

# PHIL-210: Knowledge and Certainty

November 1, 2014

**Instructor** Carlotta Pavese, PhD

**Teaching Assistant** Hannah Bondurant

**Main Lecture Time** T/Th 1:25-2:40

**Main Lecture Location** East Campus, in Friedl room 107

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**Office** West Duke Building, Philosophy department, room 201I.

**Office Hours** Tuesdays 3-4 (After class)/Thursdays 12-1 (before class starts at 1:25).

**Website** There will be a Sakai site for the course.

**Course Description** This course will be a survey of central issues in contemporary epistemology. The first part of the course will be devoted to considering skeptical arguments to the effect that we can't really know whether the world is the way it appears to us: What is it like to be in the Matrix? What would it be so bad about it, if anything? Then we will consider other forms of skepticisms, such as *skepticism about induction*: how can we be justified in believing that tomorrow the sun will rise, on the basis of our past experiences? We will look at different strategies to respond to such skeptical arguments. This endeavor will bring us to explore questions concerning the nature of knowledge and the relation between knowledge and other epistemologically significant concepts, such as certainty, justification and evidence: What is knowledge? What more is there to knowledge than justified true belief? Does knowledge require certainty? What does being justified in believing that something is the case requires of the believer? Can perception give us immediate justification? The last part of the course will be devoted to introducing some issues in *social epistemology*, such as, for example, what makes us responsible, as a community, for the beliefs that we have? Is ignorance culpable? If so, why so? Can epistemic peers reasonably disagree? In other words, can two individuals with the exact same evidence concerning a certain subject matter reasonably disagree about it? How can someone who is not knowledgeable about a certain domain reliably identify experts in that domain? How can one reliably determine when one needs to consult experts? What is feminist epistemology?

## Textbook and Readings

### *Mandatory:*

Feldman, Richard. *Epistemology*. Pearson College Division, 2003.

Rosenberg, Jay. *Three Conversations about knowing*, Hackett Publishing 2000.

**Other Readings:** Some of the readings aren't in the mandatory textbook. All such readings will be available electronically on Sakai. You should print these out and bring them to class.

**Advice on Reading:** It is more important to reach a basic grasp of the overall point of a reading than to understand any particular detail. Accordingly, I advise you to do each of the readings once quickly in a single sitting and then return to the details you missed. If, on a second reading, you can't sort out some specific detail, write down what you don't understand and bring it to class for discussion. Do your best to raise your question at a point in the class where that detail is relevant to what's being discussed. It is much more likely that you will get a satisfying answer if you ask your question at the appropriate time. In all the readings, it will be helpful to ask yourself 'what is the problem or issue at stake here?' and then 'what solutions or positions is the author arguing for here?'

### **Grading:**

**Exams** 50% 2 Exams (Exam 1: 20%, Exam 2: 30%). See the schedule for the exam days.

The 2 exams will require you to answer 3 short-answer essay questions. Each exam will present you with 3 pairs of questions and you will have to select one from each pair to answer; all the answers will have to be completed in-class. Prior to each exam I will post 12 study-questions. The 6 exam questions will be among these study questions. The exams will be non-cumulative, but there is a good deal of interdependence in the course material, so it may be necessary to revisit old notes and texts in studying for an exam.

**Essays** 40% 2 essays (Essay 1: 15%, Essay 2: 25%). See the schedule for when the essays are due.

**Attendance, class discussion, mandatory office hours and quizzes** 10%. There are seven quizzes spread out during the semester. Please, look at the schedule to see when they are scheduled. At the beginning of October starting the 6th, students have to mandatorily meet once with the professor and the TA during their office hours (Tuesday 3-4 and Thursday 12-1).

**Policy on Absences:** Students are expected to attend all classes. Please note: My policy for missed classes and missed exams is the following. If you miss an exam and want to make it up, you will need an official excuse of your absence. In all but the most extreme

cases, you will be required to make up the missed exam within 10 days. You've got up to *two* excused absences during the semester.

### **(Provisional) Schedule**

The following schedule is only provisional and most likely subject to changes as we go on.

**1st week Tuesday** *When:* 26th August.

*Readings:* None.

*Topic:* Introduction to Epistemology. Belief, Truth and Knowledge.

**Thursday** *When:* 28th August.

*Readings:* Rosenberg's First Conversation.

*Topic:* Knowledge and objectivity

**2nd week Tuesday** *When:* 2nd September. **First Quiz**

*Readings:* "What is so bad about living in the Matrix?" by Jim Pryor

<http://www.jimpryor.net/research/papers/matrix/plain.html>

*Topic:* The Matrix

**Thursday** *When:* 4th September.

- Descartes, First Meditation, Meditations on First Philosophy, made available.
- Feldman pp. 108-119.

*Topic:* The Dreaming Argument.

**3rd week Tuesday** *When:* 9th September.

*Readings:* *Readings:*

- Rosenberg, Second Conversation, pp. 18-22.

*Topic:* Knowledge and Certainty

**Thursday** *When:* 11th September. *Readings:* *Readings:*

- Selections of Hawthorne[1] made available.

*Topic:* Lottery Paradox, Closure, Multiple-premises Closure.

**4th week Tuesday** *When:* 16th September. **Second Quiz**

*Readings:*

- §1 & §2 "The problem of induction", Stanford Encyclopedia Entry at:  
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/induction-problem/>

*Topic:* Skepticism about induction

**Thursday** *When:* 18th September.

*Readings:*

- Keith DeRose, "Contextualism: an explanation and defense" in John Greco and Ernest Sosa, eds., *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*. (Blackwell, Malden, Mass., 1999), pp. 187-205.
- Feldman, pp. 152-155
- Selection from Ernest Sosa, "Skepticism and contextualism" *Philosophical Issues* 10 (2000), pp. 1-10.

*Topic:* Relevant Theories and Contextualist solutions to skepticism.

**5th week Tuesday** *When:* 23rd September.

*Readings:*

- Keith DeRose, "Contextualism: an explanation and defense" in John Greco and Ernest Sosa, eds., *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*. (Blackwell, Malden, Mass., 1999), pp. 187-205.
- Feldman, pp. 152-155
- Selection from Ernest Sosa, "Skepticism and contextualism" *Philosophical Issues* 10 (2000), pp. 1-10.

*Topic:* Relevant Theories and Contextualist solutions to skepticism, continued.

**Thursday** *When:* 25th September. **Third Quiz.**

*Readings:* No reading.

*Topic:* Review for Midterm.

**Tuesday** *When:* 30th September. *Readings:*

- Feldman chapter 1 and 2.
- Rosenberg, Second Conversation pp. 22-36.
- Edmund Gettier, "Is justified true belief knowledge?," *Analysis* 23 (1963), pp. 121-23. Reprinted in Paul K. Moser, ed., *Empirical Knowledge: readings in contemporary epistemology* (Rowman Littlefield, Totowa, NJ, 1986), pp. 231-33.

**Thursday** *When:* 2nd October.

*Topic:* **First Exam.**

**Tuesday** *When:* 7th October *Topic:* What is knowledge? Traditional analyses of knowledge and Gettier's challenge.

*Readings:*

- Feldman chapter 1 and 2.
- Rosenberg, Second Conversation pp. 22-36.
- Edmund Gettier, "Is justified true belief knowledge?," *Analysis* 23 (1963), pp. 121-23. Reprinted in Paul K. Moser, ed., *Empirical Knowledge: readings in contemporary epistemology* (Rowman Littlefield, Totowa, NJ, 1986), pp. 231-33.

**Thursday** *When:* 9th October. **Fourth Quiz.**

*Topic:* Goldman's response to Gettier. Reliabilism.

*Readings:* Alvin Goldman, "Discrimination and perceptual knowledge," *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976), pp. 771-791. Rosenberg, *Third Conversation*, especially up to p. 43.

**Tuesday** *When:* 14th October

no class, fall break.

**Thursday** *When:* 16th October **First essay (3-4 pages) due.**

*Topic:* Goldman's response to Gettier. Reliabilism. Part II

*Readings:* Rosenberg, *Third Conversation*, especially up to p. 43. Goldman's "What is justified belief?"

**Tuesday** *When:* 21st October

*Readings:* Bonjour's "Externalist theories of empirical knowledge."

*Topic:* Problems for Reliabilism.

**Thursday** *When:* 23rd October

*Readings:* <http://www.iep.utm.edu/kk-princ/>

*Topic:* The KK principle and its problems.

**Tuesday** *When:* 28th October

*Readings:* Stanford encyclopedia entry on Analysis of knowledge, section 5 (Sensitivity, Safety and relevant alternatives): <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-analysis/>

*Topic:* Modal conditions on knowledge, Sensitivity and safety.

**Thursday** *When:* 30th October

*Readings:* Stanford encyclopedia entry on Analysis of knowledge, section 5 (Sensitivity, Safety and relevant alternatives): <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-analysis/>

*Topic:* Modal conditions on knowledge, Sensitivity and safety. (Continued)

**Tuesday** *When:* 4th November. **Fifth Quiz.**

*Readings:* Readings: "Bayesian Epistemology" Hayek & Hartmann.

*Topic:* Other approaches to epistemology: Introduction to Bayesian epistemology.

**Thursday** *When:* 6th November.

*Readings:* Readings: "Bayesian Epistemology" Hayek & Hartmann.

*Topic:* Other approaches to epistemology: Introduction to Bayesian epistemology (Continued).

**Tuesday** *When:* 11th November **Sixth Quiz**. *Readings:* Gendler Tamara “On the Epistemic costs of Implicit Bias” (made available). Recommended also: Jennifer Saul “Skepticism and Implicit bias” (made available).

*Topic:* Implicit biases and their epistemic costs.

**Thursday** *When:* 13th November

*Readings:* Allan Buchanan “Political Liberalism and Social epistemology”. (Made available).

*Topics:* Political epistemology.

**13th week Tuesday** *When:* 18th November

*Readings* Goldman “Experts: which one should one trust?” (made available)

*Topic:* Introduction to Social Epistemology. The expert-novice problem. The threshold problem.

**Thursday** *When:* 20th November Wednesday. **Seventh Quiz**

*Readings:* David Christensen “Disagreement as Evidence. The epistemology of controversy”.

*Topic:* Peer disagreement.

**14th week Tuesday** *When:* 25th November, no class, thanksgiving recess

**Thursday** *When:* 27th November, no class, thanksgiving recess

**15th week Tuesday** *When:* 2nd December *Readings:* Heather Battaly “Virtue epistemology”, (made available).

*Topic:* Guest Lecture by Hannah Bondurant: Virtue Epistemology.

**Thursday** *When:* 4th December *Readings:* None.

*Topic:* Review.

**Second Essay (5-7 pages) Due.**

## References

- [1] HAWTHORNE, J., AND STANLEY, J. Knowledge and action. *Journal of Philosophy* 105:10 (2008), 571–90.