

# PHILOSOPHY 4300 - EPISTEMOLOGY

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**Overview:** In this course we will be exploring a variety of questions about knowledge, including the following. What do I know? What am I certain of? What is it to have knowledge of anything? Is there a variety of ways of knowing something? How does knowledge change me? How does experience relate to knowledge? While exploring these questions, we will study four major philosophical texts, learning how to explore them and understand them.

**The books:** Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of scepticism* (Cambridge); David Hume, *An enquiry concerning human understanding* (Hackett); Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (Routledge); Wittgenstein, *On certainty* (Harper). You may use other editions of these texts if you want. We will also read selections from works by Plato, Descartes, Locke, and others, but I will make these available to you.

**Work:** Three take-home exams, and either a fourth take-home exam or an in-class final exam (student's choice). Each exam is worth 20% of the final grade, and class attendance & participation is worth 20%. Each exam will consist of three or four essay questions; you should answer two of them with as much clarity, accuracy, and precision as possible. The first three exams are due one week after they are assigned. No late exam will receive an "A".

**What I understand grades to mean:** **A** = excellent work, among the top quarter of assignments turned in. **B** = good work, clearly in the top half of the class. **C** = adequate and average quality of work. **D** = inadequate work, somewhere towards the bottom half of the class in terms of quality, but some honest effort has been made. **F** = clearly no responsible effort was made.

date	what we will discuss (probably)
Tu, 1/11	Introduction, course mechanics. What do you know? How do you know?
Th, 1/13	What criteria do we use when we judge whether we know something? What about in different domains - science, religion, philosophy, life?
Tu, 1/18	Knowledge through reason itself? Different modes of knowledge: Plato's cave. Rationalism vs. empiricism
Th, 1/20	What's most obvious? Can we build our knowledge out of sensory experience? John Locke's empiricism
Tu, 1/25	Locke's empiricism: primary and secondary ideas, substance
Th, 1/27	Skepticism: Descartes's (methodological) solipsism. What do our ideas really prove?
Tu, 2/1	Descartes's skepticism, Berkeley's idealism: getting by without matter? <b>Take home exam #1</b>
Th, 2/3	Hume's account of knowledge - What are our ideas? <i>Enquiry</i> , sections 1-

	3
Tu, 2/8	Hume's fork - How do we know causal claims? <i>Enquiry</i> , sections 4-5
Th, 2/10	Hume's skepticism - <i>Enquiry</i> , sections 8, 10, and 12
Tu, 2/15	Who wants to be a skeptic?
Th, 2/17	Sextus's skepticism - a way of life? Book 1, sections i - xiii
Th, 2/24	Sextus's skepticism - metaphysics? Book 1, sections xiv - xxxiv
Tu, 3/1	Sextus's skepticism - ethics? Book 3, sections i - vii, xxi - xxxii. <b>Take home exam #2</b>
Th, 3/3	How is science supposed to work? Experiments, tests, falsification; the "scientific method" (Popper)
Tu, 3/15	Catch-up day
Th, 3/17	On "protocol sentences" - and objections like "the theory-ladenness of ideas" (Kuhn and Feyerabend)
Tu, 3/22	Background to the <i>Tractatus</i>
Th, 3/24	How language connects with the world - Wittgenstein, <i>Tractatus</i> 1 - 2.225
Tu, 3/29	Building knowledge out of simple propositions - Wittgenstein, <i>Tractatus</i> 3 - 4.53 (skim the symbolic bits!) <b>Take home exam #3</b>
Th, 3/31	The limits of language - Wittgenstein, <i>Tractatus</i> 5.6 - 5.641; 6.423 - 7
Tu, 4/5	Religious or mystical knowledge? How would this work?
Th, 4/7	A linguistic turn: understanding how words like "knowledge" and "certainty" actually work in natural language. Wittgenstein, <i>Certainty</i> , paragraphs 1-228
Tu, 4/12	Continued reflections: Wittgenstein, <i>Certainty</i> , paragraphs 229-434
Th, 4/14	Continued reflections: Wittgenstein, <i>Certainty</i> , paragraphs 435-676
Tu, 4/19	Legal epistemology: reliability of eyewitnesses
Th, 4/21	Legal epistemology: "beyond a reasonable doubt"? [Laudan]
Tu, 4/26	Knowledge and the world-wide web [Wikipedia] <b>Take home exam #4, due on May 5th; or in-class final, Thursday, May 5, 1:30-3:20.</b>
Th, 4/28	Catch-up day