

Philosophy 311: Knowledge and Justification

Fall 2013, M/W 2:00-3:15

Northern Illinois University

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Overview

This course is an introduction to epistemology, the branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge, belief, and related topics. This semester we will focus on three groups of questions:

1. *The Analysis of Knowledge and Justification*

- 1A. What is knowledge as opposed to mere belief?
- 1B. What are the sources and limits of knowledge?
- 1C. What is it for a belief to be justified?
- 1D. What role does evidence play in knowledge and justification?
- 1E. What is the practical significance of knowledge?

2. *Epistemology and Diversity*

- 2A. How do bias and stereotypes affect knowledge and inquiry?
- 2B. Are the assumptions of traditional epistemology sexist?
- 2C. What should be our attitude towards those with whom we disagree?

3. *Radical Skepticism and Conspiracy Theories*

- 3A. Should we take radical skepticism seriously?
- 3B. Can contextualism resolve the puzzles posed by radical skepticism?
- 3C. Is it rational to believe in apparently far-fetched conspiracy theories?

Student Learning Outcomes

- A. Acquire competence with the terms and concepts employed by contemporary epistemologists to answer questions about knowledge and justification.
- B. Accurately describe and explain the main theories and arguments developed by contemporary epistemologists in response to central questions about knowledge and justification.
- C. Critically evaluate answers to central questions about knowledge and justification.

Assessments and Course Policies

Your course grade will be determined by three factors:

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| 40% | Take-home final exam essays (due by 11:59pm on Mon., Dec. 9) |
| 40% | Tests (In class on Sep. 25, Oct. 23, and Nov. 25) |
| 20% | Reading responses (must complete 20) |

Your final exam will consist of three essays of approximately 1000 words each, in answer to one question from each of groups 1 – 3 above. No late exams will be accepted for any reason except a documented emergency. Your tests will include both a multiple-choice / true-false section and an essay question portion. Test essay question topics will be distributed in advance. The lowest of your three test grades is worth two-thirds as much as each of the higher two. This means that the test you get the lowest grade on is worth 10% of your final grade, while the two that you do better on are worth 15% each. Make-up tests will be given only for documented emergencies.

Reading responses should be between 200 and 400 words each, and require two components. First, you should summarize some key idea or argument in the reading assigned for that day's class. Second, you should raise a question or criticism concerning the aspect of the reading you have summarized. You should come to class prepared to discuss your reading response; I will start each class by selecting one or two students to share their reading responses. Reading responses are due by email to Griffin (gklemick@niu.edu) no later than noon on the day of the class for which the reading is assigned. No late responses will be accepted for any reason. You must complete 20 reading responses over the course of the semester.

The NIU undergraduate catalog defines A as "outstanding competence", B as "above satisfactory competence", C as "satisfactory level of competence", and D as "marginally satisfactory competence". My policy is to assign grades on the basis of the ordinary English meanings of these terms. In percentages:

A	> 92.5%	C+	75% - 79.8%
A-	89.9% - 92.4%	C	65% - 75%
B+	87.5% - 89.8%	D	50% - 64.9%
B	82.5% - 87.4%	F	< 50%
B-	79.9% - 82.4%		

All course documents, including readings and handouts, will be posted on the class Blackboard site.

Accessibility Statement

Nothern Illinois University is committed to providing an accessible educational environment in collaboration with the Disability Resource Center (DRC). Any student requiring an academic accomodation due to a disability should let his or her faculty member know as soon as possible. Students who need academic accomodations based on the impact of a disability is encouraged to contact the DRC if they have not done so already. The DRC is located on the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815 753 1303 or drc@niu.edu.

Academic Integrity

According to the NIU undergraduate catalog, "Students are considered to have cheated if they copy the work of another during an examination or turn in a paper or an assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else. Students are guilty of plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources or if they paraphrase ideas from such sources without acknowledging them. Students guilty of, or assisting others in, either cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, quiz, or examination may receive a grade of F for the course involved and may be suspended or dismissed from the university." Incidents of cheating or plagiarism will be handled following the guidelines given in the *Academic Regulations* section of the catalog.

Tentative Schedule

You should do the required reading before class, and I recommend doing it again after. Each reading will take a few hours to do well, so plan accordingly. 'Blackboard' means that the reading is available on the course Blackboard site. 'Feldman' refers to *Epistemology*, by Richard Feldman, which is available in the Holmes Student Center bookstore.

Knowledge, Part I

M Aug. 26	Overview; the JTB theory of knowledge
W Aug. 28	Feldman, chs. 2-3 (all) Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' (Blackboard)
M Sep. 2	<i>No Class (Labor Day)</i>
W Sep. 4	Feldman, 'An Alleged Defect in Gettier Counterexamples' (Blackboard) Lehrer and Paxson, 'Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief' (only pp. 227-231; Blackboard)

Justification and Evidence

- M Sep. 9 Feldman, ch. 4 (41-49)
 Conee and Feldman, 'Evidentialism' (Blackboard)
W Sep. 11 DeRose, 'Ought We To Follow Our Evidence?' (Blackboard)

Knowledge, Part II

- M Sep. 16 Feldman, ch. 5 (all)
W Sep. 18 Goldman, 'Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge' (Blackboard)
M Sep. 23 Catch-up, wrap-up, review

W Sep. 25 TEST 1

Biases and Stereotypes

- M Sep. 30 Selected readings on implicit bias and stereotype threat (Blackboard)
W Oct. 2 Uhlmann, Brescoll, and Machery, 'The Motives Underlying Stereotype-Based
 Discrimination Against Members of Stigmatized Groups' (Blackboard)

Feminism and Epistemology

- M Oct. 7 Haslanger, Tuana, O'Connor, 'What Is Feminism?' (Blackboard)
W Oct. 9 Jaggar, 'Love and Knowledge' (Blackboard)

Disagreement

- M Oct. 14 Feldman, 'Reasonable Religious Disagreements' (Blackboard)
W Oct. 16 Elgin, 'Persistent Disagreement' (Blackboard)
M Oct. 21 Catch-up, wrap-up

W Oct. 23 TEST 2

Skepticism

- M Oct. 28 Feldman, ch. 6 (all)
W Oct. 30 Unger, 'A Defense of Skepticism' (Blackboard)
M Nov. 4 Unger, 'Where Ignorance Enjoins Silence' (Blackboard)
W Nov. 6 Putnam, 'Brains In A Vat' (Blackboard)
M Nov. 11 Feldman, ch. 7 (130-143)
W Nov. 13 Vogel, 'Cartesian Skepticism and Inference to the Best Explanation' (Blackboard)
M Nov. 18 DeRose, 'Contextualism: An Explanation and Defense' (Blackboard)
W Nov. 20 Catch-up, wrap-up, review

M Nov. 25 TEST 3

- W Nov. 27 *No class (Thanksgiving)*

Conspiracy Theories

- M Dec. 2 Keeley, 'Of Conspiracy Theories' (Blackboard)
W Dec. 4 Coady, 'Conspiracy Theories and Conspiracy Theorists' (Blackboard)

M Dec. 9 FINAL EXAM DUE - 11:59pm