

**Philosophy 159: Epistemology [revised on 4/20/22]**  
**Harvard University, Spring 2022**

**Instructor:** Prof. Selim Berker

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*Office location:* Emerson 208

*Office hours:* Mon., 3:00–5:00 p.m. (in Emerson 208; note change), or by appointment

**Teaching Fellow:** Malcolm Morano

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*Office hours:* Mon., 12:00–2:00 p.m., or by appointment

**Course Description:**

An introduction to the theory of knowledge. Topics include skepticism about the external world, the analysis of knowledge, sensitivity and safety, the regress of reasons, foundationalism vs. infinitism vs. coherentism, and internalism vs. externalism.

**Time and Place:**

*Lectures:* Tue., Thu., 12:00–1:15 p.m., Emerson 305

*Section 1 (M.M.):* Thu., 1:30–2:30 p.m., Emerson 107

*Section 2 (M.M.):* Fri., 10:30–11:30 a.m., Emerson 310

*Section 3 (M.M.):* Fri., 3:00–4:00 p.m., Emerson 310

*Section 4 (S.B.):* Tue., 4:30–5:30 p.m., Emerson 106

In addition to the regular discussion sections led by the teaching fellow, there will be a discussion section for philosophy PhD students (as well as students in other GSAS programs) led by the instructor. Non-GSAS graduate students will be assigned to the regular discussion sections.

**Course URL:** <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/99472>

All handouts and assignments will be made available on the course website. The site also contains scans of additional readings not included in the anthology available at the Coop. Note that you must login using your HarvardKey to access all of the site's content. If you do not have a HarvardKey, please visit <<https://iam.harvard.edu/get-started/authentication>> for more information on how to obtain one.

**Prerequisites:**

None. Auditors are welcome but will be limited to Harvard University ID holders and to students/staff from universities in the area that have their own COVID testing protocols; this policy is necessary to ensure that everyone in the classroom is undergoing regular COVID testing.

**Texts:**

The following book is available for purchase in the textbook section of the Coop:

Sosa, Ernest, Jaegwon Kim, Jeremy Fantl, and Matthew McGrath, eds. *Epistemology: An Anthology*, 2nd edition. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2008.

A number of additional readings have been made available on the course website for downloading.

**Laptop Use:**

The use of laptops, tablets, cell phones, etc. during lectures and section meetings is strictly prohibited (except in cases of medical necessity, in which case follow the guidelines given below for students with disabilities).

## Requirements:

Reading, discussing, and writing about the assigned readings will be the central activities of the course. There is a reading assignment for each lecture. The readings are often fairly short, but tend to require close study. It is essential that you complete the assigned readings *before* each lecture, as many lectures will presuppose familiarity with the material in the texts. Also, lectures will introduce material not in the readings, so attendance at each and every lecture is crucial if you want to do well in the course.

The breakdown of grades will be as follows:

20% *Attendance and participation in section and lecture.*

Evaluation will be based on attendance, preparation, and contributions to discussion. If you don't feel comfortable talking during section or lecture, coming in to discuss course material during either the instructor's or the teaching fellow's office hours may count toward your contributions to discussion.

60% *Three 5-page papers.*

Paper topics will be distributed in advance and will ask students to analyze and discuss material covered in class. *The first paper must be rewritten in light of your teaching fellow's comments and resubmitted.* Your final grade for the first paper will be an average of your grades on the two versions. (Note that revised papers are held to a higher standard.)

20% *Final exam.*

You will be required to take a 3-hour final exam on the material covered throughout the term. The final exam will be approximately 2/3rds essay format, and the essay questions will be selected from a list distributed at the beginning of Reading Period. The exam will be closed-notes and closed-books. (Graduate students taking the course for credit will be given a take-home version of the final exam.)

Late work will be penalized 1/3rd of a letter grade per day (e.g. from a B+ to a B). Extensions will be granted only under exceptional circumstances, and only if an extension is requested *before* the due date of the assignment.

## Academic Integrity Policy – Collaboration Permitted in Written Work:

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with the course instructor, your TF, or your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course.

## Classroom Safety Guidelines:

As per Harvard policy, it is expected that everyone attending this class is fully vaccinated for COVID-19 (and has a booster shot by Jan. 31) and that everyone wear a three-layer procedure mask during all lecture and section meetings. If you forget your mask one day, extra masks should be available both by the photocopier on the third floor of Emerson Hall and in Nyasha Bovell's office (Emerson 308). Eating and drinking during class are strictly prohibited.

If you feel unwell on a given class day, please stay home and get tested for COVID-19 immediately. If your test comes back positive, you will need to isolate for at least five days. In either case, please contact the instructor and your TF about your situation, so that steps can be taken to make sure you don't miss too much class material.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:**

Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present the instructor with a Faculty Letter from the Accessibility Education Office (AEO) by the end of the second complete week of term, namely Fri., Feb. 4. All discussions will remain confidential.

**Departmental Writing Fellow:** Yunhyae Kim

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*Website:* <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/phil-dwf>

The Department Writing Fellow (DWF) is a resource for undergraduate students enrolled in Philosophy Department courses who would like help with their writing. Whether you need assistance starting a paper, formulating an argument, editing a draft, or figuring out the conventions of philosophical writing, the DWF can help. To learn more about one-on-one consultations, please visit the above URL.

On Wed., Feb. 9, at 8 p.m., the DWF will be giving a lecture over Zoom on the nuts and bolts of writing philosophy papers. All are welcome to attend. See the DWF website for more information and for a recording of the lecture afterwards.

## Assignment and Lecture Schedule

NOTE: Readings marked ‘(\*)’ can be downloaded from the course website. Readings marked ‘(E:A)’ can be found in Sosa, Kim, Fantl, & McGrath (eds.), *Epistemology: An Anthology* (available at the Coop).

*Tue., Jan. 25:* Introduction

### I. Skepticism about the External World

- Thu., Jan. 27:* Descartes, *First and Second Meditations* (\*)  
Stroud, “The Problem of the External World,” pp. 7–12 (E:A) (\*)
- Tue., Feb. 1:* Blumenfeld & Blumenfeld, “Can I Know That I Am Not Dreaming?” §§I–IV (\*)
- Thu., Feb. 3:* Blumenfeld & Blumenfeld, “Can I Know That I Am Not Dreaming?” §§V–VIII (\*)
- Tue., Feb. 8:* Stroud, “The Problem of the External World,” pp. 13–25 (E:A) (\*)
- Thu., Feb. 10:* Moore, “Proof of an External World” (E:A) (\*)  
Moore, “Four Forms of Skepticism” (E:A) (focus on the final paragraph) (\*)  
Moore, “Certainty” (E:A) (\*)  
Soames, “Moore on Skepticism, Perception, and Knowledge,” pp. 12–23 (\*)
- Tue., Feb. 15:* Putnam, “Brains in a Vat” (\*)

### II. The Nature of Knowledge

- Thu., Feb. 17:* Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” (E:A) (\*)  
Feldman, “The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge” (\*)  
Feldman, “Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge,” pp. 25–30 (\*)
- Fri., Feb. 18:* FIRST PAPER DUE (by 6 p.m.)
- Tue., Feb. 22:* Feldman, “Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge,” pp. 31–38 (\*)  
Zagzebski, “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems” (E:A) (\*)
- Thu., Feb. 24:* Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowing” (\*)
- Tue., Mar. 1:* Nozick, “Knowledge and Skepticism” (E:A) (skip or skim the endnotes other than n. 3)
- Thu., Mar. 3:* Sosa, “How to Defeat Opposition to Moore” (E:A) (\*)  
Craig, “Nozick and the Skeptic: The Thumbnail Version” (\*)
- Sun., Mar. 6:* REWRITE OF FIRST PAPER DUE (by 11:59 p.m.)
- Tue., Mar. 8:* Lycan, “On the Gettier Problem Problem” (\*)  
Weinberg, Nichols & Stich, “Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions” (E:A) (\*) (optional)  
Williamson, “A State of Mind” (E:A) (\*) (optional)

### III. The Structure of Knowledge and Justification

- Thu., Mar. 10:* Feldman, “The Infinite Regress Argument” (\*)  
Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid,” §§1–3 (E:A) (\*)

- Tue., Mar. 15:* NO CLASS (Spring Break)
- Thu., Mar. 17:* NO CLASS (Spring Break)
- Tue., Mar. 22:* Feldman, “Cartesian Foundationalism” (\*)  
Jackson, “Is There a Good Argument against the Incorrigibility Thesis?” (\*)
- Thu., Mar. 24:* BonJour, “Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?” (E:A) (\*)  
Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid,” §4 (E:A) (\*)
- Tue., Mar. 29:* Feldman, “Coherentism” (\*)  
BonJour, “The Elements of Coherentism” (\*)  
BonJour, “In Search of Coherentism” (\*)
- Wed., Mar. 30:* SECOND PAPER DUE (by 11:59 p.m.) **[note change]**
- Thu., Mar. 31:* Klein, “Human Knowledge and the Infinite Regress of Reasons” (E:A) (\*) (skip or skim section titled “Reliabilism?”)  
Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid,” §§5–6 (E:A) (\*)
- Tue., Apr. 5:* Feldman, “Modest Foundationalism” (\*)  
Pryor, “The Skeptic and the Dogmatist” (\*) (skip §II)  
Sosa, “The Raft and the Pyramid,” §§7–11 (E:A) (\*) (skip the appendix)

#### **IV. The Nature of Justification**

- Thu., Apr. 7:* Goldman, “What Is Justified Belief?” (E:A) (\*)
- Tue., Apr. 12:* BonJour, “Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge” (E:A) (\*)  
Cohen, “Justification and Truth” (\*) (skip or skim §§III–V)  
Feldman, “Reliability and Justification” (\*)  
(guest lecture by Malcolm Morano; instructor out of town)
- Thu., Apr. 14:* Feldman & Conee, “Evidentialism” (E:A) (\*)  
Conee & Feldman, “Evidence” (\*) (optional)
- Tue., Apr. 19:* Goldman, “Internalism Exposed” (E:A) (\*)  
Conee & Feldman, “Internalism Defended” (E:A) (\*)
- Thu., Apr. 21:* Srinivasan, “Radical Externalism” (\*)  
Johnson King, “Radical Internalism” (\*) (optional)
- Tue., Apr. 26:* Fumerton, “Externalism and Skepticism” (E:A)  
Cohen, “Basic Knowledge and the Problem of Easy Knowledge” (\*) **[note change]**
- Thu., Apr. 28:* NO LECTURE **[note change]**
- Tue., May 3:* THIRD PAPER DUE (by 11:59 p.m.) **[note change]**
- Thu., May 12:* FINAL EXAM (at 9 a.m. in Emerson 210)