

Epistemology

Instructor: Katalin Farkas

2 credits (4 ECTS credits)

Fall term 2020/2021

Thursday 13:30 – 15:10

Mode of teaching: ONLINE

Level: Core MA course. Mandatory for first year philosophy MA students on the 2-year MA program; elective for philosophy MA students on the 1-year program. Non-philosophy students with some background in philosophy (not specifically epistemology) are welcome, but are asked to contact the instructor before signing up.

Summary and aims: The course offers an introduction into some classic problems of epistemology which form the subject of lively discussion also in contemporary philosophy. We shall start with the question of necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge, the Gettier problem and its consequences. Next we look into theories of justification, and discuss the merits and shortcomings of foundationalism, coherentism and reliabilism. Next we will consider various sceptical arguments against the possibility of knowledge, and investigate some responses to the sceptical arguments. We will close the course with investigating some social aspects of knowledge: testimony and epistemic injustice. The aim of the course is to familiarize students with the central concepts of contemporary epistemological research, to enable them to discern the essential features of arguments in epistemological papers and to assess their soundness and validity. The course will offer a suitable basis for taking an advanced graduate class in epistemology.

Learning outcomes: Students will become familiar with the central concepts of contemporary epistemological research, and with the main positions occupied in epistemological debates. They will develop their ability to discern arguments in philosophical texts, to evaluate these arguments, and to present an argued position in a clear and concise manner.

Week-by-week.

- Each week, two recorded lectures with accompanying handouts (of approx. 15-20 minutes each) will be shared with the students, providing an introduction to the main topic of the week.
- Students read the set reading(s) after listening to the lecture.
- Students are encouraged to make a 1 page summary of the paper. Each week, at least one student prepares a summary and shares it with the class ahead of the weekly zoom meeting (the first summary is prepared by the instructor. The weekly deadline will be set once we have a schedule for the zoom meeting).
- The readings will be accompanied by a set of questions.
- In the weekly zoom meeting, we will use the breakout room function to split into small groups of 2 or 3, and each group discusses one of the questions. Then we reconvene and the small groups report back on the result of the discussion.

1. Theories of knowledge and the Gettier problem

Reading:

- Gettier, Edmund 1963: „Is justified true belief knowledge?“ *Analysis* 23/6, 121-3

- Linda Zagzebski “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 174 (Jan., 1994), pp. 65-73. Also in Sosa et. al. 2008

2. Deductive closure

Reading:

- Jonathan Vogel, 1990, “Are There Counterexamples to the Closure Principle?” in *Doubting: Contemporary Perspectives on Skepticism*, M. Roth and G. Ross (eds.), Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. Also in Sosa et. al. 2008

Further reading:

- Stine, G. C. 1976, “Skepticism, Relevant Alternatives, and Deductive Closure” *Philosophical Studies* 29/4, pp. 249-261

3. Foundationalism and coherentism.

Reading:

- Elgin, Catherine Z. 2013 “Non-foundationalist epistemology: Holism, coherence, and tenability”. In *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*. Second Edition. Edited by Matthias Steup, John Turri, and Ernest Sosa. Blackwell. pp. 244-255
- Van Cleve, James (2005). Why coherence is not enough: A defense of moderate foundationalism. In *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*. Second Edition. Edited by Matthias Steup, John Turri, and Ernest Sosa. Blackwell. pp. 255-267

4. Reliabilism, externalism

Reading:

- Goldman, Alvin A. 1971: „What is justified belief?” in G. Pappas (ed) *Justification and Knowledge* Dordrecht, Reidel reprinted in Sosa, Ernest, Jaegwon Kim, Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath (ed.) 2008: *Epistemology: an Anthology. 2nd edition* Blackwell Publishers

Further reading:

- Conee, E. & Feldman, R. (1998). The generality problem for reliabilism. *Philosophical Studies* 89 (1):1-29.

5. Internalism and Externalism, virtue epistemology.

Reading:

- Ernest Sosa 2009: “Human Knowledge, Animal and Reflective” In *Reflective Knowledge*, Oxford: Clarendon Press

Further reading

- Zagzebski, Linda 2009 “Epistemic Self-Trust and the Virtues that Regulate it” Chapter 4/I of *On Epistemology* Belmont. CA: Wadsworth. Pp. 77-87

6. Scepticism

Reading:

- Descartes: First Meditation. In Descartes, René (1984). *Philosophical Writings of René Descartes*. 3 volumes. Edited and translated by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothof, D. Murdoch and A. Kenny. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Further reading:

- Weintraub, Ruth (2006). What Descartes' Demon Can Do and his Dream Cannot. *Theoria* 72 (4):319-335.

7. Responses to scepticism

Reading:

- Duncan Pritchard “Resurrecting The Moorean Response To The Sceptic” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 10 (2002), 283-307

8. A priori knowledge.

Reading:

- Jenkins, Carrie: “A Priori Knowledge: The Conceptual Approach” In A. Cullison (ed.), *The Continuum Companion to Epistemology*, 2012, London: Continuum Press, pp. 180-98

Further reading:

- Devitt, Michael (2005). There is no a priori. In Steup Matthias & Sosa Ernest (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*. Blackwell. pp. 105--115.

9. Self-knowledge

Reading:

- Horgan, Terry & Kriegel, Uriah (2007). Phenomenal epistemology: What is consciousness that we may know it so well? *Philosophical Issues* 17 (1):123-144.

Further reading:

- Gertler, Brie (2011). Self-Knowledge and the Transparency of Belief. In Anthony Hatzimoysis (ed.), *Self-Knowledge*. Oxford University Press. Pp. 125-145

10. Social epistemology – testimony

Reading:

- Lackey, Jennifer (1999). “Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission,” *Philosophical Quarterly* 49 (197):471-490.

11. Epistemic injustice

Reading:

- Fricker, Miranda (2007). “Testimonial Injustice” ch. 1 of her *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford University Press.

12. Summary

Conditions for passing the course:

- conscientious attendance, reading of the assigned material, (mental) preparation of answers to all the reading questions, participation in discussions;
- submission of two paper summaries
- passing the written exam at the end of the term.

Grading

- written exam.
 - for 2-year philosophy MA students: the written exam grade is given on the basis of the in-class written examination as part of the Theoretical Philosophy Final Examination at the end of the first year. You will draw from a list of previously distributed exam questions.

- for others taking the course: there will be a written exam organised. You will draw from a list of previously distributed exam questions. In case no in-person exam is possible, students will receive a take-home exam.

Grading criteria for the written exam

The usual length of answers is 600-900 words (1.5, 2 pages)

- In order to earn an “A-“ the written exam paper has to cover most of the relevant material covered in the lectures. It has to show evidence of a thorough understanding of, and familiarity with, the relevant readings. It has to be written clearly and concisely, in competent academic English. One of the most important criteria will be the quality of the arguments. The text must be relevant to the question: it should not contain materials that do not pertain to the issue discussed. Failing to meet these criteria will result in the appropriate reduction of the grade.