

Phil 4/51040: Epistemology

Deborah C. Smith (Dr. Deb), Professor of Philosophy

Spring 2025: MW 11:00-12:15

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Office Hours: MW 10-11:00, 12:15-1:00, and by appointment.

<https://www.kent.edu/philosophy>

Texts and Readings:

Ernest Sosa, Jaegwon Kim, Jeremy Fantl, and Matthew McGrath eds., *Epistemology: An Anthology* (second edition)

Photocopied readings as needed (these will be posted in Canvas)

Course Description:

One way to define ‘philosophy’ is as the love of knowledge. But what is knowledge? A common definition, dating back to Plato’s *Theatetus* (200d-201d), is that knowledge is a true belief supported by good reasons. The definition of ‘knowledge’ as justified, true, belief was widely accepted for over two thousand years. But, in 1963, Edmond Gettier blew up that consensus by publishing a three paged article that contained convincing counter-examples to that analysis. Since then, there has been no philosophical consensus on the nature of epistemic justification or on the definition of ‘knowledge’. This class will focus on the post-Gettier literature in analytic epistemology. Topics will include the post-Gettier analysis/definition of ‘knowledge’, foundationalist vs. coherentist theories of epistemic justification, internalist vs. externalist theories of epistemic justification, naturalized epistemology, and virtue epistemology.

Learning Outcomes:

To understand the ideas of major philosophers regarding various issues in contemporary epistemology. To critically evaluate the motivations for and problems associated with various epistemological views.

NOTICE OF MY COPYRIGHT AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS.

Any intellectual property displayed or distributed to students during this course (including but not limited to PowerPoints, notes, quizzes, examinations) by the professor remains the intellectual property of the professor. This means that the student may not distribute, publish or provide such intellectual property to any other person or entity for any reason, commercial or otherwise, without the express written permission of the professor.

Course Requirements:**Reading:**

- You are to have completed the assigned reading before class on the day for which it was assigned.
- Most of the reading assignments are listed in the schedule of readings and assignments below, although I may add some additional reading assignments.
- Although I have generally assigned less than forty pages of reading a week, the material is dense and can be quite technical. Expect to spend a relatively long time doing the reading.
- You should read the assigned material at least twice (once before we discuss it in class and once after) to make sure that you understand it.
- It is highly recommended that you take notes on the reading and write down any questions you have so that I can answer them in class.
- You will be required to submit a summary of one of the readings each week (see below).
- *You are responsible for all material covered in the assigned readings whether or not it is explicitly covered in class.*
- You are expected to bring all relevant reading material with you to class.

Attendance and class participation:

- You are expected to attend every class meeting and make a positive contribution to class discussion. Note that you cannot make a positive contribution to discussion if you have not done the assigned reading.
- Do not make a habit of coming to class late or leaving early. This is not only disruptive to the other students, but may also cause you to miss an important part of the lecture.
- It is worth noting that mere attendance is not sufficient for success in this class; it is also extremely important that you ask questions when you have them or let me know when something I have said makes little or no sense to you.
- Make sure that phones and other electronic devices are turned off prior to the start of class. Tablets or laptops should be used only for the purpose of taking notes.
- Unless you have received my explicit permission to do so, refrain from recording the lecture in any way.
- If, for any reason, you cannot avoid missing a class meeting, it is your responsibility to contact me before the class so that we can arrange for you to make up any assignments scheduled for that day. I also highly recommend that you borrow lecture notes from a classmate should you miss a class.

In the event of a campus closure or instructor quarantine, we will meet virtually via Teams. You will be informed of such an occurrence via email and provided a Teams link.

- From time to time and for various reasons (e.g., campus closure, instructor illness, to catch up if we fall too far behind), I may record a lecture and post it in Canvas. Students will be notified of any posted recordings via email and are expected to view such recordings prior to the next in-person class.
- *You are responsible for all material covered in lecture whether or not it is explicitly covered in the readings.*
- A portion of your grade will be reserved to reflect attendance and meaningful class participation (for more details, see Graded Material below).

Graded Material:

- With the exception of the first week of classes and weeks in which an essay exam is due, all students are expected to submit a **summary (500 words or less) of one of the week's readings** at the beginning of the class session for which it was assigned. (Note that on Monday of week 1, I will provide a sample summary of Stroud, "The Problem of the External World." On Wednesday of week 2, all students will do a summary of Gettier's, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?") Individual reading summaries will be "graded" on a plus, check, minus scale and will be factored into your attendance/participation points (see below).
 - As an alternative to writing a summary yourself, you may ask ChatGPT to write a 500 word summary of the relevant reading at the college level. You will then write up a criticism of ChatGPT's summary based on your understanding of the reading. Your criticism should also be 500 words or less. Turn in both ChatGPT's summary and your criticism thereof. This option is only available when ChatGPT is familiar with the reading in question. You may use this alternative a maximum of two times during the semester.

Note: any other use of ChatGPT or other generative AI in this course will constitute cheating and/or plagiarism and will result in an academic sanction per University policy 3-01.8.
- All students are required to complete **three essay exams** each worth 40 points. These exams will take the form of highly detailed essay answers to questions handed out in class approximately one week prior to their due date. The due date for each is listed in the schedule of readings and assignments below. If for some reason you cannot turn in an essay exam on the due date, talk to me beforehand. An unexcused, late essay exam will be docked 5 points if turned in by the next class period after which it is due and will not be accepted for points afterward.
- In addition to the three essay exams, students in 51042 will be required to give at least **one oral presentation** on one of the readings. Students are strongly encouraged to have a handout or PowerPoint to accompany their presentation. The oral presentation will be worth 40 points.
- An additional 40 points will be reserved to reflect **meaningful participation in class discussion**. Because attendance is a necessary requirement for participation, absences

(even excused absences) will affect your participation score. Everyone is allowed one free absence. After that, each absence will drop your participation grade by 4 points. Remaining points will be awarded for meaningful participation and the extent to which that participation (along with your reading summaries) reflects that you have completed the reading. Participation includes but is not limited to:

- asking questions concerning the readings and/or my lecture,
- offering interpretations of a particular claim, argument, or view in the readings,
- raising critical questions for and offering objections/responses to particular claims, arguments, or views in the readings, and
- thinking on one's feet by offering original views on the subject, defending them with cogent reasons, and entertaining philosophical criticism from one's classmates.

Grades and Grading:

- You must turn in all three essay exams to pass this course with a D or higher. (Students in 51040 must also give an oral presentation to pass the course.)
- To determine your final grade, I will first calculate your mean score on the graded elements of this class. This will be a number between 0 and 40.
 - Since there are four graded elements of this class (three essay exams, and participation) for 41040 students, I will divide the total points earned by each student at the 41040 level by four to produce the mean score.
 - Since there are five graded elements of this class (the four above and the oral presentation) for 51040 I will divide the total points earned by each student at the 51040 level by five to produce the mean score.
- Second, I will use the resulting mean scores of each student in the class to construct a curve noting the high, low, median, mode, and mathematical average of the scores.
- Final grades will be determined based partly on the shape of the curve of the mean scores and partly by reflecting on the scores thought of as grades on a 4-point scale (for example, 36 would be a 3.6—a low A-).

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

(This schedule is tentative. You are responsible for knowing about any changes announced in class.)

Traditional Epistemology and the Problem of Skepticism

Week 1 (January 12-18):

M *Important concepts in the study of epistemology*

W **Reading:** Stroud, “The Problem of the External World,” pp. 7-25.¹

The Gettier Problem and Proposed Solutions

Week 2 (January 19-25):

M *No class — Martin Luther King Jr. Day*

W **Readings** Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?,” pp. 192-193.

Week 3 (January 26-February 1):

M **Reading:** Klein, “A Proposed Definition of Propositional Knowledge” (pdf in Canvas).

W **Reading:** Harman, “Selections from *Thought*,” pp. 194-206.

Externalism vs. Internalism about Epistemic Justification

Week 4 (February 2-8):

M **Reading:** Goldman, “What is Justified Belief?,” pp. 333-347.

W **Reading:** Feldman and Conee, “Evidentialism,” 310-321.

Week 5 (February 9-15):

M **Reading:** Vogel, “Reliabilism Leveled,” pp. 348-362.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all page references are to Kim, Sosa et al, *Epistemology: An Anthology* (second edition).

W **Reading:** BonJour, "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge," pp. 363-378.

Week 6 (February 16-22):

M **Reading:** Fumerton, "Externalism and Skepticism," pp. 394-406.

W **Reading:** Goldman, "Internalism Exposed," pp. 378-393.
First essay exam handed out (due in class Wednesday, March 5th)

Week 7 (February 23-March 1):

M **Reading:** Feldman and Conee, "Internalism Defended," pp. 407-421.

Foundationalism vs. Coherentism about Epistemic Justification

W **Reading:** Chisholm, "The Myth of the Given," pp.80-93.

Week 8 (March 2-8):

M **Reading:** Sellars, "Does Empirical Knowledge have a Foundation?," pp. 94-98.

W **Reading:** BonJour, "Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?," pp. 109-123.
First essay exam due in class

Week 9 (March 9-15):

SPRING RECESS: NO CLASSES

Week 10 (March 16-22):

M **Reading:** Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid," pp. 145-164.

W **Reading:** Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," pp. 124-133.

Week 11 (March 23-29):

M **Reading:** BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Chapter 5
(pdf in Canvas).

W **Reading:** BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Chapters 6
(pdf in Canvas).

Second essay exam handed out (due in class Wednesday, April 9th)

Week 12 (March 30-April 5):

M **Reading:** BonJour, *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*, Chapters 7
(pdf in Canvas).

W **Reading:** Haack, “A Foundherentist Theory of Empirical Justification,” pp. 226-235.

Epistemology Naturalized

Week 13 (April 6- 12):

M **Reading:** Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized,” pp. 528-537.

W **Reading:** Kim, “What is ‘Naturalized Epistemology’?,” pp. 538-551.
Second essay exam due in class

Week 14 (April 13-19):

M **Reading:** Bealer, “A Priori Knowledge and the Scope of Philosophy,” pp. 612-624.

W **Reading:** Kornblith, “Investigating Knowledge Itself,” pp. 647-659.

Virtue Epistemology

Week 15 (April 20-26):

M **Reading:** Plantinga, “Warrant: A First Approximation,” pp. 429-441.

W **Reading:** Greco, “Virtues and Vices of Virtue Epistemology,” pp. 454-461.
Third essay exam handed out (due at our final week meeting Tuesday, May 6th)

Week 16 (April 27-May 3):

M **Reading:** Sosa, “The Place of Truth in Epistemology,” pp. 477-491.

W **Reading:** Elgin, “True Enough,” pp. 507-519.

Final Exam Week (May 4-10):

T **Final meeting: 10:15-12:30, Tuesday, May 6th**
Third essay exam due

Official Syllabus Statements

PHIL4/51040: Epistemology Spring 2025: MW 11:00-12:15 EST

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Office: Bowman 320K

Email: dcsmith1@kent.edu

Office Hours: MW 10:00-11:00, 12:15-1:00, and by appointment

Course Specific Statements:

Attendance Policy: I will hand out a sign-up sheet or otherwise take note of those present at the beginning of class. You are responsible for all material covered in lecture whether or not it is explicitly covered in the readings. Attendance and participation will account for 25% of the final grade for Phil 41042 and 20% of the final grade for Phil 51040.

Final: There is no final exam in this class. The third of three essay exams will be due in class on the day and time scheduled for the final. We will have a meaningful class meeting at that time.

For more information about course content and requirements, see the detailed course syllabus.

General Statements:

Notice of My Copyright and Intellectual Property Rights: Any intellectual property displayed or distributed to students during this course (including but not limited to PowerPoints, recordings of lectures, notes, content handouts, quizzes, examinations) by the professor remains the intellectual property of the professor. This means that the student may not distribute, publish or provide such intellectual property to any other person or entity for any reason, commercial or otherwise, without the express written permission of the professor. Additionally, students may not distribute or publish recordings and/or links to live classroom presentations, lectures, and/or class discussions.

Students with Disabilities: University policy 3-01.3 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through Student Accessibility Services (contact 330-672-3391 or visit www.kent.edu/sas for more information on registration procedures).

Academic Complaints: The Philosophy Department Grievance Procedure for handling student grievances is in conformity with the Student Academic Complaint Policy and Procedures set down as University Policy 3342-16 in the *University Policy Register*. For information concerning the details of the grievance procedure, please see the departmental chairperson.

Academic Dishonesty: University policy 3-01.8 deals with the problem of academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism. None of these will be tolerated in this class. Note that using GAI to generate content in satisfaction of assigned coursework, except as expressly permitted by the instructor in the syllabus or applicable assignment meets the definition of cheating. The sanctions provided in this policy will be used to deal with any violations. If you have any questions, please read the policy at <https://www.kent.edu/policyreg/administrative-policy-regarding-student-cheating-and-plagiarism>.

Religion Accommodations: The University welcomes individuals from all different faiths, philosophies, religious traditions, and other systems of belief, and supports their respective practices. In compliance with University policy and the Ohio Revised Code, the University permits students to request class absences for up to three (3) days, per term, in order to participate in organized activities conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination, church, or other religious or spiritual organization. Students will not be penalized as a result of any of these excused absences.

The request for excusal must be made, in writing, during the first fourteen (14) days of the semester and include the date(s) of each proposed absence or request for alternative religious accommodation. The request must clearly state that the proposed absence is to participate in religious activities. The request must also provide the particular accommodation(s) you desire.

You will be notified by me if your request is approved, or, if it is approved with modification. I will work with you in an effort to arrange a mutually agreeable alternative arrangement. For more information regarding this Policy you may contact the Student Ombuds (ombuds@kent.edu).

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement: Kent State University is committed to the creation and maintenance of equitable and inclusive learning spaces. This course is a learning environment where all will be treated with respect and dignity, and where all individuals will have an equitable opportunity to succeed. The diversity that each student brings to this course is viewed as a strength and a benefit. Dimensions of diversity and their intersections include but are not limited to: race, ethnicity, national origin, primary language, age, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, mental and physical abilities, socio-economic status, family/caregiver status, and veteran status.

Land Acknowledgement Statement: We acknowledge that the lands of Kent State University were the previous homes of people who were removed from this area without their consent by the colonial practices of the United States government. Before removal, these groups created networks that extended from Wyoming to the Florida Coast and Appalachia and to the northern reaches of Lake Superior. These societies included people of the Shawnee, Seneca-Cayuga, Delaware, Wyandots, Ottawa and Miami. We honor their lives – both past and present – and strive to move beyond remembrance toward reflection and responsibility through honest accounts of the past and the development of cultural knowledge and community.