

# Theory of Knowledge

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## Course Description

Epistemology focuses on three central philosophical questions: “What is knowledge?”, “What can we know?”, and “How do we know what we know?” In addition to their role in our daily lives, these questions are central to almost every discipline, including the sciences, history, and philosophy itself. This course is an extended investigation into the nature of knowledge, understanding, and justification, primarily from the perspective of contemporary epistemology in the analytic tradition. We will look at a number of debates including skepticism, the value of knowledge, the nature of understanding, naturalistic epistemology, feminist epistemology, testimonial knowledge, and comparative epistemology. The aim of this course is to develop a sense of how these concepts and theories interrelate, and to instill philosophical skills in the critical evaluation of them.

## Learning Outcomes

1. Develop a sense of some of the central concepts and theories in contemporary epistemology and how they interrelate.
2. Gain the philosophical skills to critically evaluate these theories.
3. Produce philosophical writing that meets the field of philosophy’s expectations regarding structure, argumentation, and evidence.
4. Handle secondary sources appropriately, properly citing in Chicago style.

## Course Materials

### Required:

Ernest Sosa, Jaegwon Kim, Jeremy Fantl, and Matthew McGrath (eds), *Epistemology: An Anthology*, 2nd Edition (Blackwell) (Digital versions acceptable)

### Recommended:

Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction* (Very Short Introductions) (2014)  
Jonathan Dancy, Ernest Sosa, Matthias Steup (Editors), *A Companion to Epistemology*, 2nd Edition (2009)

John Greco, Ernest Sosa (Editors), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology* (2017)

*Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*, 11th Edition, by Williams and Bizup (other editions acceptable as well)

Readings not contained in the required text will be available through Moodle.

## Technology in the Classroom

**Please minimize your technology use in the classroom.** Students should take notes using a notebook and either bring the textbook to class or consult their notes. If you choose to use a laptop, please disable your wifi during class. **Please refrain from looking at your phone during class.** If you need an exception to this policy for person reasons, please let me know before class by email or in person.

If you are a student with a disability that has a technology accommodation, please let me know as soon as possible.

## Accessibility

Bryn Mawr College is committed to providing equal access to students with a documented disability. Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Access Services. Students can call 610-526-7516 to make an appointment with the Director of Access Services, Deb Alder, or email her at [dalder@brynmawr.edu](mailto:dalder@brynmawr.edu) to begin this confidential process. Once registered, students should schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible to share the verification form and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement. More information can be obtained at the Access Services website. (<http://www.brynmawr.edu/access-services/>)

Any student who has a disability-related need to record this class first must speak with the Director of Access Services and to me, the instructor. Class members need to be aware that this class may be recorded.

## Title IX

Bryn Mawr/Haverford College is committed to fostering a safe and inclusive living and learning environment where all can feel secure and free from harassment. All forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic violence, and dating violence are violations of Bryn Mawr/Haverford's policies, whether they occur on or off campus. Bryn Mawr/Haverford faculty are committed to helping to create a safe learning

environment for all students and for the College community as a whole. If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination, harassment, or violence, know that help and support are available. Staff members are trained to support students in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more.

The College strongly encourages all students to report any incidents of sexual misconduct. Please be aware that all Bryn Mawr/Haverford employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors, clergy, and healthcare providers) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the Bi-College Title IX Coordinator.

Information about the Colleges Sexual Misconduct policy, reporting options, and a list of campus and local resources can be found on the Colleges website:

<https://www.brynmawr.edu/inside/policies-guidelines-handbooks/title-ix>

## Notes on Academic Integrity

I regard plagiarism as a very serious matter. In this class, plagiarism consists of work taken partially or entirely from an uncited source (online content, a peer, a published article, etc.) and assumed as your own. Any use of AI to write for you is also considered plagiarism and is easily detectable. If I have reasons to suspect plagiarizing, I will ask that you report yourself to the Bryn Mawr Honor Board. See the Bryn Mawr Honor Code and Honor Board Hearing Process in the Student Handbook for more information.

## Evaluation

- Weekly reflections: Starting in the second week, each week you will write a short reflection on the reading, worth 30% of your grade in total. These will be graded as *full credit*, *half credit*, or *no credit*.
- Exams: There will be two exams, worth 25% of your grade each. The exams will not be cumulative.
- Final paper: A final paper that builds on your weekly reflections (4–5 pages), **due during finals week** and worth 20% of your grade.

### *Weekly reflections:*

By **10:30am each Thursday** you will submit a 200–300 word reflection through Moodle on that week's readings. Your reflection should either identify something you found **interesting** in the reading (and explain why you found it interesting, perhaps connecting it to your own life or other courses you've taken) or something you found **confusing** (and explain why you found it confusing, with an attempt to make sense of what the author might mean).

## Grading Policies

1. Attendance is expected.
2. The grading standard for this course is that a “B” reflects a minimal but satisfactory engagement with the material of the course. Anything above a “B” will reflect the quality of work submitted by the student.
3. Extensions can be granted on assignments, but you should ask at least a day in advance. If you do not make arrangements beforehand, late papers will be downgraded by 1/3 letter grade per day.

### Grade breakdown:

Grade	Grade Points	Percentage Range	Meaning
A	4.0	94–100%	Excellent
A-	3.7	90–93%	Excellent-
B+	3.3	87–89%	Very Good
B	3.0	83–86%	Good
B-	2.7	80–82%	Good-
C+	2.3	77–79%	Satisfactory+
C	2.0	73–76%	Satisfactory
C-	1.7	70–72%	
D	1.0	60–69%	
F	0	0–59%	

## Tentative Schedule of Readings

### 1 Skepticism

#### Week 1

##### January 23

Introduction to course

##### January 25

René Descartes, Meditation I (online)

Recommended: *The Matrix* (film)

## **Week 2**

### **January 30**

Perry et al, “Logical Toolkit” (online)  
René Descartes, Meditation II (online)

### **February 1**

Sextus Empiricus, selection (online)  
Linda Zagzebski, “The First Stage of the Skeptical Attack” (online)

## **Week 3**

### **February 6**

Jared Millson, “Conspiracy Theories” (Online)  
C. Thi Nguyen, “Escape the Echo Chamber” (online)

### **February 8**

Discussion

## **2 The Structure of Knowledge and Justification**

## **Week 4**

### **February 13**

Roderick M. Chisholm, “The Myth of the Given”

### **February 15**

Discussion

## **Week 5**

### **February 20**

Donald Davidson, “A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge”

### **February 22**

Discussion

## **Week 6**

### **February 27**

Peter Klein, "Human Knowledge and the Infinite Regress of Reasons"

### **February 29**

Discussion

## **Week 7**

### **March 5**

REVIEW DAY

### **March 7**

EXAM 1

## **Week 8**

### **March 12**

SPRING

### **March 14**

BREAK

## **3 Defining Knowledge**

## **Week 9**

### **March 19**

Edmund Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?"

Linda Zagzebski, "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems"

### **March 21**

Discussion

## **Week 10**

### **March 26**

Alvin I. Goldman, "What Is Justified Belief?"

**March 28**

Discussion

## **4 Naturalized Epistemology**

**Week 11**

**April 2**

Notes on Quine, “Epistemology Naturalized” (online)  
Kim, “What is Naturalized Epistemology?”

**April 4**

Discussion

**Week 12**

**April 9**

Louise M. Antony, “Quine as Feminist: The Radical Import of Naturalized Epistemology”  
(long!)

**April 11**

Discussion

## **5 Epistemic Injustice**

**Week 13**

**April 16**

Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, Chapters 1 and 7 (online)

**April 18**

Discussion

## 6 Comparative Epistemology

### Week 14

**April 23**

Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Mishkos Kenomagwen: The Teachings of Grass" from *Braiding Sweetgrass* (online)

**April 25**

Discussion

### Week 15

**April 30**

REVIEW DAY

**May 2**

Exam 2

\*\*\* Final essay due during finals week\*\*\*