

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 2021 Tuesdays & Thursdays 5:35—6:55 p.m. Dr. David Matheson Department of Philosophy 3A49 Paterson Hall 613-520-2600 ext. 1928 <u>david.matheson@carleton.ca</u>

Overview & objectives

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy devoted to exploring the idea of knowledge and its cognates. In this advanced introduction to epistemology, we will begin by considering a standard view of what we can know and how we can know it, along with a traditional analysis of knowledge that fits particularly well with this standard view. Our consideration of the standard view will help us understand the main varieties and sources of knowledge, and the contrasting epistemological perspectives of empiricism and rationalism. Our consideration of the traditional analysis will help us appreciate the ways in which mere belief falls short of knowledge, as well as 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 is required for knowledge according to the traditional analysis. 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 skeptical, naturalistic, and relativistic challenges to the standard view as it featured in our opening discussion. Some of these challenges work within the framework of the standard view itself; others proceed from a decidedly different framework.

There are two main objectives to this course: to provide you with a comprehensive understanding of epistemology's fundamental issues, on the one hand, and to develop your capacities for critical and creative thought about these issues, on the other.

Video lectures & email consultations

In lieu of classroom lectures, I will regularly post video lectures on cuLearn and make myself available by email during the scheduled meeting times (Tuesdays & Thursdays, 5:25—6:55 p.m.) to answer any questions you might have about these lectures.

You may of course email me at other times with course-related questions. But if you want to email me a question about the video lectures in particular, be sure to do it during the scheduled meeting times. I will answer the questions as promptly as I can during those times, on a first-come, first-serve basis. To keep things manageable, questions emailed during the scheduled meeting times should only be about the video lectures of the past couple of weeks.

Finally, please keep in mind that the video lectures are not for broader consumption. Don't share them with anyone outside of the course. You are not permitted to post them online. Nor are you permitted to submit them to crowdsourced platforms like <u>www.coursehero.com</u>.

Text & readings

The following required text, which is available for purchase at the University Bookstore, will help inform and be referenced within my video lectures :

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
- 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, 3rd 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 (70% of overall grade). There will be two tests in the course, both delivered on cuLearn. They will consist of short-answer and brief-essay questions. The first test will be worth 30% of your overall grade. The second test, which is cumulative, will be worth 40% of your overall grade. The first test will be on February 11 at 5:35—6:35 p.m. The second test will be on March 30 at 5:35—6:55 p.m. Note that you are required to be available at these times: I cannot reschedule test times due to conflicts with personal schedules.

Final essay (30% of overall grade). In lieu of 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 must be submitted electronically (via cuLearn) on or before 11:59 p.m. of 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 that time.

Date		Topics	Readings
Jan 12 & 14	The standard view & traditional analysis	Varieties of knowledge • sources of knowledge • empiricism & rationalism • knowledge as justified true belief	Feldman, Ch. 1&2 • Plato • Ayer
Jan 19 & 21		The Gettier problem • responses to the problem	Feldman, Ch. 3 • Gettier • Clark
Jan 26 & 28	Internalist theories of epistemic justification	Evidentialism as a form of internalism • the regress argument for foundationalism	Feldman, Ch. 4 (pp. 39—52) • BonJour [1] (pp. 1—8)
Feb 2 & 4		Cartesian foundationalism & its modest successor	Feldman, Ch. 4 (pp. 52—60 & 70—78) • BonJour [1] (pp. 8—13)
Feb 9 & 11		Coherentism Test 1: Feb 11, 5:35—6:35 p.m.	Feldman, Ch. 4 (pp. 60—70) • Lehrer
Feb 16 & 18		Winter break	

Schedule

Feb 23 & 25	Externalist theories of epistemic justification	The causal theory • reliabilism	Feldman, Ch. 5 (pp. 81—86 & 90—99) • Goldman
Mar 2 & 4		Truth-tracking theory	Feldman, Ch. 5 (pp. 86—90) • Nozick
Mar 9 & 11		Proper functionalism	Feldman, Ch. 5 (pp. 99—105) • Plantinga
Mar 16 & 18		Contextualism—substantive & semantic • contextually basic beliefs • the regress argument revisited	Feldman, Ch. 7 (pp. 152—55) • Annis
Mar 23 & 25	Skeptical challenges	Varieties of philosophical skepticism • skepticism about the external world	Feldman, Ch. 6 • Descartes • Moore • Stroud
Mar 30 & Apr 1		Skepticism about induction Test 2: Mar 30, 5:35—6:55 p.m.	Feldman, Ch. 7 (pp. 130—41) • Hume
Apr 6 & 8	Naturalistic challenges	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 13	Relativistic challenges	Varieties of relativism • epistemological absolutism • the coherence of epistemological relativism	Feldman, Ch. 9 • Boghossian
Apr 27		Final essay	

Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2020-21)

Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. There will be NO hard copies placed in the essay box this coming year.

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 Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in <u>Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate</u> <u>Calendar</u>). Visit the <u>Registrar's Office</u> for further information.

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. (Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations)

Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term:

- Pregnancy or 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 EDC website.
- Academic accommodations for students with disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- 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 where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per <u>Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy</u>.
- Accommodation for <u>Student Activities</u>: 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.

Important Dates:

Sept. 9	Classes start.
Sept. 23	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. 12	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 26-30	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 27	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. 11	Last day of fall term classes. Classes follow a Monday schedule. 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. 12-23	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. 23	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 11	Classes begin.
Jan. 25	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
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Jan. 31 Feb. 15	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. Statutory holiday. University closed.
Jan. 31 Feb. 15 Feb. 15-19	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. Statutory holiday. University closed. Winter Break – no classes.
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Jan. 31 Feb. 15 Feb. 15-19 Mar. 31 Apr. 2	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. Statutory holiday. University closed. Winter Break – no classes. 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. Statutory holiday. University closed.
Jan. 31 Feb. 15 Feb. 15-19 Mar. 31 Apr. 2 Apr. 14	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. Statutory holiday. University closed. Winter Break – no classes. 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. Statutory holiday. University closed. Last day of two-term and winter term classes. Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter
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Jan. 31 Feb. 15 Feb. 15-19 Mar. 31 Apr. 2 Apr. 14 Apr. 15	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. Statutory holiday. University closed. Winter Break – no classes. 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. Statutory holiday. University closed. 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. <i>Classes follow a Friday schedule</i> . No classes or examinations take place.
Jan. 31 Feb. 15 Feb. 15-19 Mar. 31 Apr. 2 Apr. 14 Apr. 15 Apr. 15 Apr. 16-27	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. Statutory holiday. University closed. Winter Break – no classes. 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. Statutory holiday. University closed. 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. <i>Classes follow a Friday schedule</i> . No classes or examinations take place. Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of
Jan. 31 Feb. 15 Feb. 15-19 Mar. 31 Apr. 2 Apr. 14 Apr. 15 Apr. 15 Apr. 16-27	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. Statutory holiday. University closed. Winter Break – no classes. 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. Statutory holiday. University closed. 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. <i>Classes follow a Friday schedule</i> . No classes or examinations take place. Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy: www.carleton.ca/philosophy 520-2110

Registrar's Office: www.carleton.ca/registrar 520-3500

Academic Advising Centre: www.carleton.ca/academicadvising 520-7850

Writing Services: http://www.carleton.ca/csas/writing-services/ 520-3822

MacOdrum Library http://www.library.carleton.ca/ 520-2735