Southam Hall 415

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Office hours:  
Tuesdays 4:00—6:00 p.m.  
Fridays 2:30—4:00 p.m.

### *Overview & objectives*

We will begin by looking at a standard view of the varieties and sources of knowledge, along with a traditional analysis of knowledge (stretching back to Plato) that comports well with the standard view. This introductory discussion will not only help us understand such things as the difference between knowledge and mere belief, and the contrasting perspectives that rationalists and empiricists take on knowledge, it will also help us appreciate the significance of one of the most widely discussed problems in contemporary epistemology, viz. the Gettier problem.

We will then turn our attention to various theories of epistemic justification—the kind of backing for one’s beliefs that (according to the traditional analysis) is required for knowledge. These theories offer interesting perspectives on the structure of epistemic justification, the strength of its connection to truth, and the extent to which it depends on what lies beyond our evidence and rationality.

In the final section of the course, we will consider challenges to the standard view as it featured in our introductory discussion. Some of these challenges, such as the challenges of skepticism about the external world and induction, work within the framework of the standard view itself; others, such as the challenges of epistemological naturalism and relativism, proceed from a decidedly different framework.

There are two main objectives to this course. The first, most obvious objective is to provide you with a comprehensive understanding of epistemology’s fundamental issues. The second objective, no less important than the first, is to develop your capacities for critical and creative thought about such fundamental issues.

### *Text & readings*

The following required text, which is available for purchase at the University Bookstore, will guide our class discussions:

Feldman, R. (2003). *Epistemology (Prentice Hall foundations of philosophy series)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

The following additional readings are contained in the required *PHIL 3140 coursepack*, also available for purchase at the Bookstore:

Annis, D. (1978). A contextualist theory of epistemic justification. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15

Ayer, A.J. (1956). Excerpt from *The problem of knowledge*. Penguin Books

Boghossian, P. (2006). Excerpt from *Fear of knowledge*. Oxford University Press

BonJour [1], L. (1978). Can empirical knowledge have a foundation? *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15

BonJour [2], L. (2000). Excerpt from *In defense of pure reason*. Cambridge University Press

Chisholm, R. (1977). Excerpt from *Theory of knowledge*. Prentice-Hall

Clark, M. (1963). Knowledge and grounds: A comment on Mr. Gettier's paper. *Analysis* 24

Cohen, L. J. (1983). Can human irrationality be experimentally demonstrated? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 6

Descartes, R. ([1640] 1988). First meditation. Descartes, *Selected philosophical writings*, trans. J. Cottingham et al. Cambridge University Press

Gettier, E. (1963). Is justified true belief knowledge? *Analysis* 23

Goldman, A. (1979). What is justified belief? G.S. Pappas, ed., *Justification and knowledge*. D. Reidel

Hume, D. ([1777] 1995). Excerpt from *Enquiries concerning human understanding and concerning the principles of morals*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., P.H. Nidditch, ed. Oxford University Press

Lehrer, K. (1974). Excerpt from *Knowledge*. Oxford University Press

Moore, G.E. (1939). Proof of an external world. *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25

Nozick, R. (1981). Excerpt from *Philosophical explanations*. Harvard University Press

Plantinga, A. (1993). Excerpt from *Warrant and proper function*. Oxford University Press

Plato. ([c. 400 BCE] 1987). Excerpt from *Theaetetus*, trans. R. Waterfield. Penguin Books

Quine, W.V.O. (1969). Epistemology naturalized. Quine, *Ontological relativity and other essays*. Columbia University Press

Stroud, B. (1984). Excerpt from *The significance of philosophical scepticism*. Oxford University Press

### *Evaluation*

In-class tests (2x35% = 70% of overall grade). There will be two in-class tests in the course, each consisting of short answer and brief essay questions. The first will be on February 12, the second on March 26.

Final essay (30% of overall grade). In lieu of sitting a formal final examination, you will also be expected to write a final essay of approximately ten pages (or 3,000 words) in length. The topic options for the essay will be posted on cuLearn shortly after our final class. The essay will be due to me (electronically is fine) on or before the last day of the term's examination period, April 27. Warning: unless I have granted you an extension for verifiably exceptional circumstances (or you have applied for an official deferral), I will not accept the final essay from you after April 27.

### *Schedule*

The schedule below is subject to change, depending on how quickly we cover the relevant topics in the class lectures and discussions. Some topics will of course take less time to cover than anticipated, others more.

| Date   |  | Topics  | Readings                                  |
|--------|--|---|---|
| Jan 8  | <i>The standard view &amp; traditional analysis</i>    | Varieties of knowledge; sources of knowledge; empiricism vs. rationalism; nonstandard sources; the tripartite analysis                                | Feldman, Ch. 1&2; Chisholm; Plato; Ayer   |
| Jan 15 |  | The Gettier problem; the justification-doesn't-transmit response; the infallibilist response; the no-false-lemmas response; the no-defeaters response | Feldman, Ch. 3; Gettier; Clark            |
| Jan 22 | <i>Internalist theories of epistemic justification</i> | Evidentialism as a form of internalism; the regress argument; foundationalism—Cartesian and modest  | Feldman, Ch. 4; BonJour [1]               |
| Jan 29 |  | The raft vs. the pyramid; coherentism   | Lehrer                                    |
| Feb 5  | <i>Externalist theories of epistemic justification</i> | The causal theory; reliabilism  | Feldman, Ch. 5; Goldman                   |
| Feb 12 | <b>First test</b>                                      |   |   |
| Feb 19 | <b>Winter break</b>                                    |   |   |
| Feb 26 |  | Truth-tracking theory; proper functionalism   | Nozick; Plantinga                         |
| Mar 5  |  | Contextualism—substantive & semantic; contextually basic beliefs; the regress argument revisited  | Annis                                     |
| Mar 12 | <i>The challenges of philosophical skepticism</i>      | Varieties of philosophical skepticism; skepticism about the external world  | Feldman, Ch. 6; Descartes; Moore; Stroud  |
| Mar 19 |  | Skepticism about induction  | Feldman, Ch. 7; Hume                      |
| Mar 26 | <b>Second test</b>                                     |   |   |
| Apr 2  | <i>Naturalist challenges</i>                           | Rationalism & the standard view; naturalist doubts about <i>a priori</i> justification; experimental doubts about our epistemic competence            | Feldman, Ch. 8; Quine; Cohen; BonJour [2] |
| Apr 9  | <i>The challenge of relativism</i>                     | Varieties of relativism; epistemological absolutism; the coherence of epistemological relativism  | Feldman, Ch. 9; Boghossian                |
| Apr 27 | <b>Final essay</b>                                     |   |   |

**Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2018-19)**

**Assignments:**

Unless specifically told otherwise by their instructors, students:

- Must not use a plastic or cardboard cover or paper clips.
- Must staple the paper (there is a stapler on the essay box).
- Must include the following on the first page: student name and number; course name and number; instructor's name.
- No assignments will be accepted after the last day for handing in term work – see dates below.
- Assignments handed in through the essay box (just inside the glass doors, Paterson Hall, Floor 3A) must be dropped into the box by **4:15** on a regular business day in order to be date-stamped with that day's date. Assignments handed in after 4:15 or on a non-business day will be stamped as having been handed in on the next business day.
- Students are required to keep copies of their assignments. If your paper is lost at any point, you will be considered not to have submitted it if you cannot produce a copy immediately on request.

**Evaluation:**

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

**Deferrals for Final Exams:**

If you miss a final examination (formally scheduled or take-home) because of circumstances beyond your control, you may apply for a deferral. You must apply within 3 working days after the scheduled date of your formally scheduled exam or within 3 working days after the due date of a take-home exam. Visit the Registrar's Office for more information: <http://calendar.carleton.ca/undergrad/regulations/academicregulationsoftheuniversity/acadregsuniv2/#2.5>

**Plagiarism:**

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

**Academic Accommodation:**

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

If you have a documented disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation or contact your PMC coordinator to send your instructor your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term. You must also contact the PMC no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your instructor as soon as possible to ensure accommodation arrangements are made. [carleton.ca/pmc](http://carleton.ca/pmc)

**Pregnancy obligation:** write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

**Religious obligation:** write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the Equity Services website: <http://www2.carleton.ca/equity/>

**Survivors of Sexual Violence:** as a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and is survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: [carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support](http://carleton.ca/sexual-violence-support)

**Accommodation for Student Activities:** Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>

For more information on academic accommodation, please contact the departmental administrator or visit: [students.carleton.ca/course-outline](https://students.carleton.ca/course-outline)

**Important Dates:**

|            |  |
|------------|--|
| Sept. 5    | Classes start.   |
| Sept. 18   | Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.   |
| Sept. 30   | Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.   |
| Oct. 8     | Statutory holiday. University closed.  |
| Oct. 22-26 | Fall Break – no classes.   |
| Nov. 23    | Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.  |
| Dec. 7     | Last day of fall term classes. <b>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</b> Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course. |
| Dec. 9-21  | Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.   |
| Dec. 21    | All take-home examinations are due.  |
| Jan. 7     | Classes begin.   |
| Jan. 18    | Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.   |
| Jan. 31    | Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.  |
| Feb. 18    | Statutory holiday. University closed.  |
| Feb. 18-22 | Winter Break – no classes.   |
| Mar. 26    | Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.  |
| Apr. 9     | Last day of two-term and winter term classes. Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.          |
| Apr. 12-27 | Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.  |
| Apr. 19-21 | Statutory holiday. University closed. No examinations take place.  |
| Apr. 27    | All take-home examinations are due on this day.  |

**Addresses:**

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| Department of Philosophy: | 3A35 Paterson Hall<br><a href="http://www.carleton.ca/philosophy">www.carleton.ca/philosophy</a><br>520-2110  |
| Registrar's Office:       | 300 Tory<br><a href="http://www.carleton.ca/registrar">www.carleton.ca/registrar</a><br>520-3500  |
| Academic Advising Centre: | 302 Tory<br><a href="http://www.carleton.ca/academicadvising">www.carleton.ca/academicadvising</a><br>520-7850  |
| Writing Services:         | 4 <sup>th</sup> Floor, Library<br><a href="http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/">http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/</a><br>520-3822 |
| MacOdrum Library          | <a href="http://www.library.carleton.ca/">http://www.library.carleton.ca/</a><br>520-2735   |