

Phil 211: Theory of Knowledge  
Bryn Mawr College  
Spring '23

Instructor: Augie Faller  
Office: Old Library 122  
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## Course Description

Epistemology focuses on three central philosophical questions: “What is knowledge?”, “What can we know?”, and “How do we know what we know?” In addition to their role in our daily lives, these questions are central to almost every discipline, including the sciences, history, and philosophy itself. This course is an extended investigation into the nature of knowledge, understanding, and justification, primarily from the perspective of contemporary epistemology in the analytic tradition. We will look at a number of debates including skepticism, the value of knowledge, the nature of understanding, naturalistic epistemology, feminist epistemology, testimonial knowledge, and comparative epistemology. The aim of this course is to develop a sense of how these concepts and theories interrelate, and to instill philosophical skills in the critical evaluation of them.

## Learning Outcomes

1. Develop a sense of some of the central concepts and theories in contemporary epistemology and how they interrelate.
2. Gain the philosophical skills to critically evaluate these theories.
3. Produce philosophical writing that meets the field of philosophy’s expectations regarding structure, argumentation, and evidence.
4. Handle secondary sources appropriately, properly citing in MLA format.

## Course Materials

### Required:

Ernest Sosa, Jaegwon Kim, Jeremy Fantl, and Matthew McGrath (eds), *Epistemology: An Anthology*, 2nd Edition (Blackwell) (Digital versions acceptable)

### Recommended:

Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction* (Very Short Introductions) (2014)  
Jonathan Dancy, Ernest Sosa, Matthias Steup (Editors), *A Companion to Epistemology*,

2nd Edition (2009)

John Greco, Ernest Sosa (Editors), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology* (2017)

*Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, 11th Edition, by Williams and Bizup (other editions acceptable as well)

Readings not contained in the required text will be available through Moodle.

## Technology in the Classroom

**Our default mode will be no technology in the classroom.** Students will take notes using a notebook and can either bring the textbook to class or consult their notes. Exceptions to this policy will be made during the semester as necessary.

If you are a student with a disability that has a technology accommodation, please let me know as soon as possible.

## Accessibility

Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Access Services. Students can call 610-526-7516 to make an appointment with the Director of Access Services, Deb Alder, or email her at [dalder@brynmawr.edu](mailto:dalder@brynmawr.edu) to begin this confidential process. Once registered, students should schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible to share the verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website. (<http://www.brynmawr.edu/access-services/>)

Any student who has a disability-related need to record this class first must speak with the Director of Access Services and to me, the instructor. Class members need to be aware that this class may be recorded.

## Title IX

Bryn Mawr/Haverford College is committed to fostering a safe and inclusive living and learning environment where all can feel secure and free from harassment. All forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic violence, and dating violence are violations of Bryn Mawr/Haverford's policies, whether they occur on or off campus. Bryn Mawr/Haverford faculty are committed to helping to create a safe learning environment for all students and for the College community as a whole. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination, harassment, or violence, know that

help and support are available. Staff members are trained to support students in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more.

The College strongly encourages all students to report any incidents of sexual misconduct. Please be aware that all Bryn Mawr/Haverford employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors, clergy, and healthcare providers) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the Bi-College Title IX Coordinator.

Information about the Colleges Sexual Misconduct policy, reporting options, and a list of campus and local resources can be found on the Colleges website:

<https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/policies-guidelines-handbooks/title-ix>

## Notes on Academic Integrity

I regard plagiarism as a very serious matter. In this class, plagiarism consists of work taken partially or entirely from an uncited source (online content, a peer, a published article, etc.) and assumed as your own. Any use of AI to write for you is also considered plagiarism and is easily detectable. If I have reasons to suspect plagiarizing, I will ask that you report yourself to the Bryn Mawr Honor Board. See the Bryn Mawr Honor Code and Honor Board Hearing Process in the Student Handbook for more information.

## Evaluation

- *Writing Assignments: 70%*  
These include a summary assignment (15%), a dialogue (25%), and an essay (30%).
- *Quiz: 15%*  
There will be one in-class quiz, worth 15% of your grade.
- *Participation: 15%*  
Your participation grade will be determined by the extent to which you are actively engaged in the course. Brief written assignments between essays will count towards your participation grade, as will your contributions to class discussion.

## Grading Policies

1. Extensions can be granted on papers, but you need to talk to me a few days in advance. If you do not make arrangements beforehand, late papers will be downgraded by 1/3 letter grade per day.

2. Attendance is expected. You receive two free absences; after that, missing class will hurt your participation grade. If you face unique circumstances, an exception to this policy can be made.

**Grade breakdown:**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Grade Points</b>	<b>Percentage Range</b>
A	4.0	94–100%
A-	3.7	90–93%
B+	3.3	87–89%
B	3.0	83–86%
B-	2.7	80–82%
C+	2.3	77–79%
C	2.0	73–76%
C-	1.7	70–72%
D	1.0	60–69%
F	0	0–59%

## **Tentative Schedule of Readings**

### **January 18**

Introduction to course

## **1 Skepticism**

### **January 23**

Perry et al, “Philosophy” (online)

René Descartes, Meditations I and II (online)

Recommended: *The Matrix* (film)

### **January 25**

Perry et al, “Logical Toolkit” (online)

René Descartes, Meditations I and II (online) (continued)

### **January 30**

Sextus Empiricus, selection (online)

Linda Zagzebski, The First Stage of the Skeptical Attack: The Infinite Regress of Reasons (online)

## **February 1**

Jim Pryor, “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper” (Online)  
Williams and Bizup, “Using Sources” (Online)

\*\*\*Summary assignment due Friday, Feb 3rd \*\*\*

## **February 6**

Jared Millson, “Conspiracy Theories” (Online)  
C. Thi Nguyen, “Escape the Echo Chamber” (online)

## **2 The Structure of Knowledge and Justification**

### **February 8**

Roderick M. Chisholm, “The Myth of the Given”

### **February 13**

Laurence Bonjour, “Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation?”

### **February 15**

Laurence Bonjour, “The Coherence Theory of Empirical Knowledge” (Online)

### **February 20**

Peter Klein, “Human Knowledge and the Infinite Regress of Reasons”

### **February 22**

Quiz 1 in class

## **3 Defining Knowledge**

### **February 27**

Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”

### **March 1**

Linda Zagzebski, “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems”

**March 6**

Spring break

**March 8**

Spring break

## **4 Theories of Epistemic Justification**

**March 13**

Richard Feldman and Earl Connee, "Evidentialism"

**March 15**

Alvin I. Goldman, "What Is Justified Belief?"

**March 20**

Jonathan Vogel, "Reliabilism Leveled"

**March 22**

Alvin Plantinga, "Warrant: A First Approximation"

\*\*\*Dialogue due Friday, March 24th\*\*\*

## **5 Naturalized Epistemology**

**March 27**

Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized"

**March 29**

Kim, "What is Naturalized Epistemology?"

**April 3**

Louise M. Antony, "Quine as Feminist: The Radical Import of Naturalized Epistemology"

## 6 Trust and Testimony

### April 5

Judith Baker, “Trust and Rationality”

### April 10

Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, Chapter 1 (online)

### April 12

Kristie Dotson, “Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing” (online)

### April 17

Writing day + Review

### April 19

Writing day

## 7 Comparative Epistemology

### April 24

Robin Wall Kimmerer, “Mishkos Kenomagwen: The Teachings of Grass” from *Braiding Sweetgrass* (online)

Cindy Blackstock, “The breath of life versus the embodiment of life: indigenous knowledge and western research” (online)

\*\*\*Draft of final essay due in class 4/26\*\*\*

### April 26

Peer review

\*\*\* Final essay due during finals week\*\*\*