

PHIL 4203: Theory of Knowledge

Spring 2009

MWF 1:30–2:20

SCEN 408

Jack Lyons

MAIN 312; MWF 2:30–3:30 or by appointment

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Introduction: In this course, we will look at a number of competing contemporary answers to the central questions in epistemology: What if anything, do we really know? What is the difference between knowledge and lucky guessing? Under what conditions is it reasonable, responsible, or justifiable to believe something? Special attention will be given to the major theories: foundationalism, coherentism, and reliabilism.

Requirements: Grades will be assigned on the basis of two in-class written exams, a paper, and a final exam. The paper will be an argument/position paper, 5–8 pages for undergraduates; 8–12 for grad students. Thoughtful contribution to class discussions is expected, though it won't be explicitly enforced by way of grades. Grad students will also give presentations near the end of the semester, along with a 4–6 page summary. All assignments are equally weighted (i.e., 25% each for undergrad, 20% for grad).

Policies: Lectures will sometimes introduce material that is not in the readings. You are responsible for finding out what transpired in any class that you have missed. All submitted work must be your own. Plagiarism will be punished to the full extent of university policy. Make-ups will be granted only under dire, documented circumstances and when requests are made ahead of time. Minimize use of electronic devices. **Cell phones must be silenced and put away.** Laptops and the like are to be used for note-taking only and may not be used to take final exam without special prior permission.

I do strongly encourage you to talk to me outside of class. My scheduled office hours are listed above, but I'm around most of the time and am happy to have you drop in or make an appointment.

Readings: Steup, *An introduction to contemporary epistemology* (CE) ** required

Sosa et al., *Epistemology: an anthology* ** Readings are required; this particular text is not

Lyons, *Perception and basic beliefs* (PBB) ** available as pdf

Other readings will be on reserve; these will be available electronically (RES)

Schedule of Events: The readings listed should be read before the dates given below. I've arranged the readings in an order in which they should be read, but I will often discuss several readings from a given section concurrently, so you should read as much from a section as possible by the first date listed for that topic. The following is subject to change.

Jan.12 – 23	Skepticism	Descartes, <i>Meditation I</i> (RES); Stroud, “The Problem of the External World”; CE Ch 10
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Jan.26 – Feb. 2	Knowledge	Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”; Harman, <i>Thought</i> (selections); CE Ch 1; Nozick “Knowledge and Skepticism” pp. 255–62; Williamson, “A State of Mind”
Feb. 4 – 13	Foundationalism	Chisholm “The Myth of the Given”; CE Ch 2; Alston, “Varieties of Privileged Access”(RES); PBB Ch 1; CE Ch 5
Feb. 16	Exam 1	
Feb. 18 – Mar. 4	Coherentism	BonJour, “Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?”; CE Ch 6; Plantinga, “Bayesian Coherentism and Warrant”; CE Ch 7; PBB Ch 2, pp. 74–84; Haack, “A Foundherentist Theory of Empirical Justification”
Mar. 6 – 13	Reliabilism	Goldman, “What is Justified Belief?”; CE Ch 8; PBB Ch 5
Mar. 23	Exam 2	
Mar. 25 – Apr. 3	Internalism and externalism; evidentialism and nonevidentialism	BonJour, “Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge”; Goldman, “Internalism Exposed”; Feldman and Conee, “Evidentialism”; PBB Ch 7; Zagzebski, <i>Virtues of the Mind</i> , selections
Apr. 6 – 17	Skepticism redux	Van Cleve, “Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle”; Dretske, “Epistemic Operators”; Nozick, “Knowledge and Skepticism” pp. 262–72; DeRose, “Solving the Skeptical Problem”; Sosa, “How to Defeat Opposition to Moore”; Fumerton, “Externalism and Skepticism”
Apr. 13	Papers due	
Apr. 20 – 29	Special topics	Graduate student presentations; readings TBA
May 6	Final exam, 3–5pm	