

# Introduction to Epistemology

## Bachelor of Liberal Arts and Sciences

*Syllabus from 02 October 2024*

### Instructor

Prof Dr. Frieder Vogelmann – [frieder.vogelmann@ucf.uni-freiburg.de](mailto:frieder.vogelmann@ucf.uni-freiburg.de)

Office hours: Wednesdays, 16–17h, Bertoldstr. 17, Room 01.071.

Please make an appointment with Silvia Stößer ([silvia.stoesser@ucf.uni-freiburg.de](mailto:silvia.stoesser@ucf.uni-freiburg.de)).

### Times and Rooms

#### Lecture

Tuesday 16-18h, Max-Kade-Auditorium 1

#### Workgroups

WG1: Thurs, 16-18h, Breisacher Tor R101

WG2: Thurs, 16-18h, Breisacher Tor R107

WG3: Thurs, 18-20h, Breisacher Tor R101

WG4: Thurs, 18-20h, Breisacher Tor R105

#### Tutors:

Silvia Berigüete Pastor (WG1, WG3) – [silvia.berigueete@venus.uni-freiburg.de](mailto:silvia.berigueete@venus.uni-freiburg.de)

Maria Jankowska (WG2, WG4) – [maria.jankowska@venus.uni-freiburg.de](mailto:maria.jankowska@venus.uni-freiburg.de)

### Course Description

This course offers an overview of contemporary epistemology with a primer on the basics of philosophical logic (propositional and predicate logic). At the same time, it introduces non-philosophy students to philosophy in the sense of working on conceptual problems, questions and arguments.

The primer on propositional and first-order logic is based on standard textbooks for logic in philosophy. The overview of epistemology starts with traditional approaches about

knowledge, justification and truth but gradually moves towards social and political epistemology. It is loosely based on Michel Williams' five systematic problems of epistemology:

- (1) *The Analytical Problem*. What is knowledge and how can we define it? In the lecture, we start from the so-called "standard analysis of knowledge" as justified true belief (JTB) and the famous counterexamples by E. Gettier. We then discuss the most important contemporary theories of knowledge (internalism, externalism, virtue epistemology etc.) with a focus on their core ideas and arguments.
- (2) *The Problem of Scepticism*. Can we know anything at all? How can we know that we do (not)? The lecture includes a discussion of the most common sceptical positions and arguments (Agrippa's trilemma, Cartesian scepticism) as well as the attempts to refute them.
- (3) *The Problem of Boundaries*. What different kinds (know-how, know-that) and sources (perception, testimony, memory) of knowledge are there? How do we explain and distinguish them? The lecture focuses on testimony as a source of knowledge and the resulting recognition of the social aspects of epistemology.
- (4) *The Problem of Value*. Why do we aspire to gain knowledge? Why does true belief not suffice? The lecture discusses the intertwinement of values and knowledge by considering contributions from feminist epistemology.
- (5) *The Problem of Method*. How do we gain knowledge? What role do rationality and reason play in epistemology? How should we do epistemology? The lecture concentrates on the last question and considers different traditions in epistemology.

## General Reading

Jennifer Nagel: *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: OUP 2014.

Duncan Pritchard: *What Is This Thing Called Knowledge?* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London: Routledge 2014.

Alessandra Tanesini: *An Introduction to Feminist Epistemologies*. Oxford: Blackwell 1999.

Michael Williams: *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology*. Oxford: OUP 2001.

## Learning Goals

Upon successful completion of this course, students are able to

- use basic forms of propositional and predicate logic,
- distinguish sound deductive arguments from fallacies,
- explain key concepts of epistemology like knowledge, justification and truth,
- understand different attempts to answer the main questions in epistemology and their (dis-)advantages,
- navigate the philosophical literature on epistemology on their own.

## Attendance & Punctuality

Standard LAS attendance policies apply. Generally, students should inform the instructor about their absence ahead of time, if possible. Students can miss **two sessions** in a workgroup without having to give specific reasons. Students may miss another **two sessions** if they hand in the necessary proof defined in the general LAS attendance guidelines (see [ILIAS Info Board](#)). In this case, instructors may ask students to prepare make-up work.

Note that you are expected to arrive punctually for workgroups and the lecture. Presuming that your time is more valuable than everybody else's time is simply arrogant, if not rude.

## Assessment and Assignments

**Graded Examination I (20%):** Students must give a short (10min) presentation of one core text in the workgroups. These presentations can be held by two students, but not by larger groups. They should answer three questions:

- (a) What is the main argument in the text? How can we express its main thesis?
- (b) How does the argument work?
- (c) Where do you see problems? Identify where you find an argument hard to understand and where you think an argument is inconclusive.

Please be aware that you should reconstruct the argument, not just summarise all of the text. Since you will not have time to include every detail, you must decide what is important and what is not. It is far better if we discover in the discussion that we do need some of the left-out passages than if you try to cramp everything into the presentation.

**Graded Examination II (80%):** The final exam will be a written exam on **4 February 2025**. The **re-sit date is 8 April 2025**. The exam consists of two parts: A first part with knowledge questions that require short answers about material covered in the lecture, and a second part with essay question to choose from. Further information about the exam will be given in the lecture.

**Guiding Questions:** To help you with the reading, we will upload guiding questions on ILIAS every week. You can use them to orient your text or write an answer in order to practice for the exam. You can also get feedback for your answers from your workgroup tutor but please talk to them before handing anything in.

**Philosophy students** can earn 3 ECTS by attending the lecture and writing a short essay (2-3 pages) at the end of the term (**due by 7 April 2025**). They are free to join the workgroups if they are not filled to capacity. A list of essay questions will be provided at the end of the term. If you want to write about a topic of your own choosing, please contact me before you start.

Exam registration takes place in HISinOne during the first two weeks of the semester/the block. For semester-long courses, there is a withdrawal period in the third week of the semester.

All core texts will be made available via ILIAS.

## Course Outline/Schedule

#	Date	Topic	Required Reading	Optional Reading
1	15.10.2024	What Is Epistemology and Why Should We Care?	René Descartes (2008 [1641]), <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> , 13–24.	Catherine Z. Elgin (1998), “Epistemology’s End.”
2	22.10.2024	Statements, Arguments and Inferences (Categorical Logic)	Siu-Fan Lee (2017), <i>Logic: A Complete Introduction</i> , 1–25.	Susanne K. Langer (1967), <i>An Introduction to Symbolic Logic</i> , 45–81.
3	29.10.2024	Evaluating Truth-Values (Propositional Logic)	Siu-Fan Lee (2017), <i>Logic</i> , 173–196 and 209–215.	Graham Priest (2017 [2000]), <i>Logic</i> , 7–23 and 45–52.
4	5.11.2024	Existence and Universality (Predicate Logic)	Siu-Fan Lee (2017), <i>Logic</i> , 263–285.	Ernest Lepore (2009 [2000]): <i>Meaning and Argument</i> , 129–154.
5	12.11.2024	Beliefs and Experience	John L. Austin (1962), <i>Sense and Sensibilia</i> , 1-5 and 20–32.	Quill Kukla writing as Rebecca Kukla (2006), “Objectivity and Perspective in Empirical Knowledge”
6	19.11.2024	What is Knowledge?	Edmund L. Gettier (1963), “Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?”	Plato (1997), <i>Theaitetos</i> , 146c–147c, 151d–152b, 187b–187e, 237c/d.
7	26.11.2024	Knowledge after Gettier	Linda Zagzebski (1994), “The Inescapability of Gettier Problems.”	Alvin I. Goldman (1967), “A Causal Theory of Knowing.”
8	3.12.2024	Justification and The Structure of Knowledge	Laurence Bonjour (1999), “The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism”	Alessandra Tanesini (1998), “The Practices of Justification.”
9	10.12.2024	What is Truth?	Bertrand Russell (2001), “Truth and Falsehood.” Paul Horwich (2010), “Truth – Meaning – Reality,” 1–12.	Linda Martín Alcoff (1997), “Immanent Truth.” Michael Williams (1986), “Do We (Epistemologists) Need A Theory of Truth?”

#	Date	Topic	Required Reading	Optional Reading
10	17.12.2024	Do We Know Anything at All?	Catherine Z. Elgin (2010), "Skepticism Aside"	Michael Williams (1999), "Skepticism."
11	7.01.2025	Sources of Knowledge: A Priori Knowledge and Testimony	Jennifer Nagel (2014), Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction, 72–86.	Andrea Frisch (2003), "The Ethics of Testimony: A Genealogical Perspective"
12	14.01.2025	Power and Knowledge: Social Epistemology	Miranda Fricker (2011), "Authority and Social Power: Towards a Truly Social Epistemology."	Charles W. Mills (1998), "Alternative Epistemologies."
13	21.01.2025	Who Knows? Feminist Epistemology	Donna Haraway (1988), "Situated Knowledges"	Lynn Hankinson Nelson (1993), "Epistemological Communities."
14	28.01.2025	From the Value of Knowledge to the Epistemology of Ignorance	Linda Alcoff (2007), "Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types."	Sally Haslanger (1999), "What Knowledge Is and What It Ought to Be: Feminist Values and Normative Epistemology."
15	04.02.2025	Written Examination		

## Full Biography

- Alcoff, Linda Martín (1997): Immanent Truth. In: *Science in Context* 10 (1), 97–112.
- (2007): Epistemologies of Ignorance: Three Types. In: Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. Albany: SUNY Press, 39–57.
- Austin, John L. (1962): *Sense and Sensibilia*. Ed. by G. J. Warnock. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- BonJour, Laurence (1999): The Dialectic of Foundationalism and Coherentism. In: John Greco and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 117–142.
- Descartes, René (2008 [1641]): *Meditations on First Philosophy. With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Translated by Michael Moriarty. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Elgin, Catherine Z. (2010): Skepticism Aside. In: Joseph Keim Campbell, Michael O'Rourke and Harry S. Silverstein (eds.), *Knowledge and Skepticism* The MIT Press, 309–324.
- Elgin, Catherine Z. (1998): Epistemology's End. In: Linda Martín Alcoff (ed.), *Epistemology: The Big Questions*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 26–40.
- Fricker, Miranda (2011 [1998]): Rational Authority and Social Power. Towards a Truly Social Epistemology. In: Alvin I. Goldman and Dennis Whitcomb (eds.), *Social Epistemology. Essential Readings*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 54–68.
- Frisch, Andrea (2003): The Ethics of Testimony: A Genealogical Perspective. In: *Discourse* 25 (1), 36–54.

- Gettier, Edmund L. (1963): Is Justified True Belief Knowledge? In: *Analysis* 23 (6), 121–123.
- Goldman, Alvin I. (1967): A Causal Theory of Knowing. In: *The Journal of Philosophy* 64 (12), 357–372.
- Haraway, Donna J. (1988): Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. In: *Feminist Studies* 14 (3), 575–599.
- Haslanger, Sally (1999): What Knowledge Is and What It Ought to Be: Feminist Values and Normative Epistemology. In: *Philosophical Perspectives* 13, 459–480.
- Horwich, Paul (2010): *Truth – Meaning – Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kukla, Rebecca (2006): Objectivity and Perspective in Empirical Knowledge. In: *Episteme: A Journal of Social Epistemology* 3 (1), 80–95.
- Langer, Susanne K. (1967): *An Introduction to Symbolic Logic*. 3., revised ed. New York: Dover Publications.
- Lee, Siu-Fan (2017): *Logic. A Complete Introduction*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Lepore, Ernest (2009 [2000]): *Meaning and Argument. An Introduction to Logic Through Language*. 2. ed. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Mills, Charles W. (1998): Alternative Epistemologies. In: Linda Martín Alcoff (ed.), *Epistemology. The Big Questions*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 392–410.
- Nagel, Jennifer (2014): *Knowledge. A very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nelson, Lynn Hankinson (1993): Epistemological Communities. In: Linda Martín Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter (eds.), *Feminist Epistemologies*. London/New York: Routledge, 121–160.
- Plato (1997): *Complete Works*. Ed. by John M. Cooper. Indianapolis, IN: Hachette.
- Priest, Graham (2017 [2000]): *Logic. A Very Short Introduction*. 2. ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Russell, Bertrand (2001): Truth and Falsehood. In: Michael P. Lynch (ed.), *The Nature of Truth. Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*. Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 17–24.
- Tanesini, Alessandra (1998): The Practices of Justification. In: Linda Martín Alcoff (ed.), *Epistemology. The Big Questions*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 152–164.
- Williams, Michael (1986): Do We (Epistemologists) Need A Theory of Truth? In: *Philosophical Topics* 14 (1), 223–242.
- (1999): Skepticism. In: John Greco and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 35–69.
- Zagzebski, Linda (1994): The Inescapability of Gettier Problems. In: *The Philosophical Quarterly* 44, 65–73.