

Knowledge and Its Limits

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Class Hours: T/Th 11-1:50pm

Classroom: WLH 2112

Course Description

This course deals with both classical and contemporary issues in epistemology, the theory of knowledge. The course focuses on five fundamental questions in five modules :

1. **Do we have knowledge at all?** We will start by examining varieties of *skepticism*—the view that we lack knowledge—and some of the arguments for it.
2. **What is the nature of perceptual knowledge?** We will then turn to a commonly cited source of knowledge: perception.
3. **What is the nature of scientific and “higher” knowledge?** We’ll consider the status of scientific, moral, and religious knowledge.
4. **What is knowledge, exactly?** After we have our feet wet, we’ll consider what exactly knowledge is. We will focus on a classical analysis of knowledge (the *JTB* theory), Gettier’s challenge to it, and several ways of responding to this challenge.
5. **How do groups of people create and influence knowledge?** We close the course by turning to the field of *social epistemology* and the influence of race, gender, experts, and other people on what we know.

Students will also learn the basics of logic, philosophical analysis, and argumentation.

Required Materials

- Jennifer Nagel, *Knowledge: A very short introduction* (2014)
- A Classquestion.com account (a free polling system)
- All other texts are provided on TritonEd.

Assessments

1. Assignment 1 (due July 10)
2. Assignment 2 (due July 17)
3. Assignment 3 (due July 24)
4. Final Exam (out-of-class take-home portion, due July 31)
5. Final Exam (in class portion, Saturday, August 4, 11:30a-2:30p, location TBA)

Grading Distribution

- **10%** Assignment 1
- **10%** Assignment 2
- **20%** Assignment 3
- **20%** Final Examination (out of class portion)

- **30%** Final Examination (in class portion)
- **10%** Attendance and Participation

Course Policies

During Class

I strongly encourage students to take regular written notes during class if they can. **Some research suggests** that even though students who type their notes take *more* notes, they consistently *underperform* relative to their peers who take handwritten notes. I will not post Power Points in advance of class, though they will be available after lecture. If you choose to use a computer to take notes, I require that you not do anything *but* take notes on it during class. The TA will facilitate this. If you violate these expectations or annoyingly and openly text in class, I will make every effort to stop class and initiate a shaming, repeating “shame, shame, shame” like **Septa Unella from Game of Thrones**.

Participation via ClassQuestion is mandatory starting the second class.

Office Hours

What are office hours? Contrary to popular belief, office hours are not merely for remediation, and you don't need to prepare a 5-minute presentation to come to office hours. Office hours are a casual setting for you to expand your understanding of the material and to talk about further study in philosophy. **Some studies** indicate that students who attend office hours perform better in the class. Not to mention, if no one comes to office hours, I end up playing chess online for 2 hours, which is fun but definitely not the best expenditure of university funds. Also, there's candy.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected in all lectures. The participation grade is based attendance and participation in section on Thursday and in lecture. Section attendance on Thursday is mandatory unless excused at the TA's discretion. Office hour attendance on Tuesday is obviously optional.

Policies on Late Assignments

For each day late, the penalty will be an *entire letter grade*. For instance, if an assignment is due Thursday, a paper turned in on Thursday that receives an A would receive a B if turned in on Friday. Late assignments will be accepted for no penalty if the student has a University authorized excuse from a doctor or dean; this must be communicated to the instructor promptly.

Assignment Policies

All work should be in a standard 12 pt font, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins. No particular style besides this is required. The summer session is fast, and we need to be able to give you rapid, high-quality feedback on your succinct but well-thought-out work. As a result, students will be penalized 5% of an assignment's points if they exceed the word count *including headers, footnotes, and footers*. There is no penalty for coming under the word count. Bibliographies are not required for the assignments, though you should cite the articles you reference, all of which should be from class. All assignments must be turned in on Turnitin through TritonEd.

Regrade Policy

You should speak to the TA before asking the instructor about a regrade. Any requests for a regrade will be handled by the instructor. The resulting regrade could be higher *or lower* than

the original grade.

Final Exam

The final will be comprised of multiple choice, true/false, identification items, and (very) short answers. It is cumulative. Throughout the course, lectures will be chock-full of questions that will be quite like those you will encounter on the final. The final will be administered during the final exam time on WebReg (repeated above). No retakes will be administered without a letter from the dean or a doctor.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

All suspicions of academic misconduct will be reported to the Academic Integrity Office according to university policy. Academic misconduct is not just blatant cheating (e.g., copying off another student during an exam), but includes copying other students' essays; copying or using old essays; forgetting to cite material you took from an outside resource; turning in work completed in total or in part by another. This is an incomplete list; if you have questions concerning academic misconduct it is your responsibility to ask me for advice.

Accommodations for Disabilities

Accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. See [the UCSD OSD/DCC website](#) for more information.

Course Schedule

The schedule is tentative and subject to change. Boxed readings provide necessary background information; I suggest reading them *after* you read non-boxed texts for the week.

WEEK 1: SEEKING CERTAINTY

Nagel, ch. 2, "Skepticism"

- **Tuesday** Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, First and Second Meditations (pp. 1-8 in Bennett's version)
- **Tuesday** Russell, *Problems*, chapters 1-2, pp. 7-26
- **Thursday** Wilson, "The regress argument against Cartesian scepticism" (2012)
- **Thursday** Chalmers, "The Matrix as Metaphysics"

WEEK 2: PERCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE

Nagel, ch. 3, "Empiricism and Rationalism"

Crash course in logic

- **Tuesday** Pryor, "The Skeptic and the Dogmatist"
- **Thursday** Siegel, "Cognitive Penetrability and Perceptual Justification"

WEEK 3: "HIGHER" FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE

Godfrey-Smith, ch. 3, "Induction and Confirmation"; ch. 4, "Popper"

- **Tuesday** Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, §§2-4 (pp. 7-18 in Bennett's version)

- **Tuesday** Popper, “Science as Falsification”
- **Thursday** Goodman, “The New Riddle of Induction”
- **Thursday** Audi, Selection from “Scientific, moral, and religious knowledge,” pp. 319-328 (from *Epistemology: An introduction*)

WEEK 4: IS KNOWLEDGE JUSTIFIED TRUE BELIEF?

Nagel, ch. 4, “The Analysis of Knowledge”; ch. 5, “Internalism and Externalism”

- **Tuesday** Gettier, “Is justified true belief knowledge?”
- **Tuesday** Goldman, “Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge”
- **Thursday** Bonjour, “Externalist Accounts of Justification”

WEEK 5: SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Nagel, ch. 6, “Testimony”

- **Tuesday** Code, “Is the Sex of the Knower Epistemologically Significant?”
- **Tuesday** Gendler, “On the Epistemic Cost of Implicit Bias”
- **Thursday** Goldman, “Experts: Which ones should you trust?”
- **Thursday** Christensen, “Disagreement as Evidence: The Epistemology of Controversy”