

PHILOSOPHY 251 (A01): KNOWLEDGE, CERTAINTY AND SKEPTICISM
SPRING 2019 [22362]

Class times

Monday & Thursday, 1:00-2:20, COR Building B107

Professor

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edition; Oxford, 2003; ISBN 0-19-514966-1.

- (2) Several additional readings will be made available via the course's web page (CourseSpaces). Students are responsible for acquiring copies of these.

Course Description

We think we have knowledge of a real, objective, material world – we think we know such things as that humans are mammals, that water is wet, that Bo Horvat plays for the Canucks, that the earth revolves around the sun, etc. But what, exactly, does such ‘knowledge’ consist in? What, if anything, do each of the cases of knowledge just mentioned have in common? If we lack a clear understanding of what knowledge is, can we be sure that we know what we think we know? Sceptics claim that we don’t have any, or much, knowledge at all. Other philosophers insist that while we do have knowledge, this isn’t – *can’t be* -- knowledge of a material world that exists independently of our thoughts. In the first part of the course, we will look at some central historical writings centering on the problem of our knowledge of the external world. In addition to giving us some historical grounding, this will introduce some key concepts and issues (knowledge, justification, scepticism, doubt, certainty, etc.). In the second part of the course, we will turn to more recent attempts to give a systematic theory of just what these notions – centrally, knowledge and justification – involve, and to respond to sceptical challenges to our everyday belief in an independently-existing material world.

Expectations

Students are expected to come to class having read the assigned readings, and prepared to talk and ask questions about the material. Students who miss a class are responsible for any material covered therein, as well as for finding out what announcements, if any, were made.

Three quick tips for doing well in the course

		activities. A B+ represents a more complex understanding and/or application of the course material. Normally achieved by the largest number of students.
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- *optional: Plato, excerpt from the Meno (HK pp. 35-38)*

Week 4 (Jan. 28, 31): Berkeley's empiricism (and his idealism)

Berkeley, excerpts from *A Treatise Concerning Human Understanding* (HK)

**1st essay topics distributed Thursday, Jan. 31th*

Week 5 (Feb. 4, 7): Hume's 'scepticism'

Hume, excerpts from the *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (HK)

PERCEPTION AND BASIC KNOWLEDGE

Week 6 (Feb. 11, 14)

Ayer, "The Argument from Illusion" (C)

Reid, excerpts from *An Inquiry Into the Human Mind* (HK)

- *recommended: re-read Russell, "Appearance, Reality, and Knowledge by Acquaintance" (from Wk.2)*

**1st essay due at the start of class, Monday, Feb. 11th*

*****Feb. 18-22: No classes – Reading break*****

- *optional: Feldman and Conee, “Evidentialism” (HK)*

**2nd essays due at the start of class, Thursday, March 21st*

THE NATURE OF EPISTEMIC JUSTIFICATION – DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES ON EPISTEMIC A