

Date prepared: 8/25/13

Syllabus
The University of New Orleans
Dept. of Philosophy

PHIL 3401: Theories of Knowledge (3 credits)

SECTION 001: LA 370, MWF, 9:00 – 9:50

Contact
Information

Instructor: Dr. Edward Johnson
Office: UNO: LA 395
Office Hours: MWF, 11:00 – 12:00 (and by appointment)
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Email: erjohns1@uno.edu
Course Webpages: [Moodle](#) login page

Required
Text

[1] Sosa, Ernest, et al., eds (2008). *Epistemology: An Anthology* (2nd ed., Blackwell), ISBN 9781405169660

Course Description

CATALOG

A philosophical investigation of the meaning, varieties, limits, and grounds of human knowledge.

DESCRIPTION:

COURSE OVERVIEW: We will examine a number of famous philosophers, standard theories, and central issues in the field of epistemology, focusing in particular on three basic questions: the definitional problem (What *is* knowledge?), the sceptical challenge (Is knowledge *possible*?), and the disciplinary conundrum (Is *philosophy* knowledge?). The first five weeks (leading up to the first exam) will paint in broad strokes challenges to the Platonic theory of knowledge, the central worries of the debate between rationalists (e.g., Descartes) and empiricists e.g., Hume), and certain aspects of the post-Kantian quasi-pragmatist approach (e.g., Dewey, Moore, Wittgenstein). We will then devote the second third of the semester to discussion of the pros and cons of naturalized epistemology (e.g., Quine, Kim) and the role of the apriori in philosophy. The last third of the semester will introduce some additional perspectives (e.g., Davidson and Sellars), touch on some difficulties in our knowledge of history, and examine the relation to knowledge to other categories such as information and wisdom.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- Identify features of practical situations relevant to epistemological evaluation
- Define key concepts in epistemology
- Evaluate the persuasiveness of epistemological arguments of different types
- Apply epistemological concepts studied to new kinds of cases
- Synthesize, in effective English essays, central aspects of philosophical debate in this area
- Distinguish the new problem of induction from the old
- Articulate the difference between ancient and modern skepticism
- Explain the significance of “Gettier problems”
- Discuss the role of the concept of the a priori in philosophical analysis

Grades will be based on a 100 point scale distributed as follows:

Requirement		Final grade	
Participation	(10%) 10 points	A	100 – 90 points
Reflection Paper 1	(10%) 10 points		
Reflection Paper 2	(10%) 10 points		
Reflection Paper 3	(10%) 10 points		
Reflection Paper 4	(10%) 10 points	B	89 – 80 points
Exam 1	(15%) 15 points		
Exam 2	(15%) 15 points	C	79 – 70 points
Term Paper	(20%) 20 points		
		D	69 – 60 points
		F	59 — 0 points

Course Requirements

PARTICIPATION: The class will meet on Mondays, from 9:00 to 9:50 MWF, in LA 370. The Undergraduate/ Graduate Catalog states: “Students are expected to attend all classes regularly and punctually. **A student who is not present when attendance is checked in a class is considered absent.**” The Attendance Policy of the Department of English states: “When a student has missed a total of 1½ weeks of classes ... the instructor may request that the student’s dean put the student on attendance probation. ... Continued absences from any ... class will subject the student to full penalties ... including failing the course...” That reasonable policy, in the case of a class meeting three times a week, would allow for, say, five absences. **Each additional absence (beyond the five) will incur a one-point penalty deduction from the student’s final semester average.** Attendance means attending the entire class: **attendance may be checked more than once during class.** Students who leave early without permission will be assessed ½ absence for that day. Students should be on time; those who arrive more than 20 minutes late will be assessed ½ absence for that day. Attendance at public events requires a commitment to contribute to the maintenance of public order for the sake of a shared benefit: this includes paying attention and participating appropriately.

REFLECTION PAPERS: Four “reflection papers” are due at various points during the semester. These should be one to three pages in length, and should discuss your understanding of the material discussed in class and the readings up to that point in the semester. Some of this material may provide the foundation for your term paper. Reflection papers should conform to guidelines posted on Moodle, and an electronic copy should be submitted by the deadline via Moodle. A printed “hard copy” must be submitted in class on the day the paper is due.

LATE WORK: Late work will be accepted only with adequate excuse, and for a limited time (depending, of course, on the excuse). Confusion or lack of understanding is not a good excuse for not writing: rather, students should try to explain what they do not understand, and its significance in relation to what they do understand.

EXAMS: There will be two in-class exams, in which you will respond to questions about the material covered. This will be mostly (maybe entirely) essay.

TERM PAPER: The term paper should be ten to twelve typed pages, discussing in an informed way some philosophical issue or debate relevant to epistemology. This paper should articulate

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Academic integrity is fundamental to the process of learning and to evaluating academic performance. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, plagiarism, tampering with academic records and examinations, falsifying identity, and being an accessory to acts of academic dishonesty. Refer to the UNO Judicial Code for further information. The Code is available online

ATTENDANCE: Required. See the section on Participation above.

ELECTRONICS: Use of electronic devices is, in general, not allowed during class. You may use a laptop computer or a tablet to take notes, but not during exams (unless required for disability accommodations). Use of phones, e-mailing, texting, online surfing, etc., are not permitted during class.

MAKE-UP EXAMS: Make-up exams are discouraged, and the absence of support staff makes scheduling flexibility difficult. Any make-up exam (if the instructor determines that it is justified) will have to take place during office hours.

DISABILITY ACCOMODATIONS: UNO is committed to providing for the needs of students who have disabilities under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). Students who qualify for services will receive academic modifications to which they are legally entitled. It is the responsibility of students who may require such services or modifications to register each semester with the Office of Disability Services (UC 260, 280-6222) and follow its procedures for obtaining assistance.

WARNING: Learning philosophy requires the ability to examine critically, from a variety of perspectives, one's most basic assumptions about what is true and what is valuable. Critical examination involves challenging what we take for granted. Students occasionally find such an experience unsettling, as it may instill doubt about matters thought to be secure, or may require a serious engagement with ideas, language, or viewpoints the student finds threatening, or offensive, or absurd. This is especially possible in connection with controversial topics in ethics, politics, and religion. We will deal with any controversial matters in an explicit, candid, and analytical fashion. Your continued enrollment in this course constitutes acceptance of the right of other students, and the right of the professor, to explore relevant ideas, language, and viewpoints in a frank and open manner. If you object to that – if you think rational adults should be prevented from discussing certain subjects, or speaking certain words, or viewing certain images – then this is not the course for you.

PHIL 3401 Timeline

(subject to revision)

DAY	TOPIC/READING
M Aug. 26	Introduction to the course
Aug. 28	Socrates and philosophical definitions
Aug. 30	Plato on knowledge as justified true belief
Sep. 2	No class: Labor Day
Sep. 4	Gettier and Zagzebski on Gettier problems [Sosa, 192-193, 207-212]
Sep. 6	Ancient skepticism
Sep. 9	Descartes and the quest for certainty [First reflection paper due]
Sep. 11	Stroud on the significance of skepticism [Sosa, 7-25]
Sep. 13	Stroud continued
Sep. 16	Hume and the problem of induction
Sep. 18	Goodman and the new problem of induction
Sep. 20	From Kant (through Hegel) to Dewey
Sep. 23	Moore, "Proof on an External World," etc. [Sosa, 26-34] [Second reflection paper due]
Sep. 25	Wittgenstein on certainty [handout]
Sep. 27	FIRST EXAM
Sep. 30	Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized" [Sosa, 528-537]
Oct. 2	Quine continued
Oct. 4	Antony, "Quine as Feminist: The Radical Import of Naturalized Epistemology" [552-584]
Oct. 7	Antony continued
Oct. 9	Kim, "What Is Naturalized Epistemology?" [Sosa, 538-551]
Oct. 11	Kim continued
Oct. 14	Putnam, "There Is at Least One A Priori Truth" [Sosa, 585-594] [Third reflection paper due]
Oct. 16	Putnam continued
Oct. 18	No class: Midsemester break
Oct. 21	Bealer, "A <i>Priori</i> Knowledge and the Scope of Philosophy" [Sosa, 612-624]
Oct. 23	Bealer continued
Oct. 25	Weinberg et al., "Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions" [Sosa, 625-646]
Oct. 28	Weinberg continued
Oct. 30	SECOND EXAM
Nov. 1	Kornblith, "Investigating Knowledge Itself" [Sosa, 647-659]
Nov. 4	Kornblith continued

Nov. 6	Sellars, "Does Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?" & "Epistemic Principles" [Sosa, 94-108] [Fourth reflection paper due]
Nov. 8	Sellars continued
Nov. 11	Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" [Sosa, 124-133]
Nov. 13	Davidson continued
Nov. 15	Frege and the critique of psychologism
Nov. 18	Science v. scientism
Nov. 20	Knowledge of history: testimony and trust
Nov. 22	Knowledge of history: explanation v. <i>Verstehen</i>
Nov. 25	Catch-up day
Nov. 27	Catch-up day
Nov. 29	No class: Thanksgiving holiday
Dec. 2	Knowledge v. information
Dec. 4	Knowledge v. wisdom
Dec. 6	Conclusion
Dec. 9	FINAL EXAM/TERM PAPER due (7:30-9:30 a.m.)