

Epistemology (Phil. 351): Fall 2010

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Office Hours: Tuesday 11am-12pm, Wednesday 4pm-5pm and by appointment.

Lectures: MW 11:45am- 12:55pm, Hall of Science 200.

Course Description:

Epistemology, along with Metaphysics and Ethics, constitute the main body of philosophy. In this course on Epistemology, we discuss the following major questions:

- Under what conditions does a person know something to be true?
- Under what conditions is a belief justified (or reasonable or rational)?
- In what ways, if any, do epistemological, practical, and moral matters affect one another?
- Do we really have any knowledge at all? Is there any good response to the arguments of the skeptics?
- In what ways, if at all, do results in natural science, especially cognitive psychology, bear on epistemological questions? Do recent empirical results undermine our common conception of knowledge?
- What are the epistemological implications of cognitive diversity? Are there universal standards of rationality, applicable to all people (or all thinkers) at all times? Under what circumstances can rational people disagree with one another?

To address these questions, we organize our discussions in three major parts:

- (I) In the first part, we discuss the traditional conception of knowledge or what is called, “Received View”. According to this view, knowledge is possible, and it is understood as “true justified belief”. This view has been subject to serious objections. To meet those objections, we will introduce a modified version of the view.
- (II) In the second part, we focus on the condition of “justification”. There are two major different accounts of justification: Evidentialist account, and Non-evidentialist account.
 - (1) According to Evidentialist accounts, justification is a matter of having good reasons. However, there are different understandings of what having good reasons amounts to. We discuss three major evidentialist theories of knowledge and justifications:
 - (1-1) Foundationalism,
 - (1-2) Coherentism, and
 - (1-3) Modest Foundationalism.
 - (2) According to non-evidentialist accounts, even if evidence often matters to justification, the processes that initiate and sustain beliefs play more central role. We discuss four major non-evidentialist theories in this course:
 - (2-1) The Causal Theory
 - (2-2) The Truth Tracking Theory
 - (2-3) Reliabilism
 - (2-4) Proper Function
- (III) In the Third part, we examine Skepticism. Skeptical arguments can be classified into major types:

- (1) The First type relies on the assumption that the standards for knowledge are extremely high, and that we do not, or cannot, satisfy them.
- (2) The Second type denies that we meet ordinary standards for justification.

Note: In this course, there will be a great emphasis on writing, and 50% of your grade will be based on the final paper you will submit.

Course Objectives:

- To develop a substantial understanding of major theories of justification.
- To have a substantial understanding of Skepticism of different sorts.
- To be able to analyze statements and arguments vigorously, to understand them with sympathy, and to evaluate them fairly.
- To learn how to think and write philosophy explicitly, clearly, and succinctly.

Required Texts:

- *Epistemology*, Richard Feldman, Pearson Education, 2003.
 - *The Theory of Knowledge (Classical and Contemporary Readings)*, Louis P. Pojman, Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, Third edition, 2003.
- These books are available at Moravian College Book Store.

I will post some additional articles on Blackboard. Please make sure you have access to Blackboard and the shell designed for this course.

Note: You will find that you get the most out of the course if you read each assignment before lecture and then re-read the assignment after the lecture.

Lecture attendance:

It is not possible to perform well in the course without attending lectures regularly. We will cover substantial amounts of material in the lectures not necessarily included anywhere in the readings. It is highly unlikely that you will learn this material adequately by, e.g., borrowing your friend's lecture notes. You have two class sessions you can miss with no question asked. Beyond those two class sessions, any further missed classes without a really good excuse (involving a note from your doctor, psychiatrist, parole officer, etc.) will cost you 2% of your final grade.

Academic honesty:

Students are required to honor academic integrity. The course imposes the application of Moravian College's Academic Honesty Policy. The policy is to be found at Moravian College's *Student Handbook*.

Course requirements:

- (1) A regular final exam, scheduled for **Mon. December 13, at 1:30pm**. You will receive a Study Guide for the Final Exam two weeks prior to the exam to know what kind of questions you should expect on the Final Exam. Make up final exam will be administered only under the most extraordinary of circumstances, and only in light of appropriate supporting documents.
- (2) Each one of you will have a class presentation of a topic of your choice to be approved by me. You need to discuss the topic and the date of your presentation with me not later than September 29th.
- (3) One paper (at least 25 pages). On October 20, I will suggest you some paper topics. However, you have two options available: Either (i) you write your paper on one of topics suggested by me, or (ii) you may have a topic of your choice to be approved by me. Please notice that the topic of your paper can be

related but not the same as the topic of your class presentation. Paper should be typed, double spaced, and spell-checked. You are responsible to submit a hard copy of your paper. In some exceptional cases, you may be allowed to submit your paper through email. If so, you must receive a confirmation email from me, otherwise, you must assume that I have not received your paper. If the paper is turned in late without prior permission, the grade will be adjusted downwards by a third of a grade for each day the paper is late (e.g., A to A-, A- to B+, B+ to B, etc.). It is always helpful to discuss the draft of your paper with your friends, roommates, or classmates so as to solicit feedback.

- (i) Your first draft needs to be ready by November 3rd.
- (ii) At least three of your classmates should read your draft and each of them should raise at least three substantial critical comments on the content of your draft. That means by that date, everyone should read three papers of his/her classmates, and comment on them. We will discuss those comments one by one on November 10th. The Critic must be ready to defend her/his critique, and the Writer must be ready to defend her/his position or explain why s/he is willing to modify her/his position.
- (iii) The revised version of your draft should be submitted to me on November 15th.
- (iv) You will give back your drafts with my comments on November 22nd.
- (v) Your paper due is November 29th.

Important note: *By the end of the semester, all three above-mentioned requirements must be completed in order to pass the course. In order words, if you miss at least one of the above requirements, we will fail the course automatically.*

Grading:

Final Exam: 30% - Paper: 50% - Class Presentation and Participation: 20%

The grading scale is as follows:

Points	Grade	4-point conversion
95-100	A	4
90-95	A-	3.7
87-90	B+	3.3
84-87	B	3
80-84	B-	2.7
77-80	C+	2.3
74-77	C	2
70-74	C-	1.7
67-70	D+	1.3
64-67	D	1
60-64	D-	0.7
0-60	F	0

Tentative Lecture Schedule:

Weeks One and Two: August 30, September 1, 8: “Epistemological Questions” and “The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge”.

- *Epistemology*, Chapter One, pp. 1-7, Chapter Two, pp.8-24.
- *The Theory of Knowledge*:
- “What Can We Know?”, by Bertrand Russell, pp. 5-8;
- “The Problem of the Criterion”, by Roderick Chisholm, pp. 9-18.

Weeks Two, Three, Four: September 13, 15, 20: “Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge”.

- *Epistemology*, Chapter Three, pp. 25-38.
- *The Theory of Knowledge*:
- “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”, by Edmund Gettier, pp. 125-126;
- “An Alleged Defect in Gettier Counter-Examples”, by Richard Feldman, pp. 127-128.
- “Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief”, by Keith Lehrer and Thomas Paxson, pp. 138-141.

Weeks Four, Five, Six, Seven: September 22, 27, 29, October 4, 6, 13: “Evidentialist Theories of Knowledge and Justification”.

- *Epistemology*, Chapter Four, pp. 39-80.
- *The Theory of Knowledge*:
- “Contemporary Classic Foundationalism”, by Roderick Chisholm, pp. 163-173.
- “Contemporary Modest Foundationalism”, by Robert Audi, pp. 174-181.
- “A Critique of Foundationalism”, by Laurence Bonjour, pp. 182-193.
- “A Defense of Coherentism”, by Jonathan Dancy, pp. 206-214.
- “A Critique of Coherentism”, by Richard Fumerton, pp. 215-221.
- “The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge”, by Ernest Sosa, pp. 222-236.

Weeks Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven: October 18, 20, 25, 27, November 1, 3: “Nonevidentialist Theories of Knowledge and Justification”.

- *Epistemology*, Chapter Five, pp. 81-107.
- *The Theory of Knowledge*:
- “A Causal Theory of Knowledge”, by Alvin Goldman, pp. 129-137.
- “Reliabilism: What Is Justified Belief?”, Alvin Goldman, pp.260-272.
- *Philosophical Explanation*, by Robert Nozick, Ch.3 (will be available on Blackboard).
- *Warrant and Proper Function*, by Alvin Plantinga (will be available on Blackboard)

Weeks Twelve, Thirteen, Fourteen: November 8, 10, 15, 17, 22, 29: “Skepticism: The Standard of Knowledge cannot be satisfied”.

- *Epistemology*, Chapter Six, pp. 108-129.
- *The Theory of Knowledge*:

- “Global Skepticism and the Quest for Certainty” (Meditations 1 through 4), by Rene Descartes, pp. 22-38.
- *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*:
- “Responding to Skepticism”, by Keith DeRose, pp. 1-26 (will be available on Blackboard).
- “Brains in a Vat”, by Hillary Putnam, pp. 27-42 (will be available on Blackboard).
- “Philosophical Relativity”, by Peter Unger, pp.243-271 (will be available on Blackboard).

Weeks Fifteen and Sixteen: December 1, 6: “Skepticism: The Problem of Induction”.

- *Epistemology*, Chapter Seven, pp. 130-156.

- *The Theory of Knowledge*:

- “The Problem of Induction” , by David Hume, pp. 434-439.
- “The New Riddle of Induction”, by Nelson Goodman, pp. 460-464.

Review Session will be held on Dec. 8th, the last day of the classes.

The Final Exam will be held on Monday, December 13th, at 1:30pm, Hall of Science 200.

Important Note:

- Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Mr. Joe Kempfer, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Disability Support, 1307 Main Street (extension 1510).
- The Writing Center is located in a building that is not accessible to persons with mobility impairments. If you need the services of the Writing Center, please call 610-861-1392. The Writing Center tutors will make arrangements with the student who needs tutoring services to meet in an accessible location, such as the library or a study/conference room in PPHAC.