

Philosophy 4300 - Epistemology - Spring 2019

Professor Charlie Huenemann

T/Th 12-1:15, Main 207

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. Somehow, in our causal interactions with the world, we end up with some sort of model or representation of it. How much of our knowledge is due directly to our senses? What do we really perceive - and what do we infer from what we perceive? How justified are those inferences? How much of our alleged knowledge is due to the presuppositions we bring to our experience? Is our confidence in science justified? Is there any knowledge that is due simply to the fact that we are rational? To what extent do our cultural institutions shape what we regard to be true? In this class we'll explore all these questions, and others, reading our main text along with primary philosophical works.

Required text: Charles Landesman, *An Introduction to Epistemology* (Blackwell). We will also be reading works by Berkeley, Locke, Hume, Russell, Wittgenstein, Putnam, Quine, and others, available on Canvas.

Instructor information: Charlie Huenemann, Main 208, phone 797-0254; office hours 1-3 on Wednesdays, but I'm also generally available on T/W/Th, and by appointment, email charlie.huenemann@usu.edu. I'm always happy to meet with you - really, I'm a friendly and encouraging fellow who enjoys talking with students - so please feel welcome to knock on my door. I have a blog if you are interested: huenemanni.com. Also, on the subject of blogs, you may wish to check out usuphilosophy.com to stay abreast of local philosophical happenings.

Work. You will have to write three essays, and be part of a group presentation. Each essay will be about 5-7 pages (1200-1700 words). Your part of the group presentation will be to write and present a two-page (500 word) response as part of a **panel discussion** on a book read outside of class. (Details on all this things to follow). You are expected to attend class, and participate as suits you. These five items - the three essays, the panel discussion, and your attendance - count equally toward your final grade. There will be no tests.

Cheating. In class - as in life - never try to pass off someone else's work as your own. It is always okay to do some extra reading, and seek out more information on the internet. But when your writing is informed by what you learn from these sources, you should cite the information at the end of your writing. Every quotation should be indicated as a quotation, and cited appropriately.

Attendance policy: This is a seminar, so attendance is extremely important. That being said, life can get complicated, and sometimes missing a class is unavoidable. Three absences will be tolerated without penalty. After that, each absence will be recorded as a point taken away from the 10 points accorded to attendance, which is worth 20% of the final grade.

Late to class policy: After 30 minutes, you are absent, unless I grant you an exception in advance.

Lateness in turning in work: Generally there should be none, but life packs surprises, and sometimes work has to be delayed. Be mature about this, and talk to me about it. If you need an extension, or need some alternative arrangement due to disability, please let me know, and we'll work something out. Generally, I don't count any work as late until I have graded everything that has been turned in. Once I'm through the initial supply of turned-in papers, anything received after that is late. The penalty is that your work will not receive a grade higher than a "B". If it's REALLY late (more than two weeks), it will not receive higher than a "C".

Date	Topics, and what you should read for class discussion that day:
1/8	Introduction and preliminaries
1/10	<p style="text-align: center;">Knowledge gained from our senses</p> Landesman, chapters 1 and 2 ("Sense Awareness" and "Appearance and Reality"): what our senses tell us, and what we infer from them
1/15	Selections from George Berkeley, <i>Principles of Human Knowledge</i> (Canvas): an argument for the unreality of the mind-independent, material world
1/17	An answer to Berkeley: Bertrand Russell, "Our Knowledge of the External World" (Canvas); class presentation on writing philosophy
1/22	Selections from John Locke, <i>Essay Concerning Human Understanding</i> (Canvas): how can we distinguish reality from appearance in our experience?
1/24	Alternative model for knowledge gained from the senses, based on cognitive science Rough draft of paper #1 due
1/29	First panel discussion: <i>Our Senses: An Immersive Experience</i> , by Rob DeSalle and Patricia Wynne
1/31	<p style="text-align: center;">The skeptical challenge</p> Landesman, chapter 3 ("Skepticism"): how much can we doubt?
2/5	Hilary Putnam: an argument for being sure we are not brains in vats
2/7	Nick Bostrom: our universe is probably only a simulation
2/12	Selections from Wittgenstein, <i>On Certainty</i> (Canvas): to be read together in class Paper #1 due
2/14	<p style="text-align: center;">Knowing ourselves</p> Landesman, chapter 4 ("Self-Knowledge"): What is the nature of our knowledge of ourselves?
2/19	Descartes and Hume on self knowledge

2/21	The self as “a user illusion”
2/26	Second panel discussion: <i>Why People Believe Weird Things</i> , by Michael Shermer
2/28	Epistemology of science Landesman, chapter 5 (“Beyond Basic Belief”): how do we justify scientific knowledge?
3/5	Selections from Hume, <i>Enquiry</i> (Canvas): What is Hume’s argument against causal knowledge?
3/7	Nelson Goodman, “The New Riddle of Induction” (Canvas)
	<i>Spring break</i>
3/19	Third panel discussion: <i>Consilience</i> , by E. O. Wilson
3/21	Purely rational knowledge? Landesman, chapter 6 (“A Priori Knowledge”): is some knowledge based on purely rational truths?
3/26	Descartes, Locke, and Leibniz on a priori knowledge Paper #2 due
3/28	Kant and a priori synthetic knowledge
4/2	W. V. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”
4/4	Knowledge in Society Fourth panel discussion: <i>Reinventing Knowledge</i> , by Ian McNeely with Lisa Wolverton
4/9	Landesman, chapter 7 (“Epistemology”): what are the ethics of belief?
4/11	Kuhn, <i>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</i>
4/16	Foucault, how culture and social power shape knowledge, institutions
4/18	Demands and Limits of Knowledge
4/23	Fifth panel discussion: <i>The Know-It-All</i> , by A. J. Jacobs
4/30	Paper #3 due: no late papers will be accepted!

Books for panel discussion (with short descriptions from Amazon):

Our Senses: An Immersive Experience, by Rob DeSalle and Patricia Wynne - "Over the past decade neuroscience has uncovered a wealth of new information about our senses and how they serve as our gateway to the world. ... With infectious enthusiasm, Rob DeSalle illuminates not only how we see, hear, smell, touch, taste, maintain balance, feel pain, and rely on other less familiar senses, but also how these senses shape our perception of the world aesthetically, artistically, and musically." [Available online through USU Library]

Why People Believe Weird Things, by Michael Shermer - "In this age of supposed scientific enlightenment, many people still believe in mind reading, past-life regression theory, New Age hokum, and alien abduction....*Why People Believe Weird Things* debunks these nonsensical claims and explores the very human reasons people find otherworldly phenomena, conspiracy theories, and cults so appealing." [Available online through USU Library]

Consilience, by E. O. Wilson - "Using the natural sciences as his model, Wilson forges dramatic links between fields. He explores the chemistry of the mind and the genetic bases of culture. He postulates the biological principles underlying works of art from cave-drawings to Lolita. Presenting the latest findings in prose of wonderful clarity and oratorical eloquence, and synthesizing it into a dazzling whole, **Consilience** is science in the path-clearing traditions of Newton, Einstein, and Richard Feynman." [Available in Course Reserves]

Reinventing Knowledge, by Ian McNeely with Lisa Wolverson - "Here is an intellectual extravaganza, a dazzling history of the key institutions that have shaped and channeled knowledge in the West from the classical period to the present. Fashioned with elegance and wit, this exhilarating survey carries us through the pivotal points of institutional change and cultural transformation. In its compact history we find the perfect context for understanding the vast changes we are experiencing now in the landscape of knowledge." [Available in Course Reserves]

The Know-It-All, by A. J. Jacobs - "Part memoir and part education (or lack thereof), *The Know-It-All* chronicles NPR contributor A.J. Jacobs's hilarious, enlightening, and seemingly impossible quest to read the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* from A to Z." [Available only through purchase]