

Introduction to Epistemology

University of Houston, Spring 2021
ILAS 2350-18692, Knowledge and Methods

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Course Description

The "Knowledge and Methods" course (ILAS 2350-18692) surveys the cognitive methods pertaining to our understanding of diverse disciplines (including natural sciences, mathematics, philosophical logic, social sciences, cultural studies, and the arts). It aims to raise students' awareness of the distinctive research methods of the diverse disciplines associated with their chosen majors and minors.

This semester (Spring 2021), the course introduces students to contemporary *theories of knowledge* (Lehrer, Chisholm). So, it focuses on *skepticism* (Descartes, Moore, Stroud, Putnam), *justification* (Gettier, Feldman, Goldman), *coherentism vs. foundationalism* (Sellars, Davidson), *internalism vs. externalism* (Bonjour), *the a priori knowledge* (Ayer, Casullo), and *naturalized epistemology* (Quine, Kim).

Time and Place

On Zoom, you will attend weekly online lectures delivered synchronously every Monday (10am – 1pm). This class offers three credits, and each credit requires 50 minutes of class every week. The online platform for your class is *Blackboard Learn*, where you can find all the relevant information about the course, including syllabus, readings, and links for paper submission and final test. There, you can also find the recorded lectures. Access Monday class through this link: [Knowledge-and-Methods/Class](#).

The teaching assistant (Ms. Smalley) organizes weekly office hours to clarify the class subjects. The office hours take place on Tuesday (3-4 pm), but she is also available by appointment for individuals or groups. Access Tuesday office hours through this link: [Knowledge-and-Methods/OfficeHours](#).

During lectures, seminars, and appointments, you must keep the microphone off and the video on anytime unless the instructor requires otherwise. Exceptions are granted if requested by the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) or in extraordinary circumstances.

Requirements and Assessments

Much of the course consists of understanding and writing about the assigned readings. Each lecture has reading assignments, which students should complete before class as lectures will presuppose familiarity with the texts' materials. The readings are complex and require close study. Also, lectures can introduce material not included in the readings, so attendance at every lecture is crucial if you want to do well. Check the class's schedule regularly since the readings can change a week before class. Below is the breakdown of your final grade.

- 20% *Attendance and Participation*. Students must be timely on Zoom every Monday between 10am-1pm (excused absences require doctor notes).
- 60% *Three Papers* (2000 words each). The teaching assistant will suggest modifications for resubmission if needed. Late submissions are accepted within one week but penalized. Detailed guidelines are available on *Blackboard Learn*.
- 20% *Final Exam*. Students must take a comprehensive quiz (closed notes and closed books) on the class materials at the end of the semester. The quiz will be available on *Blackboard Learn*.

Bibliography

All the required readings are available on *Blackboard Learn*. Their sources appear below.

- Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*. Dover, 1952.
- Albert Casullo, *Essays on A Priori Knowledge and Justification*. Oxford UP, 2012.
- Roderick Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*. Prentice-Hall, 1966.
- René Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*. Hackett, 1998.
- Jeremy Fantl, Jaegwon Kim, Matthew McGrath, Ernst Sosa (eds), *Epistemology* (E). Blackwell, 2008.
- Richard Feldman, *Epistemology*. Prentice-Hall, 2003.
- Alvin I. Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing." *The Journal of Philosophy* 64/12, 1967: 357-72.
- Keith Lehrer, *Knowledge*. Oxford UP, 1974.
- Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*. Cambridge UP, 1981.

Schedule

Jan 25	Lehrer, "Truth and Knowledge" (24-48)
Feb 1	Descartes, <i>Discourse on Method</i> (11, 18-21) and <i>Meditations</i> (59-63) Stroud, "The Problem of the External World" (E: 3, 7-25); "Certainty" (E: 31-4)
Feb 8	Moore, "Proof of an External World" (E: 4, 26-8) and "Four Forms of Skepticism" (E: 29-30) Klein, "How a Pyrrhonian Skeptic Might Respond to Academic Skepticism" (E: 35-50)
Feb 15	Putnam, "Brains in a Vat" (1-21) and "Two Philosophical Perspectives" (49-74)
Feb 22	Feldman, "The Traditional Analysis of Knowledge" (8-24) Lehrer, "What is Knowledge?" (1-23) and/or Chisholm, "What is Knowledge?" (90-100)
Mar 1	Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?" (E: 333-47)
Mar 8	Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" (E: 192-3) Feldman, "Modifying the Traditional Analysis of Knowledge" (25-38) Zagzebski, "The Inescapability of Gettier Problems" (E: 207-12)
Mar 22	Goldman, "A Causal Theory of Knowing" Quine, "Naturalized Epistemology" (E: 528-37) Kim, "What is Naturalized Epistemology?" (E: 538-51)
Mar 29	Ayer, "The A Priori" (71-87) Chisholm, "The A Priori" (26-38)
Apr 5	Casullo, "A Priori Knowledge" (2012: 108-52)
Apr 12	Chisholm, "Foundationalism and the Coherence Theory" (85-9) Chisholm, "The Myth of the Given" (E: 80-91) Sellars, "Does Empirical Knowledge have a Foundation?" (E: 94-8)
Apr 19	Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" (E: 124-32) Feldman, "The Infinite Regress Argument" (49-52), "Cartesian Foundationalism" (52-5), "Coherentism" (60-6), "Modest Foundationalism" (70-1) Sosa, "The Raft and the Pyramid" (E: 145-60)
Apr 26	Chisholm, "Internalism and Externalism" (75-84) BonJour, "Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge" (E: 363-76)
May 3	Feldman and Conee, "Internalism Defended" (E: 407-17)

Writing Support

The UH Writing Center works with undergraduates enrolled in any course who want help with their writing. Whether you need support with any part of your paper or check your final draft, the UH Writing Center can complement the class assistance with additional aid. To learn more about one-on-one consultations or to book an appointment, visit the [Writing-Center-Webpage](#). Here is the link for CLASS's students: [UH-Writing-Center](#).

University Policies

Students must comply with the university policies pertaining to ethics and academic honesty. See the following links and read the documents thoroughly: [Student-Conduct-Policy](#) and [Academic-Honesty](#). For counseling and psychological services, visit [CAPS](#). Request for special accommodations is available here: [Adjustments/Auxiliary-Aids](#). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the University of Houston has issued extraordinary policies listed at the end of the syllabus.