

Philosophy 3551: Epistemology
Professor Erica L. Neely
Spring 2015

Place and Time: Burgett 115, TR 12-1:15 p.m.
Email address: e-neely@onu.edu
Office Hours: MWF 10-11 and 2:30-3; R 11:30-12; and by appointment
Required Texts: *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 3rd ed., ed.
Louis P. Pojman
Web page: <https://northernonline.onu.edu/>

Note: I am disability and ESL friendly. If you need accommodation or are having trouble keeping up in class due to language issues, please drop me an email or come to see me. I'm happy to help.

Aims and Objectives

This course discusses central concerns in epistemology (the theory of knowledge.) We will begin by briefly considering the ways in which these questions have classically occurred, namely, via problems of skepticism and perception of the external world. The central portion of the course will be spent wrestling with the central problem of epistemology, namely, what exactly is knowledge? What transforms a belief into knowledge? This raises issues of what is required to make a belief justified; we will look at the contrasting approaches of foundationalism and coherentism, as well as the theoretical differences between internalist and externalist views of justification.

We will then cover a number of other debates in epistemology. First, we will discuss whether there is a priori knowledge, i.e., knowledge that exists independently of the senses. Second, we will examine the problem of induction: how can I gain knowledge of the future by looking at past occurrences? Third, we will consider scientific justification and the problem of making knowledge claims that go beyond what we can directly gather evidence for. Fourth, we will consider the ethics of belief and what kind of epistemic duties we might have – can we simply believe whatever we wish to? Lastly, we will consider challenges and alternatives to contemporary epistemology, specifically in trying to see what basic assumptions may need questioning.

Assignments and Grading

Three Papers 25% each – These papers are 10-15 pages each on a topic of your choice pertaining to epistemology. I must approve the topic in advance, but you are welcome to explore whatever readings most interest you; you are also encouraged to seek out additional readings on the topic if you so choose. Your papers must demonstrate an ability for philosophical thought – I am not interested in a book report; I want to read your criticisms, arguments, and ideas. I am willing to read outlines or rough drafts; students whose grades on the first paper are lower than a B- may be required to show me an outline and/or draft of later papers in advance.

Papers are to be submitted in class on the scheduled date; if you know that you will be absent on the day an assignment is due, please make arrangements to have a classmate hand it in or leave it in my mailbox. Unless something extraordinary prevents you from turning your assignments in on time, late papers will be dropped one step for each day that they are late. (Hence an A- paper that is one day late will be a B+ paper; if it is two days late it will be a B, etc.)

Participation 25% – This is a seminar-style course. I will presenting a certain amount of information to provide background for our discussions, but the principal activity of the class should be discussion. To facilitate this, each class period you need to bring an index card to class with your name on it, a one-sentence or so summary of the reading for the day, and a question about the reading. If there are multiple readings for that day, you should have a summary and question for each reading. You should come prepared to discuss the question you have raised, as these will help form the basis of discussion for each day.

Note also that inappropriate participation can negatively impact your participation grade. **In particular, holding conversations or texting during class will count against you.** These classes aren't big enough to hide in, so show some courtesy to your teacher and fellow students.

Special Note on Academic Dishonesty

The University expects its students to conduct themselves in a dignified and honorable manner as mature members of the academic community and assumes that individually and collectively they will discourage acts of academic dishonesty. The University also expects cooperation among administrators, faculty, staff, and students in preventing acts of academic dishonesty, in detecting such acts, reporting them, and identifying those who commit them, and in providing appropriate punishment for offenders. The University Code of Academic Student Conduct is found in Appendix C of the Student Handbook: http://www.onu.edu/student_life/student_conduct/student_handbook

Committing academic dishonesty will result in an automatic failure in the course; the administration may pursue additional sanctions. If you have questions about appropriate citations, I will be happy to help you.

Special Note on Accommodation

Students requiring particular accommodations because of physical and/or learning disabilities should contact their Dean's office prior to or during the first week of classes. For additional information, see: http://www.onu.edu/student_life/disability_services

Other Information

Although final grades are limited to whole letter grades, individual assignments will use the plus/minus scale; this will enable you to see whether your B is closer to an A or closer to a C.

The schedule lists what chapters are being covered on what dates. It is your responsibility to read the articles in advance so that you can participate in class. However, do realize that we will be spreading out the material to some extent; you do not need to read 110 pages for the first of five days on a topic. As we move through the topic, of course, you will want to make certain you keep abreast of where we are.

As many of the topics are rather involved, you may find it helpful to bring your book to class so that you may reference the readings during our discussions.

Schedule

Jan. 15-22:	Parts I and II: General Introduction and Skepticism
Jan. 27 and 29:	Part III: Perception: Our Knowledge of the External World
Feb. 3-10:	Part IV: The Analysis of Knowledge
Feb. 12-24:	Part V: Theories of Justification (I): Foundationalism and Coherentism
Feb. 26-Mar. 17:	Part VI: Theories of Justification (II): Externalism and Internalism
Mar. 19-31:	Part VII: A Priori Knowledge
Apr. 2 and 9:	Part VIII: The Justification of Induction
Apr. 14 and 16:	Part IX: Scientific Method, Justification, and the Demarcation Problem
Apr. 21 and 23:	Part X: The Ethics of Belief
Apr. 28 and 30:	Part XI: Challenges and Alternatives to Contemporary Epistemology

[Reading schedule subject to change if we find a topic particularly interesting!]

Important Dates

R	2/12	Paper One Topic Due
R	2/19	Paper One Due
T	3/3	No Class (Spring Break)
R	3/5	No Class (Spring Break)
T	3/17	Paper Two Topic Due
T	3/24	Paper Two Due
T	4/7	No Class – Remember today is really a Monday! Go to Monday classes!
T	4/28	Final Paper Topic Due
T	5/5	Final Paper Due, 12 noon