



Syllabus

All of the information on this syllabus is also posted on the course website:

<http://homepages.nyu.edu/~pfk2/episte>

The website will be updated throughout the semester with announcements, assignments, handouts, links, etc. Please check it regularly.

The official course title & number is **Belief, Truth, and Knowledge**, V83.0076-001. The course meets Monday and Wednesday from 9:30-10:45 a.m. in the Tisch UC56.

The instructors for the course are

- Lecturer: Peter Kung, pfk2@nyu.edu
office hours: Monday/Tuesday after class in 503 Silver/Main.
- TA: Dana Evan, de285@nyu.edu
office hour: Monday from 4 to 5 in 503 Silver/Main.

If you cannot make the scheduled office hours, feel free to send us an email or stop by after class to make an appointment.

What is epistemology?

This is a course in epistemology, the study of what it takes to know something is true and what it takes to be justified in believing something is true.

We often pose questions — e.g., What percentage of Iraq is Kurdish? Will the Sixers win tonight? $68+57=?$ — and take ourselves to *know* the answers, or to have *rational opinions*, or to have *good evidence* for our views. Rather than answer these questions directly, we will take a step back and investigate the nature of evidence, and what it is to know something, or to be rational. The course will begin by considering some well-known skeptical challenges to much of what ordinarily take ourselves to know and/or have justified beliefs about. For instance, some have thought that our apparent inability to rule out the sort of scenario described in the movie *The Matrix*, shows that we don't know (or even rationally believe) anything about our surroundings. We will then look at a number of related questions concerning the structure and nature of knowledge and justification. Does knowledge or justification have to rest on foundations? Is the standard for what counts as knowing or being justified higher in, say, the courtroom or epistemology classroom than in more normal contexts. To know or to be justified in believing something, do you always have to be in a position to say how you know or what your grounds are?

Finally, we will examine some particular areas of knowledge, as time permits, to see what special problems they pose.

- self-knowledge
- scientific knowledge
- memory
- a priori knowledge
- knowledge of right and wrong

Texts

There is one required text, available at the NYU Bookstore:

- *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology*, edited by Sven Bernecker and Fred Dretske

Some readings not in the Bernecker and Dretske (B&D) are available on the web. We may occasionally distribute articles in class for you to read. See the list of readings for details.

Grading

You must complete all of the following requirements to pass the course:

- Two writing assignments. (20%, 30%)
- In-class mid-term. (20%)
- Final exam. (30%)

For some of you this will be your first experience writing a philosophy paper. We will discuss philosophical writing as the date of the first assignment approaches. If you want to get a head start, take a look at Jim Pryor's excellent set of [guidelines on writing a philosophy paper](http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/general/writing.html),

<http://www.princeton.edu/~jimpryor/general/writing.html> (our course website has this link)

which describes not only how to write your paper, but also what we will look for in grading it.

Policies

- While class attendance is not technically required, it will be very difficult to get a passing grade without coming to class. A good portion of the material we will cover is either not in or not explicit in the readings.
- Class participation will influence borderline grades. There's a big gap between a B (3.0) and a B+ (3.3). You'd be surprised how often grades wind up in the border region...
- Lateness is bad, very bad. No late papers will be accepted. If an emergency prevents you from turning in your paper at the beginning of class on the due date, please bring us a letter from your advisor explaining why you were unable to meet the deadline.
- It should go without saying that violation of the *code of academic integrity*

<http://www.nyu.edu/cas/map/integrity.html>

is a serious matter. Any work that is submitted as your own but written in whole or in part by someone else is plagiarism. Plagiarism results in an F for the course and is subject to further disciplinary action.

Tentative Reading List

This tentative schedule is subject to change depending on how much material we are able to cover week to week. Underlined articles are available on the web. For web articles and schedule updates, please check the course website. (The number on the left indicates the number of classes allocated to that topic.)

Two Challenges

the skeptical challenge

- Descartes, [Meditations I](#)
- 2 Stroud, "Understanding human knowledge in general" (B&D ch. 22)
- Unger, "A defense of skepticism" (B&D ch. 23)

Gettier's challenge

- Gettier, "Is justified true belief knowledge?" (B&D ch.2)
- 2 Feldman, "An alleged defect in Gettier counter-examples" (B&D ch. 3)
- (optional) Ayer, "Knowing as having the right to be sure" (B&D ch. 1)

responses to challenges

- Lehrer & Paxson, "Knowledge: undefeated justified true belief" (B&D ch. 5)
- 5 Goldman, "A causal theory of knowing" (B&D ch. 4)
- Goldman, "Discrimination and perceptual knowledge" (B&D ch. 8)

- (optional) Armstrong, “The thermometer model of knowledge” (B&D ch. 7)
Nozick, “Knowledge and skepticism” (B&D ch. 25)
[Stine, “Skepticism, relevant alternatives, and deductive closure” (Philosophical Studies, 1978)]

Wed Feb 25 — first writing assignment due

The Structure of Knowledge and Justification

the internalism-externalism debate

- Chisholm, “The indispensibility of internal justification” (B&D ch. 10)
Foley, “What’s wrong with reliabilism?” (B&D ch. 13)
4 BonJour, “Externalist theories of empirical knowledge” (B&D ch. 14)
Bach, “A rationale for reliabilism” (B&D ch. 15)
Alston, “An internalist externalism” (B&D ch. 16)

Contextualism and invariantism

- Lewis, “Elusive knowledge” (B&D ch. 26)
2 Schiffer, “Contextualist solutions to scepticism” (*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1996: 317-333)
(optional) DeRose, “Contextualism: an explanation and defense” (The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology, 1998, J. Greco and E. Sosa, eds.)

Wed Mar 10 — mid-term exam

foundationalism and coherentism

- Price, “The given” (B&D ch. 17)
Chisholm, “The directly evident” (B&D ch. 18)
4 Sellars, “Does empirical knowledge have a foundation?” (B&D ch. 19)
BonJour, “The elements of coherentism” (B&D ch. 11)
Lehrer, “The coherence theory of knowledge” (B&D ch. 12)

Objectivity and Truth

- 2 Paul Boghossian, selections from forthcoming book

Wed April 14 — second writing assignment due

Other Topics

(time permitting)

- 3 modal knowledge
self-knowledge

Wed May 5 — final exam, 10 a.m. to 11:50 p.m. (as per University schedule)