

Epistemology

Spring 2015. MR 1:30-2:45. Bosler 308.

Instructor: Chauncey Maher
maherc@dickinson.edu. East College 202
Office Hours: TR 10:30-11:30, or by appointment

Course Description

“How did he know that the two boys were dangerous?”
“Akenya knows how to dance, but is not a good instructor.”
“Do you know whether it is legal to carry a concealed weapon in Pennsylvania?”
“Sarah knows the answer, even though she doesn’t think she does.”
“Andre said the teacher didn’t like him from the start, but he doesn’t know that.”

As these remarks illustrate, talk of knowledge is common. We seem to value knowledge, as a special standard worth meeting. What exactly is knowledge? And why is it valuable, if it is? How do we establish that someone knows something? Isn’t there always room for doubt—or are some things beyond doubt? In order to get on with our lives, we rely on what others know or claim to know, seeking the advice of doctors, lawyers, bakers, and mechanics. We accord their claims special weight. Sometimes, however, we accord a person’s claims less weight than they deserve, as when a journalist instinctively distrusts a young black man’s claims about his encounter with the police. Is doing so a distinctive sort of wrong or injustice? If so, in what way exactly?

By addressing these questions, among others, this seminar will introduce you to contemporary epistemology. We will start by reading Michael Williams’s opinionated introduction to the field, and then turn to Miranda Fricker’s recent, groundbreaking work on epistemic injustice.

Goals

- learn key issues, claims, concepts, distinctions, and arguments in contemporary epistemology
- improve philosophical reading and writing by regularly composing responses to difficult philosophical texts
- improve philosophical writing by drafting an essay in stages
- learn proper use of critical literature in philosophy

Texts

Michael Williams, *Problems of Knowledge*, ISBN: 0192892568
Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, ISBN: 0199570523
+PDFs on Moodle

Epistemology

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Evaluation

Participation

Your participation is essential to the success of this seminar. You should make regular, substantive, and clear contributions to our discussions. Your participation is worth 25% of your final grade.

Weekly Writing

Each week you will write a short response—no more than 2 pages— to the reading for that week. There are several goals for your weekly writing. First, they are to help you engage with the reading. Second, they are to provide thoughts for discussion in our meetings. Third, they are to help you develop ideas for your essays. Fourth, they are to habituate you to writing philosophically. Your piece of writing should take one of the following forms. Over the entire semester, you must attempt at least three of these types of writing.

Argument Clarification

Clarify an important argument. Enumerate the premises and conclusion. It must appear valid. Do your best also to make it appear sound—that is, with true or plausible premises.

Objection to an Argument

Object to an argument. Enumerate the premises and conclusion of an important argument. It must appear valid. Explain why it is problematic, identifying some specific premise as false or implausible, or some specific inference as invalid.

Example of a phenomenon

Present a detailed example of a phenomenon for which philosophers have offered competing explanations, explaining what the philosophical challenge is. For instance, you might provide an example of testimonial injustice.

Explanation of a theory or account

Give an example of the phenomena to be accounted for, or state a philosophical question. Explain how the theory interprets the example or answers the question.

Counter-example to a theory

Explain a theory. Give an appropriately detailed example that conflicts with the theory, explaining exactly where the conflict is. For instance, suppose a theory says that A suffices for knowledge. Provide a clear example of something that is or has A but isn't an instance of knowledge.

Epistemology

Spring 2015. MR 1:30-2:45. Bosler 308.

Weekly Writing (continued)

Class will be divided into two groups, A and B. Each student in A will submit a response on Thursday; each student in B will submit one on Monday. They are due by **1pm** before we meet on **Thursday for group A** and **Monday for group B**. Approximately, over the semester, you will write 12 responses. Together they are worth **25%** of your final grade.

Grading Scale: 2 = adequate, 1 = inadequate, 0 = not submitted

Essays

1. You must revise and extend **1** of your weekly writings into a short essay of **no more than 4 pages** (1400 words). You must confer with me about your topic. This essay will be worth **20%** of your final grade. It must be submitted no later than **April 20**.

2. You will write **1** longer essay of **no more than 12 pages** (4200 words). This essay should be a revision and extension of your 4-page essay. It must incorporate all reasonable feedback received on the predecessor, and it must incorporate at least one piece of "secondary" literature, which you should choose in consultation with me. Further details will be specified later in the semester. This essay will be worth **30%** of your final grade.

Schedule (tentative)

Date	Topic	Reading (for class on this day)
<i>Problems of Knowledge</i>		
1/19 M	Introduction to the course	Williams, Introduction
1/22 R	What is knowledge? The Standard Analysis	Williams, Chapter 1
1/26 M	What is knowledge? Externalism and Reliabilism	Williams, Chapter 2
1/29 R	What is knowledge? Fallibility	Williams, Chapter 3
2/2 M	What is knowledge? Stability	Williams, Chapter 4
2/5 R	Do we have knowledge? Agrippan Skepticism	Williams, Chapter 5
2/9 M	Do we have knowledge? Cartesian Skepticism	Williams, Chapter 6

Epistemology

Spring 2015. MR 1:30-2:45. Bosler 308.

2/12 R	Does knowledge have a foundation?	Williams, Chapter 7
2/16 M	Does knowledge have a foundation?	Williams, Chapter 8
2/19 R	Is there an alternative to foundationalism? Coherentism	Williams, Chapter 10
2/23 M	Is there an alternative to foundationalism? Coherentism	Williams, Chapter 11
2/26 R	Does knowledge depend on context?	Williams, Chapter 13
3/2 M	Does knowledge depend on context?	Williams, Chapter 14
3/5 R	What place does perceptual experience have in knowledge?	Williams, Chapter 15
3/9 M	<i>Spring Break</i>	<i>Spring Break</i>
3/12 R	<i>Spring Break</i>	<i>Spring Break</i>
3/16 M	What place does perceptual experience have in knowledge?	Williams, Chapter 16
3/19 R	Slack	Slack
<i>Epistemic Injustice</i>		
3/23 M	What is testimonial injustice?	Fricker, Introduction and Chapter 1
3/26 R	How does prejudice affect our judgments of credibility?	Fricker, Chapter 2
3/30 M	How does testimony work?	Fricker, Chapter 3
4/2 R	What is involved in being testimonially just?	Fricker, Chapter 4
4/6 M	Why is testimonial justice a virtue?	Fricker, Chapter 5
4/9 R	Virtue epistemology	Greco and Turri, "Virtue Epistemology"
4/13 M	Why is testimonial injustice a wrong?	Fricker, Chapter 6
4/16 R	What is hermeneutical injustice?	Fricker, Chapter 7
4/20 M	What is hermeneutical injustice?	Fricker, Chapter 7

Epistemology

Spring 2015. MR 1:30-2:45. Bosler 308.

4/23 R	Slack	Slack
4/27 M	Student Presentations	Secondary literature for essays
4/30 R	Student Presentations	Secondary literature for essays
5/5	Final Essay Due by 2pm	Final Essay Due by 2pm

Academic Honesty

Any case of suspected academic dishonesty must be reported. Note: "To plagiarize is to use without proper citation or acknowledgment the words, ideas, or work of another. Plagiarism is a form of cheating that refers to several types of unacknowledged borrowing." When in doubt, cite it. For more information, please see the handbook on Community Standards here:

<http://www.dickinson.edu/student/files/commstand0809.pdf>

Disabilities

I will make reasonable academic accommodations for students with documented disabilities. If you think you are eligible for such accommodation, please first register with Disability Services in Biddle House, specifically Stephanie Anderberg (717-245-1734; disabilityservices@dickinson.edu). If you are eligible, Marni Jones, Director of Learning Skills and Disability Services, will provide you with a letter attesting to that. Once you have that letter, we can meet to discuss what we need to do. All of that must happen in the first three weeks of the semester.