

# THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

PHI 313, Princeton University  
Fall 2020-2021

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**Instructor:** Dr. Silvia De Toffoli  
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Office Hours: By appointment

**Time:** Monday, Wednesdays, 11-11-50am  
**Precepts Times:** TBD

**Preceptor:** Rebecca Mullen  
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**Office Hours:** Monday 2-3pm and by  
appointment  
<https://princeton.zoom.us/j/94455756941>

**Virtual Location:**  
<https://princeton.zoom.us/j/91944148138?pwd=-ZkN5UWk3UmVsSzRzV2NDZVpyRi8xQT09>  
Meeting ID: 919 4414 8138  
Passcode: episteme

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## Description

We live our lives thinking we know a lot of stuff: it's 3pm, the Pythagorean theorem is true, I have hands... But do we really know any of this? If a skeptic challenges us to prove that we are not living in a computer simulation, or in a dream, what could we say? How can we justify our beliefs? Can two people with the same evidence rationally disagree? It seems that we form beliefs spontaneously, but can we also sometimes control what we believe? Can we, for example, rationally believe something just because believing it will bring about good consequences? In what ways are we responsible for our beliefs? Can we wrong someone just by believing something about them? Can our practices of gaining and sharing knowledge bring about social injustice and if so, what can we do about it?

## Prerequisites

No particular prerequisite is necessary. However, at least another class in philosophy is recommended.

## Readings

Richard Feldman, *Epistemology*, Prentice Hall, 2003.  
Additional readings will be available electronically in *Blackboard*.

## Online Tools

Live participation on zoom is required. The Zoom sessions will be on 10 minutes before the official start of the class and will continue for 10 minutes after the end of the class to allow for informal interactions. Please plan to arrive few minutes before the start of the lectures and precepts. There is a camera-on policy. For this requirement to be waived special reasons must be presented (e.g., being in a very different time-zone).

We will use *Polls Everywhere* (there is an app available for free) and *Perusall* – please create a free account and join the class DE-TOFFOLI-CWPGC.

## Papers

One 1500-word paper and one 2000-words paper. They are to be written on one of a list of topic questions that will be circulated in advance, or on a topic proposed by the student and submitted to the instructor for approval. Each paper should be written in accordance with University regulations that are to be found in the University publication Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities.

Students with little experience writing philosophy papers are advised to consult <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html> and may request comments on a draft of the first paper before submissions if they make their request in a timely manner.

## Grades

The final grade with be weighted between participation, two papers, and a comprehensive final exam:

- 20% Class/Precept Participation (including Group work, Perusall, VoiceThread, and Polls)
- 25% First Paper
- 35% Second Paper
- 20% Comprehensive Final Exam (take home)

## Lateness

There is a grade penalty of 1 point (on a scale of 100) per weekday to a maximum of 10 (or one full letter, e.g. from A- to B-) for unexcused lateness. By University policy, when extensions are sought on medical grounds, verification from University Health Services must be presented. Extensions for foreseeable reasons should be sought in advance. Note that “Dean’s Date” is so called because only deans can grant extensions past that date; individual faculty may not do so on their own authority; please don’t even ask until you have spoken with your academic dean.

# SCHEDULE

## 1. Mon 08/31 – *Introduction and Overview*

No readings

### **BLOCK I - ANALYSIS OF KNOWLEDGE**

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## 2. Wed 09/02 – *The Standard View*

- a. Feldman, *Epistemology*, Chapter 1, “Epistemological Questions”
- b. Feldman, *Epistemology*, Chapter 2, “The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge”

## 3. Mon 07/09 – *Gettier*

- a. Edmund Gettier, “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?” (1963)
- b. Feldman, *Epistemology*, Chapter 3, “Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge”

## 4. Wed 09/09 – *Responses to Gettier: the Causal Theory*

- a. Alvin Goldman, “A Causal Theory of Knowledge” (1967)
- b. Feldman, “The Causal Theory,” pp. 81-86

## 5. Mon 09/14 – *Gettier Again*

- a. Linda Zagzebski, “The Inescapability of Gettier Problem” (1994)

## 6. Wed 09/16 – *Against the Analysis of Knowledge*

- a. Alan Millar, “The Traditional Analytical Project and the Central Tension” (2009)

### **BLOCK II - THE ETHICS OF BELIEF**

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## 7. Mon 09/21 – *Evidentialism and The Ethics of Belief*

- a. Feldman, “Evidentialism,” pp. 41-48
- b. William James, “The Will to Believe” (1896)

**8. Wed 09/23 – *The Ethics of Belief***

- a. William James, “The Will to Believe” (1896) – continued

**9. Wed 09/28 – *Doxastic Wrongdoing* – GUEST LECTURER: Rebecca Mullen**

- a. Rima Basu and Mark Schroeder, “Doxastic Wronging” (2019)

**10. Mon 09/30 – *The Ethics of Belief and Friendship* – GUEST LECTURER: Andrew Chignell**

- a. Andrew Chignell, “The Ethics of Belief” (2018)
- b. Simon Keller, “Friendship and Belief” (2004)

**FIRST PAPER DUE on Sunday 10/04**

**BLOCK III - THEORIES OF JUSTIFICATION**

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**11. Mon 10/05 – *Foundationalism***

- a. Feldman, “Cartesian Foundationalism,” pp. 49-59
- b. Feldman, “Modest Foundationalism,” pp. 70-78

**12. Wed 10/07 – *Coherentism***

- a. Feldman, “Coherentism,” pp. 60-70

**13. Wed 10/14 – *Reliabilism***

- a. Alvin Goldman, “What Is Justified Belief?” (1979)
- b. Feldman, “Reliabilism,” pp. 90-98

**14. Mon 10/19 – *Radical Externalism***

- a. Amia Srinivasan, “Radical Externalism” (*forthcoming*)

**15. Wed 10/21 – *Radical Externalism***

- a. Amia Srinivasan, “Radical Externalism” (*forthcoming*) – continued

## **BLOCK IV - SKEPTICISM**

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### **16. Mon 10/26 – *Skepticism About the External World***

- a. Descartes, “First Meditation” (1641)
- b. Berry Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Skepticism* (1984), *Extracts*
- c. Feldman, *Epistemology*, Chapter 6, “Skepticism (I),” pp. 108-118

### **17. Wed 10/28 – *Moore’s Solution***

- a. G.E. Moore, “A proof of an External World” (1939)
- b. Feldman, *Epistemology*, Chapter 6, “Skepticism (I),” pp. 119-128

### **18. Mon 11/02 – *The Skeptic and the Dogmatist***

- a. James Pryor, “The Skeptic and the Dogmatist” (2000)

### **19. Wed 11/04 – *A Reply to the Skeptic***

- a. Susanna Rinard, “Reasoning one’s way out of skepticism” (2018)

## **BLOCK V - BELIEFS AND DEGREE OF BELIEF**

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### **20. Mon 11/09 – *Beliefs and Degrees of Beliefs***

- a. Richard Foley, “Beliefs, Degrees of Belief, and the Lockean Thesis” (2009)

### **21. Wed 11/11 – *Norms for Beliefs and Degrees of Beliefs***

- a. Lara Buchak, “Belief, Credence, and Norms” (2014)

## **BLOCK VI - SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY**

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### **22. Mon 11/16 – *Disagreement***

- a. Christensen, “Disagreement as Evidence” (2009)
- b. Feldman, *Epistemology*, Chapter 9, “Epistemological Relativism”

**23. Wed 11/18 – *Moral Disagreement***

- a. Sarah McGrath, “Moral Disagreement and Moral Expertise” (2008)

**24. Mon 11/23 – *Epistemic Injustice***

- a. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and Ethics of Knowing* (2007), extracts

**SECOND PAPER DUE on Thursday 12/03**

**TAKE HOME FINAL EXAM DUE on Thursday 12/10**