

Introduction to Epistemology

Bachelor of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Syllabus from 26 September 2026

Instructor

Prof Dr. Frieder Vogelmann – frieder.vogelmann@ucf.uni-freiburg.de

Office hours: Wednesdays, 16–17h, Bertoldstr. 17, Room 01.071.

Please make an appointment with Silvia Stößer (silvia.stoesser@ucf.uni-freiburg.de).

Times and Rooms

Lecture

Tuesday 16-18h, Max-Kade-Auditorium 2

Workgroups

WG1: Thurs, 16-18h, Peterhof R2

WG2: Thurs, 16-18h, Old University R 01.065

WG3: Thurs, 18-20h, Peterhof R2

WG4: Thurs, 18-20h, Old University R 01.065

Tutors:

Maria Jankowska (WG2, WG4) – maria.jankowska@ucf.uni-freiburg.de

Wouter Wiersma (WG1, WG3) – wouter.wiersma@ucf.uni-freiburg.de

Course Description

This course offers an overview of contemporary epistemology with a primer on 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.

The primer on propositional and first-order logic is based on standard textbooks for logic in philosophy. The overview of epistemology starts with traditional approaches about

knowledge, justification and truth but gradually moves towards social and political epistemology. It is loosely based on Michel Williams' five systematic problems of epistemology:

- (1) *The Analytical Problem*. What is knowledge and how can we define it? In the lecture, we start from 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 etc.) with a focus on their core ideas and arguments.
- (2) *The Problem of Scepticism*. Can we know anything at all? How can we know that we do (not)? The lecture includes a discussion of the most common sceptical positions and arguments (Agrippa's trilemma, Cartesian scepticism) as well as the attempts to refute them.
- (3) *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 lecture focuses on testimony as a source of knowledge and the resulting recognition of the social aspects of epistemology.
- (4) *The Problem of Value*. Why do we aspire to gain knowledge? Why does true belief not suffice? The lecture discusses the intertwinement of values and knowledge by considering contributions from feminist epistemology.
- (5) *The Problem of Method*. How do we gain knowledge? What role do rationality and reason play in epistemology? How should we do epistemology? The lecture concentrates on the last question and considers different traditions in epistemology.

General Reading

Jennifer Nagel (2014): *Knowledge. A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: OUP.

Duncan Pritchard (2014): *What Is This Thing Called Knowledge?* 3rd ed. London: Routledge.

Alessandra Tanesini (1999): *An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Michael Williams (2001): *Problems of Knowledge. A Critical Introduction to Epistemology*. Oxford: OUP.

Learning Goals

Upon successful completion of this course, students are able to

- use basic forms of propositional and predicate logic,
- distinguish sound deductive arguments from fallacies,
- explain key concepts of epistemology like knowledge, justification and truth,
- understand different attempts to answer the main questions in epistemology and their (dis-)advantages,
- navigate the philosophical literature on epistemology on their own.

Attendance & Punctuality

Standard LAS attendance policies apply. Generally, students should inform the instructor about their absence ahead of time, if possible. Students can miss **two sessions** in a workgroup without having to give specific reasons. Students may miss another **two sessions** if they hand in the necessary proof defined in the general LAS attendance guidelines (see [ILIAS Info Board](#)). In this case, instructors may ask students to prepare make-up work.

Note that you are expected to arrive punctually for workgroups and the lecture. Presuming that your time is more valuable than everybody else's time is simply arrogant, if not rude.

Assessment and Assignments

(A) StuPO 2020

Graded Examination I (20%): Students must give a short (10min) presentation of one core text in the workgroups. These presentations can be held by two students, but not by larger groups. They should answer three questions:

- (a) What is the main argument in the text? How can we express its main thesis?
- (b) How does the argument work?
- (c) 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 just summarise all of 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.

Graded Examination II (80%): The final exam will be a written exam on **9 February 2027**. The **re-sit date is 12 April 2027**. The exam consists of two parts: A first part with knowledge questions that require short answers about material covered in the lecture, and a second part with essay question to choose from. Further information about the exam will be given in the lecture.

(B) StuPO 2026

The only change in StuPO 2026 is that the presentations will not be graded (they are now part of the SL), so the exam accounts for 100% of the final grade.

(C) Philosophy and Other Study Programmes

Philosophy students can earn 3 ECTS by attending the lecture and writing a short essay (2-3 pages) at the end of the term (**due by 1 April 2027**). They are free to join the workgroups if they are not filled to capacity. A list of essay questions will be provided at the

end of the term. If you want to write about a topic of your own choosing, please contact me before you start.

(D) Useful Hints

Guiding Questions: To help you with the reading, we will upload guiding questions on ILIAS every week. You can use them to orient your text or write an answer in order to practice for the exam. You can also get feedback for your answers from your workgroup tutor but please talk to them before handing anything in.

Exam registration takes place in HISinOne during the first two weeks of the semester/the block. For semester-long courses, there is a withdrawal period in the third week of the semester.

All core texts will be made available via ILIAS.

Course Outline/Schedule

#	Date	Topic	Required Reading	Optional Reading
1	20.10.2026	What Is Epistemology and Why Should We Care?	René Descartes (2008 [1641]), <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> , 13–24.	Catherine Z. Elgin (1998), “Epistemology’s End.”
2	27.10.2026	Statements, Arguments and Inferences (Categorical Logic)	Siu-Fan Lee (2017), <i>Logic: A Complete Introduction</i> , 1–25.	Susanne K. Langer (1967), <i>An Introduction to Symbolic Logic</i> , 45–81.
3	03.11.2026	Evaluating Truth-Values (Propositional Logic)	Siu-Fan Lee (2017), <i>Logic</i> , 173–196 and 209–215.	Graham Priest (2017 [2000]), <i>Logic</i> , 7–23 and 45–52.
4	10.11.2026	Existence and Universality (Predicate Logic)	Siu-Fan Lee (2017), <i>Logic</i> , 263–285.	Ernest Lepore (2009 [2000]): <i>Meaning and Argument</i> , 129–154.
5	17.11.2026	Beliefs and Experience	John L. Austin (1962), <i>Sense and Sensibilia</i> , 1-5 and 20–32.	Quill Kukla writing as Rebecca Kukla (2006), “Objectivity and Perspective in Empirical Knowledge”
6	24.11.2026	What is Knowledge?	Edmund L. Gettier (1963), “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”	Plato (1997), <i>Theaitetos</i> , 146c–147c, 151d–152b, 187b–187e, 237c/d.
7	01.12.2026	Knowledge after Gettier	Linda Zagzebski (1994), “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems.”	Alvin I. Goldman (1967), “A Causal Theory of Knowing.”

#	Date	Topic	Required Reading	Optional Reading
8	08.12.2026	Justification and The Structure of Knowledge	Catherine Z. Elgin (2014): "Non-foundationalist Epistemology: Holism, Coherence, and Tenability."	Alessandra Tanesini (1998), "The Practices of Justification."
9	15.12.2026	What is Truth?	Bertrand Russell (2001), "Truth and Falsehood."	Michael Williams (1986), "Do We (Epistemologists) Need A Theory of Truth?"
10	22.12.2026	Do We Know Anything at All?	– NO WORKGROUPS – Julianne Chung (2020), "Skeptical Arguments, Conceptual Metaphors, and Cross-Cultural Challenges."	Michael Williams (1999), "Skepticism." Catherine Z. Elgin (2010), "Skepticism Aside"
WINTER HOLIDAYS				
11	12.01.2026	Sources of Knowledge: A Priori Knowledge and Testimony	Sybille Krämer (2017), "Epistemic Dependence and Trust:: On Witnessing in the Third-, Second- and First-Person Perspectives."	Jennifer Nagel (2014), Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction, 72–86. Andrea Frisch (2003), "The Ethics of Testimony: A Genealogical Perspective"
12	19.01.2026	Power and Knowledge: Social Epistemology	Miranda Fricker (2011), "Authority and Social Power: Towards a Truly Social Epistemology."	Charles W. Mills (1998), "Alternative Epistemologies."
13	26.01.2026	Who Knows? Feminist Epistemology	Donna Haraway (1988), "Situated Knowledges"	Lynn Hankinson Nelson (1993), "Epistemological Communities."
14	02.02.2026	From the Value of Knowledge to the Epistemology of Ignorance	Linda Alcoff (2007), "Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types."	Sally Haslanger (1999), "What Knowledge Is and What It Ought to Be: Feminist Values and Normative Epistemology."
15	09.02.2026	Written Examination		

Biography

Alcoff, Linda Martín (2007): Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types. In: Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. Albany: SUNY Press, 39–57.

- Austin, John L. (1962): *Sense and Sensibilia*. Ed. by G. J. Warnock. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Chung, Julianne (2020): Skeptical arguments, conceptual metaphors, and cross-cultural challenges. In: *Ethno-epistemology* Routledge, 154–183.
- Descartes, René (2008 [1641]): *Meditations on First Philosophy. With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Translated by Michael Moriarty. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Elgin, Catherine Z. (2010): Skepticism Aside. In: Joseph Keim Campbell, Michael O'Rourke and Harry S. Silverstein (eds.), *Knowledge and Skepticism* The MIT Press, 309–324.
- (2014): Non-foundationalist Epistemology: Holism, Coherence, and Tenability. In: Matthias Steup, John Turri and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 244–255.
- Elgin, Catherine Z. (1998): Epistemology's End. In: Linda Martín Alcoff (ed.), *Epistemology: The Big Questions*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 26–40.
- Fricker, Miranda (2011 [1998]): 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.
- Frisch, Andrea (2003): The Ethics of Testimony: A Genealogical Perspective. In: *Discourse* 25 (1), 36–54.
- Gettier, Edmund L. (1963): Is Justified True Belief Knowledge? In: *Analysis* 23 (6), 121–123.
- Goldman, Alvin I. (1967): A Causal Theory of Knowing. In: *The Journal of Philosophy* 64 (12), 357–372.
- Haraway, Donna J. (1988): Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. In: *Feminist Studies* 14 (3), 575–599.
- Haslanger, Sally (1999): What Knowledge Is and What It Ought to Be: Feminist Values and Normative Epistemology. In: *Philosophical Perspectives* 13, 459–480.
- Krämer, Sybille (2017): Epistemic Dependence and Trust: On Witnessing in the Third-, Second- and First-Person Perspectives. In: Sybille Krämer and Sigrid Weigel (eds.), *Testimony/Bearing Witness: Epistemology, Ethics, History and Culture*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 247–259.
- Kukla, Rebecca (2006): Objectivity and Perspective in Empirical Knowledge. In: *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology* 3 (1), 80–95.
- Langer, Susanne K. (1967): *An Introduction to Symbolic Logic*. 3., revised ed. New York: Dover Publications.
- Lee, Siu-Fan (2017): *Logic. A Complete Introduction*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- 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.
- Nagel, Jennifer (2014): *Knowledge. A very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Nelson, Lynn Hankinson (1993): Epistemological Communities. In: Linda Martín Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (eds.), *Feminist Epistemologies*. London/New York: Routledge, 121–160.
- 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.
- Pritchard, Duncan (2014): *What Is This Thing Called Knowledge?* 3. ed. London: Routledge.
- Russell, Bertrand (2001): Truth and Falsehood. In: Michael P. Lynch (ed.), *The Nature of Truth. Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*. Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 17–24.
- Tanesini, Alessandra (1998): The Practices of Justification. In: Linda Martín Alcoff (ed.), *Epistemology. The Big Questions*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 152–164.
- (1999): *An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- 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 (1994): The Inescapability of Gettier Problems. In: *The Philosophical Quarterly* 44, 65–73.