

**Philosophy 159: Epistemology [revised on 9/20/18]
Harvard University, Fall 2018**

Instructor: Prof. Selim Berker

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Office location: Emerson 208

Office hours: Mon., 12:30 - 2:30 p.m., or by appointment

Teaching Fellows:

Darien Pollock

Email: dpollock@g.harvard.edu

Office hours: Tue., 3:30 - 4:30 p.m.; Wed., 1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

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Said Saillant

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Office hours: Thu., 1:30 - 2:30 p.m.

Office hours location: Robinson Hall Lobby

Course Description:

An introduction to the theory of knowledge. Topics include skepticism about the external world, the analysis of knowledge, sensitivity and safety, the regress of reasons, foundationalism vs. infinitism vs. coherentism, and internalism vs. externalism.

Time and Place:

Lectures: Tue., Thu., 12:00 - 1:15 p.m., Emerson 101

Section 1 (D.P.): Mon., 12:00 - 1:00 p.m., Emerson 107 (a.k.a. the Bechtel Room)

Section 2 (D.P.): Mon., 3:00 - 4:00 p.m., Emerson 104

Section 3 (S.S.): Fri., 9:15 - 10:15 a.m., Sever 104 **[note change in room]**

Section 4 (S.B.): Thu., 1:30 - 2:30 p.m., Emerson 107 (a.k.a. the Bechtel Room)

Please note that because of the new class-time rules at Harvard that go into effect this year, lectures will begin at 12:00 on the dot (not at 12:07, as was the informal convention in previous years).

Course URL: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/45502>

All handouts and assignments will be made available on the course website. The site also contains scans of additional readings not included in the anthology available at the Coop. Note that you must login using either your HarvardKey or an XID (an external ID for people without a HarvardKey) to see all of the site's content. To obtain an XID, please visit <<https://xid.harvard.edu/xid-apps/>>.

Prerequisites:

None. Auditors are welcome to attend the lectures, but only if they have an official affiliation with Harvard University or at another academic institution in the area.

Texts:

The following book is available for purchase in the textbook section of the Coop:

Sosa, Ernest, Jaegwon Kim, Jeremy Fantl, and Matthew McGrath, eds. *Epistemology: An Anthology*, 2nd edition. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2008.

A number of additional readings will be made available for downloading on the course website.

Laptop Use:

The use of laptops, tablets, cell phones, etc. during lectures and section meetings is strictly prohibited (except in cases of medical necessity, in which case follow the guidelines given below for students with disabilities).

Requirements:

Reading, discussing, and writing about the assigned readings will be the central activities of the course. There is a reading assignment for each lecture. The readings are often fairly short, but tend to require close study. It is essential that you complete the assigned readings *before* each lecture, as many lectures will presuppose familiarity with the material in the texts. Also, lectures will introduce material not in the readings, so attendance at each and every lecture is crucial if you want to do well in the course.

The breakdown of grades will be as follows:

20% *Attendance and participation in section and lecture.*

Evaluation will be based on attendance, preparation, and contributions to discussion. If you don't feel comfortable talking during section or lecture, coming in to discuss course material during either the instructor's or the teaching fellow's office hours may count toward your contributions to discussion.

60% *Three 5-page papers.*

Paper topics will be distributed in advance and will ask students to analyze and discuss material covered in class. *The first paper must be rewritten in light of your teaching fellow's comments and resubmitted.* Your final grade for the first paper will be an average of your grades on the two versions. (Note that revised papers are held to a higher standard.)

20% *Final exam.*

You will be required to take a 3-hour final exam on the material covered throughout the term. The final exam will be approximately 2/3rds essay format, and the essay questions will be selected from a list distributed at the beginning of reading period. The exam will be closed-notes and closed-books. (Graduate students taking the course for credit will be given a take-home version of the final exam.)

Late work will be penalized 1/3rd of a letter grade per day (e.g. from a B+ to a B). Extensions will be granted only under exceptional circumstances, and only if an extension is requested *before* the due date of the assignment.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present the instructor with a Faculty Letter from the Accessibility Education Office (AEO) by the end of the second complete week of term, namely Fri., Sept. 21. Failure to do so may result in our inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential.

Academic Integrity Policy – Collaboration Permitted in Written Work:

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers or course instructional staff (TF/TAs, course assistants, faculty), particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts etc. from peers or course instructional staff), you must also acknowledge this assistance. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course.

Departmental Writing Fellow: Noel Dominguez

Email: ndominguez@gmail.com

Website: <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/phil-dwf>

Office location: Emerson 003

The Department Writing Fellow (DWF) is a resource for undergraduates enrolled in Philosophy Department courses who would like help with their writing. Whether you need help starting a paper, formulating an argument, editing a draft, or figuring out the conventions of philosophical writing, the DWF can help. To learn more about one-on-one consultations or workshops on philosophical writing, please visit the above URL.

On Thu., Sept. 13, at 4:00 p.m., in Emerson 101, the DWF will be giving a lecture on the nuts and bolts of writing philosophy papers. All are welcome to attend.

Assignment and Lecture Schedule

NOTE: Readings marked ‘(*)’ can be downloaded from the course website. Readings marked ‘(E:A)’ can be found in Sosa, Kim, Fantl, & McGrath (eds.), *Epistemology: An Anthology* (available at the Coop).

Tue., Sept. 4: Introduction

I. Skepticism about the External World

- Thu., Sept. 6:* Descartes, *First and Second Meditations* (*)
Stroud, “The Problem of the External World,” pp. 7-12 (E:A) (*)
- Tue., Sept. 11:* Blumenfeld & Blumenfeld, “Can I Know That I Am Not Dreaming?” §§I-IV (*) **[note slight change in reading assignment]**
- Thu., Sept. 13:* Blumenfeld & Blumenfeld, “Can I Know That I Am Not Dreaming?” §§V-VIII (*)
- Tue., Sept. 18:* Stroud, “The Problem of the External World,” pp. 13-25 (E:A) (*)
- Thu., Sept. 20:* Moore, “Proof of an External World” (E:A)
Moore, “Four Forms of Skepticism” (E:A) (focus on the final paragraph)
Moore, “Certainty” (E:A)
Soames, “Moore on Skepticism, Perception, and Knowledge,” pp. 12-23 (*)
- Tue., Sept. 25:* Putnam, “Brains in a Vat” (*)

II. The Nature of Knowledge

- Thu., Sept. 27:* Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” (E:A)
Feldman, “The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge” (*)
Feldman, “Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge,” pp. 25-30 (*)
- Fri., Sept. 28:* FIRST PAPER DUE (by 6 p.m.)
- Tue., Oct. 2:* Feldman, “Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge,” pp. 31-38 (*)
Zagzebski, “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems” (E:A)
- Thu., Oct. 4:* Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing” (*)
- Tue., Oct. 9:* Nozick, “Knowledge and Skepticism” (E:A) (skip or skim the endnotes other than n. 3)
- Thu., Oct. 11:* Sosa, “How to Defeat Opposition to Moore” (E:A)
- Sun., Oct. 14:* REWRITE OF FIRST PAPER DUE (by 11:59 p.m.)
- Tue., Oct. 16:* Lycan, “On the Gettier Problem Problem” (*)
Weinberg et al., “Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions” (E:A) (optional)
Williamson, “A State of Mind” (E:A) (optional)

III. The Structure of Knowledge and Justification

- Thu., Oct. 18:* Feldman, “The Infinite Regress Argument” (*)
Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid,” §§1-3 (E:A)

- Tue., Oct. 23:* Feldman, “Cartesian Foundationalism” (*)
Jackson, “Is There a Good Argument against the Incorrigibility Thesis?” (*)
- Thu., Oct. 25:* NO CLASS (instructor out of town)
- Tue., Oct. 30:* Bonjour, “Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?” (E:A)
Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid,” §4 (E:A)
Davidson, “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge” (E:A) (optional)
- Thu., Nov. 1:* Feldman, “Coherentism” (*)
Bonjour, “The Elements of Coherentism” (*)
Bonjour, “In Search of Coherentism” (*)
- Sun., Nov. 4:* SECOND PAPER DUE (by 11:59 p.m.)
- Tue., Nov. 6:* Klein, “Human Knowledge and the Infinite Regress of Reasons” (E:A) (skip or skim section titled “Reliabilism?”)
Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid,” §§5-6 (E:A)
- Thu., Nov. 8:* Feldman, “Modest Foundationalism” (*)
Pryor, “The Skeptic and the Dogmatist” (*) (skip §II)
Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid,” §§7-11 (E:A) (skip the appendix)

IV. Internalism vs. Externalism

- Tue., Nov. 13:* Goldman, “What Is Justified Belief?” (E:A)
- Thu., Nov. 15:* Bonjour, “Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge” (E:A)
Cohen, “Justification and Truth” (*)
Feldman, “Reliability and Justification” (*)
- Tue., Nov. 20:* Feldman & Conee, “Evidentialism” (E:A)
Conee & Feldman, “Evidence” (*) (optional)
- Thu., Nov. 22:* NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)
- Tue., Nov. 27:* Goldman, “Internalism Exposed” (E:A)
Conee & Feldman, “Internalism Defended” (E:A)
- Thu., Nov. 29:* Fumerton, “Externalism and Skepticism” (E:A)
- Tue., Dec. 4:* Cohen, “Basic Knowledge and the Problem of Easy Knowledge” (*)
- Wed., Dec. 5:* THIRD PAPER DUE (by 11:59 p.m.)
- Wed., Dec. 12:* FINAL EXAM (at 9 a.m. in a location TBD)