

Knowledge and Its Problems

Online-Lecture

Wednesdays, 14–16h

Syllabus from 20 October 2021

This course offers an overview of contemporary epistemology and introduces the basics of philosophical logic (propositional and predicate logic). At the same time, it introduces non-philosophy students to philosophy in the sense of working on conceptual problems, questions and arguments. Students of all disciplines will profit from the introduction to conceptual thinking and logic.

The primer on propositional and first-order logic is based on standard textbooks for logic in philosophy. The overview of epistemology is structured according to Michel Williams (2001: 1–12) five systematic problems of epistemology:

- (i) *The Analytical Problem*. What is knowledge and how can we define it? The course introduces the so-called “standard analysis of knowledge” as justified true belief (JTB) and the famous counterexamples by E. Gettier. We then discuss the most important contemporary theories of knowledge (internalism, externalism, virtue epistemology, knowledge-first epistemology etc.) with a focus on their core ideas and arguments.
- (ii) *The Problem of Scepticism*. Can we know anything at all? How can we know that we do (not)? The course outlines the most common sceptical positions and arguments (Agrippa’s trilemma, Cartesian scepticism) as well as the attempts to refute them.
- (iii) *The Problem of Boundaries*. What different kinds (know-how, know-that) and sources (perception, testimony, memory) of knowledge are there? How do we explain and distinguish them? The course focuses on testimony as a source of knowledge and the resulting recognition of the social aspects of epistemology.
- (iv) *The Problem of Value*. Why do we aspire to gain knowledge? Why does true belief not suffice? The course discusses the intertwinement of values and knowledge by considering contributions from feminist epistemology.
- (v) *The Problem of Method*. How do we gain knowledge? What role do rationality and reason play in epistemology? How should we do epistemology? The course concentrates on the last question and considers different traditions in epistemology.

Assessment tasks: Students must (a) give a short (10min) presentation of one core text or (b) write two short response paper to given questions about another core text. Only if students have completed either (a) or (b) during the term are they eligible for (c) the final written exam.

- (a) The short presentation is intended to open up the discussion in class and should answer three questions:
 - (i) What is the main argument in the text? How can we express its main thesis?
 - (ii) How does the argument work?



- (iii) Where do you see problems? Identify where you find an argument hard to understand and where you think an argument is inconclusive.

Please be aware that you should *reconstruct* the argument, not retell the text. Since you will not have time to include every detail, you must decide what is important and what is not. It is far better if we discover in the discussion that we do need some of the left-out passages than if you try to cramp everything into the presentation.

- (b) Each week, we will upload three questions for next week's workgroup session. You can freely decide which of those you answer in a response paper (two pages max), but you must answer two of them during the semester. The response paper must be sent in one day before the session in which the corresponding text is discussed (so: Thursday night at the latest), so that the workgroup discussion can draw on your response paper.
- (c) The final exam will be a written exam on **16 February 2022**. Further information about the exam will be given in the lecture.

Sessions				
#	Date	Topic	Required Reading	Further Reading (Optional)
1	20.10.2021	What Is Epistemology and Why Should We Care?	Michael Williams (2001), <i>Problems of Knowledge</i> , 1–12	Catherine Z. Elgin (1998), “Epistemology’s End.”
2	27.10.2021	Statements, Arguments and Inferences (Logic I)	Virginia Klenk (2007 [1983]), <i>Understanding Symbolic Logic</i> , 1–20.	Susanne K. Langer (1967), <i>An Introduction to Symbolic Logic</i> , 45–81. Ernest Lepore (2009 [2000]): <i>Meaning and Argument</i> , 5–16.
3	3.11.2021	NO CLASSES THIS WEEK!		
4	10.11.2021	Evaluating Truth-Values (Logic II)	Virginia Klenk (2007 [1983]), <i>Understanding Symbolic Logic</i> , 33–50.	Graham Priest (2017 [2000]), <i>Logic</i> , 7–23 and 45–52.
5	17.11.2021	Quantifiers: Existence and Universality (Logic III)	Virginia Klenk (2007 [1983]), <i>Understanding Symbolic Logic</i> , 201–224.	Ernest Lepore (2009 [2000]): <i>Meaning and Argument</i> , 129–154.
6	24.11.2021	What is Knowledge? (The Analytical Problem I)	Edmund L. Gettier (1963), “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”	Plato (1997), <i>Theaitetos</i> , 146c–147c, 151d–152b, 187b–187e, 237c/d.
7	1.12.2021	Knowledge after Gettier (The Analytical Problem II)	Linda Zagzebski (1999), “What is Knowledge?”	Alvin I. Goldman (1967), “A Causal Theory of Knowing.” Ernest Sosa (1980), “The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge.”
8	8.12.2021	Justifications Inside Out (The Analytical Problem III)	William P. Alston (1989) “Justification and Knowledge.”	Alessandra Tanesini (1998), “The Practices of Justification.”

#	Date	Topic	Required Reading	Further Reading (Optional)
9	15.12.2021	What is Truth? (The Analytical Problem IV)	Michael Williams (1986), "Do We (Epistemologists) Need A Theory of Truth?"	Linda Martín Alcoff (1997), "Immanent Truth."
10	22.12.2021	All in Vain? (The Problem of Scepticism)	Michael Williams (1999), "Skepticism."	Anita Avramides (2011), "Skepticism about Knowledge of Other Minds."
11	12.1.2022	Sources of Knowledge (The Problem of Boundaries I)	Jennifer Lackey (2011), "Testimonial Knowledge."	William Alston (1999), "Perceptual Knowledge."
12	19.1.2022	Social Epistemology (The Problem of Boundaries II)	Miranda Fricker (2011), "Authority and Social Power: Towards a Truly Social Epistemology."	Frederick F. Schmitt (1994), "Socializing Epistemology: An Introduction through Two Sample Issues."
13	26.1.2022	Who Knows? (The Problem of Boundaries III)	Lorraine Code (1998), "Taking Subjectivity into Account."	Lynn Hankinson Nelson (1993), "Epistemological Communities."
14	2.2.2022	Why Do We Want Knowledge? What Kind of Knowledge Do We Want? (The Problem of Value)	Charles W. Mills (1998), "Alternative Epistemologies."	Sally Haslanger (1999), "What Knowledge Is and What It Ought to Be: Feminist Values and Normative Epistemology."
15	9.2.2022	Knowledge in a Different Key (The Problem of Method)	Friedrich Nietzsche (1999 [1873]), "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense."	Linda Martín Alcoff (2010), "Continental Epistemology."
16	16.2.2022	Written Exam		

Full Biography

- Alcoff, Linda Martín (1997): Immanent Truth. In: *Science in Context* 10 (1), 97–112.
- (2010): Continental Epistemology. In: Jonathan Dancy, Ernest Sosa and Matthias Steup (eds.), *A Companion to Epistemology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 287–292.
- Alston, William P. (1989): Justification and Knowledge. In: ders. (ed.), *Epistemic Justification. Essays in the Theory of Knowledge*. Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 172–182.
- (1999): Perceptual Knowledge. In: John Greco and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 223–242.
- Avramides, Anita (2011): Skepticism about Knowledge of Other Minds. In: Sven Bernecker and Duncan Pritchard (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*. New York: Routledge, 433–444.
- Code, Lorraine (1998): Taking Subjectivity into Account. In: Linda Martín Alcoff (ed.), *Epistemology. The Big Questions*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 124–151.
- Elgin, Catherine Z. (1998): Epistemology's End. In: Linda Martín Alcoff (ed.), *Epistemology: The Big Questions*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 26–40.
- Fricker, Miranda (2011): Rational Authority and Social Power. Towards a Truly Social Epistemology. In: Alvin I. Goldman and Dennis Whitcomb (eds.), *Social Epistemology. Essential Readings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 54–68.
- Gettier, Edmund L. (1963): Is Justified True Belief Knowledge? In: *Analysis* 23 (6), 121–123.
- Haslanger, Sally (1999): What Knowledge Is and What It Ought to Be: Feminist Values and Normative Epistemology. In: *Philosophical Perspectives* 13, 459–480.
- Klenk, Virginia (2007 [1983]): *Understanding Symbolic Logic*. 5. ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Lackey, Jennifer (2011): Testimonial Knowledge. In: Sven Bernecker and Duncan Pritchard (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*. New York: Routledge, 316–325.
- Langer, Susanne K. (1967): *An Introduction to Symbolic Logic*. 3., revised ed. New York: Dover Publications.
- Lepore, Ernest (2009 [2000]): *Meaning and Argument. An Introduction to Logic Through Language*. 2. ed. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mills, Charles W. (1998): Alternative Epistemologies. In: Linda Martín Alcoff (ed.), *Epistemology. The Big Questions*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 392–410.
- Nelson, Lynn Hankinson (1993): Epistemological Communities. In: Linda Martín Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (eds.), *Feminist Epistemologies*. London/New York: Routledge, 121–160.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1999 [1873]): On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense. In: idem, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*. Eds. by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 139–153.
- Plato (1997): *Complete Works*. Ed. by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis, IN: Hachette.
- Priest, Graham (2017 [2000]): *Logic. A Very Short Introduction*. 2. ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schmitt, Frederick F. (1994): Socializing Epistemology. An Introduction through Two Sample Issues. In: Frederick F. Schmitt (ed.), *Socializing Epistemology. The Social Dimensions of Knowledge*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1–27.
- Tanesini, Alessandra (1998): The Practices of Justification. In: Linda Martín Alcoff (ed.), *Epistemology. The Big Questions*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 152–164.
- Williams, Michael (1986): Do We (Epistemologists) Need A Theory of Truth? In: *Philosophical Topics* 14 (1), 223–242.
- (1999): Skepticism. In: John Greco and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 35–69.
- (2001): *Problems of Knowledge. A Critical Introduction to Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Zagzebski, Linda (1999): What is Knowledge? In: John Greco and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 92–116.