

## **Epistemology (Phil. 351): Fall 2014**

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**Office Hours:** Tuesday 10:30-11:30am, Wednesday 4pm-5pm, and by appointment.

**Lectures:** MW 11:45AM-12:55 PM, Main Street Campus, Comenius Hall, 218.

### **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 Text:**

- *Epistemology*, Richard Feldman, Pearson Education, 2003. ISBN: 978-0133416459

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

**Note 1:** This book is available at Moravian College Book Store.

**Note 2:** 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 **Tuesday April 29, 2014 at 1:30pm**, plus a midterm (tentatively scheduled for **Wednesday, February 26, 2014**). 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) One paper (around 1000 words). On March 19, the paper topic will be posted on Blackboard. The paper due is **April 2nd**. Paper should be typed, double spaced, and spell-checked. You are responsible to submit your paper on Blackboard. 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.
- (3) You will be required to write weekly short paragraphs (not more than two pages) consist of your critical evaluation of the material to be discussed in the class. In the

paragraphs, you should concentrate on a specific concept, theme or question. Throughout the semester I am going to assign you 12 weekly assignments, and you are required to complete 10 out of 12 assignments by the end of the semester, that is, you are allowed to skip two assignments. If you decide to do more than 10 assignments, your final grade for assignments would be calculated based on the first ten highest grades you receive on your assignments. The assignments will be posted on the Blackboard every Wednesday, and you are required to submit your paragraph the next Wednesday on Blackboard by midnight, unless I specify otherwise. (There would be no assignment for the first week.)

- (4) You will be divided into two groups, and groups are required to participate in 3 class discussions. As a group you receive a grade between 0 and 10 for each discussion. If you miss a discussion, you individually receive 0 for that discussion, unless you have an extremely good excuse for your absence. If your absence is excused, then I will decide how you may make up for the missing discussion. However, if you miss more than one discussion, the make up policy applies only to one of them, and you will receive 0 for the rest.

**Grading:**

Final Exam: 30% - Midterm Exam: 25%- Paper: 15% - Weekly assignments: 15%.- Class debates:15%

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:**

**Jan. 13, 15, 20, 22 : “Epistemological Questions” and “The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge”.**

- *Epistemology*, Chapter One, pp. 1-7, Chapter Two, pp.8-24.

“What Can We Know?”, by Bertrand Russell, pp. 5-8 (Will be posted on Blackboard)

- “The Problem of the Criterion”, by Roderick Chisholm, pp. 9-18 (Will be posted on Blackboard)

**Jan. 27, 29, Feb. 3: “Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge”.**

- *Epistemology*, Chapter Three, pp. 25-38.
- “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”, by Edmund Gettier, pp. 125-126 (Will be posted on Blackboard)
- “An Alleged Defect in Gettier Counter-Examples”, by Richard Feldman, pp. 127-128.(Will be posted on Blackboard)
- “Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief”, by Keith Lehrer and Thomas Paxson, pp. 138-141. (Will be posted on Blackboard)

Feb. 5, 10, 12, 17, 19, 24: **“Evidentialist Theories of Knowledge and Justification”.**

- *Epistemology*, Chapter Four, pp. 39-80.

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

**Feb. 26: Midterm Exam**

Mar. 10, 12, 17, 19, 24, 26: **“Nonevidentialist Theories of Knowledge and Justification”.**

- *Epistemology*, Chapter Five, pp. 81-107.

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

Apr. 2, 7, 9 : **“Skepticism: The Standard of Knowledge cannot be satisfied”.**

- *Epistemology*, Chapter Six, pp. 108-129.

- “Global Skepticism and the Quest for Certainty” (Meditations 1 through 4), by Rene Descartes, pp. 22-38. (Will be posted on Blackboard.)
- “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).

**Apr. 2: Paper Due**

**Apr. 14, 16: “Skepticism: The Problem of Induction”.**

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

- “The Problem of Induction” , by David Hume, pp. 434-439. (Will be posted on Blackboard.)
- “The New Riddle of Induction”, by Nelson Goodman, pp. 460-464. (Will be posted on Blackboard.)

**Apr. 23: Review**

**The Final Exam will be held on Tuesday, April 29, 2014, at 1:30pm, Comenius Hall, 218.**

**Important Notes:**

- Students who wish to request accommodations in this class for a disability should contact Elaine Mara, Assistant Director of Learning Services for Academic and Disability Support, 1307 Main Street, or by calling 610-861-1510. Accommodations cannot be provided until authorization is received from the Academic Support Center.
- 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.