

Epistemology

Instructor: Daniel Kodaj

Content of the course:

“Epistemology” is a fancy word for the theory of knowledge. This is the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge.

Epistemology falls into roughly three areas. One is the *definition* of knowledge: what are the conditions for someone to know that P? (Where P is any statement you like, such as “2+2=4”.) It turns out that constructing such a definition is extremely difficult. (Does it follow that we don’t know what knowledge is?)

Second, there are some classic puzzles concerning knowledge, the most famous of which is the ‘evil demon’ scenario described by Descartes: How do we know that our world is not an illusion created by an evil demon, so that almost all of our beliefs false?

Third, epistemology studies different kinds or branches of knowledge, for example scientific knowledge, knowledge of God etc. The seminar provides an introduction to each of these areas, acquainting students with the core concepts and problems of contemporary epistemology.

Grading

Assessment will be based on two in-class tests (21 Oct and 9 Dec, respectively). Each test will consist of (a) 10 multiple-choice questions about the texts we’ll be reading (50 points) and (b) an essay question (70 points).

There will be 5 or 6 possible essay topics for each test. These will be announced before the test.

The grade depends on the average of the two tests: 60–69 points D (2), 70–79 points C (3), 80–89 points B (4), 90–99 points A (5), 100–109 points A+, 110–120 points A++.

Topics

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Gettier cases
- 3 Foundationalism
- 4 Coherentism
- 5 Relativism
- 6 Reliabilism and virtue epistemology
- 7 Test 1
- 8 Internalism and externalism
- 9 Scepticism
- 10 Testimony
- 11 A priori knowledge
- 12 Religious knowledge
- 13 Test 2

Texts:

Audi, Robert (2011): *Epistemology*. Routledge.

Huemer, Michael (2011): *Knowledge, Reality, and Value*.

Lemos, Noah (2007): *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*. Cambridge University Press.

Plantinga, Alvin (1981): Is belief in God properly basic? *Noûs*

Recommended literature:

BonJour, Laurence (2010): *Epistemology*. Rowman & Littlefield.

McCain, Kevin (2022): *Epistemology: 50 Puzzles, Paradoxes, and Thought Experiments*. Routledge.