

# Omar Fakhri

## Epistemology

### Course Description

Epistemology investigates questions about knowledge, understanding, justification, and rationality. This is a survey course in contemporary epistemology. We will read contemporary texts that focus on three main branches of epistemology: traditional epistemology, social epistemology, and formal epistemology. Here is a sample of some of the questions that we will discuss: What is knowledge? What is the structure of justification? What are degrees of belief? How should we update our beliefs? Is testimony a good source of knowledge or justification? How should we respond to disagreement, especially disagreements among epistemic equals? The overall aim of this course is to introduce students to a wide range of topics found in contemporary epistemology, and to help students cultivate critical reasoning skills so that they can develop their own answers to these questions.

### Course Requirements:

- Biweekly Assignments 40% – These are either short reaction papers between 400-500 words or solving exercises. The former will be applicable during the first and last parts of this course, and the latter will be applicable during the middle part of the course, the formal part. For the reaction papers, you are expected to summarize an important part of the reading and then critically evaluate it. For the exercises, you will be assigned 2-3 exercise questions to help you better understand the formal material.

Pick only **one** of the following requirements (note: for those interested in applying to graduate programs in philosophy, I highly recommend doing the latter option):

- Three Papers 20% each – These are shorter papers, about 5-7 double-spaced pages. Prompts will be handed out a week before the paper is due.

Or

- Long Paper 60% - This is a substantial paper, about 15 double-spaced pages. You will be required to get your paper topic approved by me first. Ideally, you should aim to do this at least a month before the paper is due. This paper will engage with a big bulk of the assigned readings and perhaps some outside sources as well. If you decide to write this paper instead of the three short papers, please let me know as soon as you make this decision. I will provide extensive comments on this paper, and I would be happy to read future drafts of it, even after the class is done.

### Required Text:

There is no required text for this course. All the readings will be uploaded to the course website by the instructor.

### Course Schedule

(\* = optional reading)

## **Part 1: Traditional**

### **Week 1: Skepticism**

Jonathan Vogel: Cartesian Skepticism and Inference to the Best Explanation  
Sherrilyn Roush: Closure on Skepticism  
Roderick Chisholm: The Problem of the Criterion  
\*Descartes: Meditations I and II  
\*Moore: Proof of an External World  
\*Stroud: Skepticism and the Possibility of Knowledge

### **Week 2: The structure of justification**

Laurence Bonjour: The Elements of Coherentism  
Ernest Sosa: The Raft and the Pyramid  
Susan Haack: Foundherentism Articulated  
\*Klein: Infitism  
\*Chisholm: The Myth of the Given  
\*Gadamer: The Hermeneutic Circle

### **Week 3: Internalism vs Externalism**

Alvin Goldman: What is Justified Belief  
Laurence Bonjour: Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge  
Feldman and Conee: Evidentialism  
\*Comesana: Evidentialist Reliabilism  
\*Berker: Epistemic Teleology and the Separateness of Propositions

### **Week 4: The analysis of “knowledge”**

Alvin Goldman: A Causal Theory of Knowing  
Catherine Elgin: Epistemology’s End  
Linda Zagzebski: The Inescapability of Gettier Problems  
\*Gettier: Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?  
\*Lehrer and Paxson: Knowledge: Undefeated Justified True Belief  
\*Plantinga: Proper Functionalism

### **Week 5: Knowledge first**

Williamson: Knowledge and Its Limits, ch. 2  
Elizabeth Fricker: Is Knowing a State of Mind? The Case Against  
Mikkel Gerken: Against Knowledge-First Epistemology  
\*Yablo: Causal Relevance

## **Part 2: Formal**

### **Week 6: Degrees of belief**

Michael Titelbaum: Fundamentals of Bayesian Epistemology, ch. 1  
David Christensen: Putting Logic in its Place, ch. 2  
\*Makinson: The Paradox of the Preface  
\*Hajek and Eriksson: What are Degrees of Belief?  
\*Buchak: Belief, Credence, and Norms

### **Week 7: Probability Distribution**

Michael Titelbaum: Fundamentals of Bayesian Epistemology, ch. 2  
Ian Hacking: An Introduction to Probability and Inductive Logic, ch. 4  
\* Robert Williams: Probability and Non-Classical Logic

### **Week 8: Conditional Credences**

Michael Titelbaum: Fundamentals of Bayesian Epistemology, ch. 3  
Stephenson: An Introduction to Bayesian Net-work Theory and Usage, sections 6-7  
\*Lewis: Probabilities of Conditionals and Conditional Probabilities

### **Week 9: Updating by Conditionalization**

Michael Titelbaum: Fundamentals of Bayesian Epistemology, ch. 4  
Ian Hacking: An Introduction to Probability and Inductive Logic, ch. 15  
\*Teller: Conditionalization and Observation  
\*Carnap: Logical Foundations of Probability, sections 43-45

## **Part 3: Social**

### **Week 10: Testimony**

Elizabeth Fricker: Against Gullibility  
Jennifer Lackey: Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission  
\*Fricker: Epistemic Injustice, ch. 1-2  
\* Richard Foley: Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others, ch. 4

### **Week 11: Experts**

Alvin Goldman: Experts: Which ones Should You Trust?  
John Hardwig: Epistemic Dependence  
\*Dreyfus: How Far is Distance Learning from Education?  
\*Plato: Charmides, 164c-176d

### **Week 12: Disagreement**

Thomas Kelly: The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement  
Adam Elga: Reflection and Disagreement  
\*Christensen: Epistemology of Disagreement: The Good News  
\* Kelly: Disagreement and the Burdens of Judgment  
\* Lackey: A Justificationist View of Disagreement's Epistemic Significance

### **Week 13: Permissivism and Uniqueness**

Roger White: Epistemic Permissiveness  
Thomas Kelly: Evidence Can Be Permissive  
\*Kopec & Titelbaum: The Uniqueness Thesis  
\* Ballantyne & Coffman: Conciliationism and Uniqueness

### **Week 14: Group Knowledge**

Christian List: Group Knowledge and Group Rationality  
Jennifer Lackey: What is Justified Group Belief?  
\*Pettit: Groups with Minds of Their Own  
\* Schmitt: The Justification of Group Beliefs