

Epistemology

Instructor: Katalin Farkas

Teaching assistant: Marta Santuccio

2 credits (4 ECTS credits)

Fall term 2017/2018

Friday 11- 12:40, Nador 13 / 223

Level: Core MA course. Mandatory for first year philosophy MA students on the 2-year MA program; elective for philosophy MA students on the 1-year program. Philosophy PhD students can take the course for audit. Non-philosophy students with some background in philosophy (not specifically epistemology) are welcome, but are asked to contact the instructor before signing up.

Summary and aims: The course offers an introduction into some classic problems of epistemology which form the subject of lively discussion also in contemporary philosophy. We shall start with the question of necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge, the Gettier problem and its consequences. Next we look into theories of justification, and discuss the merits and shortcomings of foundationalism, coherentism and reliabilism. Next we will consider various sceptical arguments against the possibility of knowledge, and investigate some responses to the sceptical arguments. In the rest of the course, we study the nature of different forms of knowledge: a priori knowledge, perceptual knowledge and self-knowledge. The aim of the course is to familiarize students with the central concepts of contemporary epistemological research, to enable them to discern the essential features of arguments in epistemological papers and to assess their soundness and validity. The course will offer a suitable basis for taking an advanced graduate class in epistemology.

Learning outcomes: Students will become familiar with the central concepts of contemporary epistemological research, and with the main positions occupied in epistemological debates. They will develop their ability to discern arguments in philosophical texts, to evaluate these arguments, and to present an argued position in a clear and concise manner.

Week-by-week. The classes will be mixtures of lectures and seminar-style discussion of readings. The first class will be an introduction to the first topic, theories of knowledge. During the following weeks, we will start each class with discussing the readings for the topic introduced in the previous week, and in the second part of the class, we introduce a new topic. Students may want to read the texts for the introductory lectures (and that's where they listed below), but the discussion of readings will always take place in the following week.

22 September. Theories of knowledge and the Gettier problem (video lecture).

Reading:

- Gettier, Edmund 1963: „Is justified true belief knowledge?” *Analysis* 23/6, 121-3
- Linda Zagzebski “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems” *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 174 (Jan., 1994), pp. 65-73. Also in Sosa et. al. 2008

29 September. Discussion: theories of knowledge. Lecture: Deductive closure

Reading (see also readings for theory of knowledge):

- Jonathan Vogel, 1990, “Are There Counterexamples to the Closure Principle?” in *Doubting: Contemporary Perspectives on Skepticism*, M. Roth and G. Ross (eds.), Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. Also in Sosa et. al. 2008

6 October. Discussion: deductive closure. Lecture: Foundationalism and coherentism.

Reading (see also reading for deductive closure):

- Susan Haack: “A Foundherentist Theory of Empirical Justification” in: Louis Pojman (ed.) *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 2nd ed. (1998).

13 October. Discussion: foundationalism and coherentism. Lecture: Reliabilism, externalism

Reading (see also readings for foundationalism and coherentism)

- Jennifer Nagel, 2016 “Knowledge and Reliability”: In Hilary Kornblith & Brian McLaughlin (eds.), *Alvin Goldman and his Critics*. Blackwell
- recommended: Goldman, Alvin A. 1971: „What is justified belief?” in G. Pappas (ed) *Justification and Knowledge* Dordrecht, Reidel also in Sosa et al. 2008)

20 October. Discussion of reliabilism. Lecture: doxastic voluntarism, epistemic norms.

Reading (see also readings for reliabilism):

- John Heil (1983) “Doxastic Agency” *Philosophical Studies* 43/3 pp. 355-364.

27 October. Discussion of doxastic voluntarism. Lecture: Internalism and Externalism, virtue epistemology.

Reading (see also reading for doxastic voluntarism):

- Ernest Sosa 2009: “Human Knowledge, Animal and Reflective” In *Reflective Knowledge*, Oxford: Clarendon Press

3 November. Discussion of virtue epistemology. Lecture: Scepticism

Reading (see also reading for virtue epistemology):

- Descartes: First Meditation. In Descartes, René (1984). *Philosophical Writings of René Descartes*. 3 volumes. Edited and translated by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothof, D. Murdoch and A. Kenny. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

10 November. Discussion of scepticism. Lecture: Responses to scepticism

Reading (see also reading for scepticism):

- Duncan Pritchard “Resurrecting The Moorean Response To The Sceptic” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 10 (2002), 283-307

17 November. Discussion of responses to scepticism. Lecture: Perceptual knowledge

Reading (see also reading for responses to scepticism):

- McDowell, John (2008). The disjunctive conception of experience as material for a transcendental argument. In Fiona Macpherson & Adrian Haddock (eds.), *Disjunctivism: Perception, Action, Knowledge*. Oxford University Press. pp. 376-389.

23 November. Discussion of perceptual knowledge. Lecture: A priori knowledge.

Reading (see also reading for perceptual knowledge):

- Maddy, Penelope (2000). Naturalism and the A Priori. In Paul Boghossian & Christopher Peacocke (eds.), *New essays on the a priori*. Oxford University Press. pp. 92–116.

1 December. Discussion of a priori knowledge. Lecture: Self-knowledge

Reading (see also reading for a priori knowledge):

- Alex Byrne: “Knowing that I am Thinking” in Anthony Hatzimoysis (ed.) *Self-Knowledge* OUP 2010

8 December. Discussion of self-knowledge, Summary

Reading (see reading for self-knowledge).

Sosa, Ernest, Jaegwon Kim, Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath (ed.) 2008: *Epistemology: an Anthology*. 2nd edition Blackwell Publishers

Conditions for passing the course:

- conscientious attendance, reading of the assigned material, (mental) preparation of answers to all the reading questions, participation in discussions;
- a 5-7 minute presentation of the answer to at least one reading question during the term. If there is time, students can choose to give more than one presentation; the best grade will count towards the course grade;
- passing the written exam at the end of the term.

Grading

- 15%: presentation
- 85% written exam.
 - for 2-year philosophy MA students: the written exam grade is given on the basis of the in-class written examination as part of the Theoretical Philosophy Final Examination at the end of the first year. You will draw from a list of previously distributed exam questions.
 - for others taking the course: there will be a written exam organised. You will draw from a list of previously distributed exam questions.
- Informed and active participation in the seminar discussions will be taken into account in borderline cases to improve the grade.

Grading criteria for the presentation

- An “A-” presentation offers a substantial answer to the reading question, focuses on the question (ie does not contain irrelevant material), is clearly organised and presented, and keeps the time. Lack of each of these results in lowering the grade by one. An “A” presentation has all the virtues of an “A-” presentation plus shows evidence of independent thinking.

Grading criteria for the written exam

- In order to earn at least a “B+”, the written exam paper has to cover most of the relevant material covered in the lectures. It has to show evidence of a thorough understanding of, and familiarity with, the relevant readings. It has to be written clearly and concisely, in competent academic English. One of the most important criteria will be the quality of the arguments. The text must be relevant to the question: it should not contain materials that do not pertain to the issue discussed.
- In order to earn an “A-”, all the above are required, plus *independent organisation* of the material. This means that the paper does not simply reconstruct the materials presented in

the lectures, but adds something in their organisation. Further readings could help you in independent organisation of the material.

- In order to earn an “A”, all the above, plus evidence of *independent thinking*. This means that you should think through the questions for yourself and come up with your own assessment. The emphasis is not on originality; you don't need to invent something nobody has said before. Rather, the idea is that you make these problems your own, and develop, as best as you can, your own view of them (which can very well agree with the views defended by some others).