

Philosophy 2611: Knowledge and Belief
Spring 2019
Course Syllabus

This course will introduce students to some central questions in epistemology (often defined as the philosophical study of knowledge), using both contemporary and historical readings. For example, we will examine our reliance on experts and testimony for our knowledge, the status of reports concerning miraculous or 'scientifically impossible' events, and the epistemology of conspiracy theories. We will also consider questions of disagreement and pluralism when it comes to controversial matters such as politics and religion.

Instructor: Prof. Cole Mitchell
Phone: (607) 255-3687
E-mail: scm244@cornell.edu
Office: Goldwin Smith 322
Office hours: Mondays 3:30PM – 4:30PM and by appointment

Class time: Tuesdays/Thursdays 1:25PM – 2:40PM
Discussion section: Wednesdays 9:05AM – 9:55AM
Classroom: Uris Hall 398
Course website: Blackboard

Required work: A total of 100 points is possible:

- (1) Two short papers (4–5 pages/10 points each), one long paper (8–10 pages/15 points) due in class on:
Friday, February 16 (short #1)
Monday, April 15 (short #2)
Friday, May 3 (long)
- (2) Two exams, a midterm and a final (25 points each)
Midterm: Thursday, February 21, in class
Final: TBA
- (3) Reading questions: each week, by Monday at noon, e-mail a question you have about the readings for that week to Prof. Mitchell (10 points)
- (4) Attendance and participation (5 points)

Texts: Feldman, R., *Epistemology* (Pearson 2003). Other readings will be available online and in class.

Topics and Main Readings:

A. Introduction to Epistemology (Weeks 1–5)

Richard Feldman's *Epistemology* textbook

Chapter 1: Epistemological Questions – Tue., Jan. 22 through Thu., Jan. 24.

Chapter 2: The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge – Thu., Jan. 24 through Wed., Jan. 30.

Chapter 3: Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge – Thu., Jan. 31 through Wed., Feb. 6

Chapter 4: Evidentialist Theories of Knowledge and Justification – Thu., Feb. 7 through Wed., Feb. 13

Chapter 5: Nonevidentialist Theories of Knowledge and Justification – Thu., Feb. 14 through Wed., Feb. 20

Supplementary readings:

Noah Lemos, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (Cambridge 2007)

Selected articles from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (plato.stanford.edu)

B. Classic Readings (Weeks 6–10)

Mill, "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion" (Ch. 1 of *On Liberty*) – Wed., Feb. 27 through Tue., Mar. 5
Hume, "Of Miracles" (Ch. 10 of the 1st *Enquiry*) – Wed., Mar. 6 through Wed., Mar. 13
Pascal, "The Wager" (from *Pensées*) – Wed., Mar. 13 through Thu., Mar. 14
Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief" – Tue., Mar. 19 through Thu., Mar. 21
James, "The Will to Believe" – Thu., Mar. 21 through Thu., Mar. 28

C. Contemporary Readings (Weeks 12–16)

Doxastic Voluntarism and 'Ought Implies Can'

Richard Feldman, "Voluntary Belief and Epistemic Evaluation"

Moorean Refutations of Skepticism

William Lycan, "Moore Against the New Skeptics"

Thomas Kelly, "Moorean Facts and Belief Revision, or Can the Skeptic Win?"

Disagreement, Pluralism, and Contingency

Alvin Plantinga, "Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism"

Katia Vavova, "Irrelevant Influences"

Conspiracy Theory and Testimony

Mark Webb, "Can Epistemology Help? The Problem of the Kentucky-Fried Rats"

David Coady, "Conspiracy Theories and Conspiracy Theorists"

NOTE: The information contained in the course syllabus, other than the grade and absence policies, may be subject to change with reasonable advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.