



# Knowledge, Reason & Belief

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## *Syllabus*

## Overview

Think of all the different beliefs you hold about various matters. How many of these, if any, constitute genuine knowledge rather than mere opinion? What does this distinction amount to and why is it important? To what extent do the standards for what counts as knowledge depend on context? Can you know something without knowing that you know it? What makes a belief justified or reasonable? Is it ever reasonable to hold a belief if you have no evidence to support it? Is it ever reasonable to believe something that couldn't possibly be true? These are some of the central questions in epistemology—the philosophical study of the nature, extent, and value, of knowledge and justified belief. In this course we will explore these and related questions using both historical and contemporary sources. Epistemological questions crop up absolutely everywhere—in science, the humanities, politics, religion, and everyday life—and this course will give you the tools to tackle such questions wherever you find them.

The required weekly reading will consist in one or two accessible articles or book chapters. A large proportion of this material will be drawn from the following introductory textbook, abbreviated 'WTK' in the remainder of this document:

- Pritchard, D. 2014: *What Is This Thing Called Knowledge?* (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition). NY: Routledge.

In addition, it is *highly recommended* that you attempt to engage with some additional material, after working your way through the relevant set reading. For your convenience, most of the relevant readings will be provided in a pdf-format course reader. The remainder is available freely online, following the links provided.

## Schedule & Weekly Reading

### 1. Course introduction

Required:

- Pritchard, D. *WTK*, 'How to use this book', Ch. 1 & Ch. 5.

Recommended:

- Ryle, G. 2009: *The Concept of Mind*, 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. London: Routledge. Originally published in 1946 by Hutchinson. Ch. 2 'Knowing how and knowing that'. (Available in course reader)
- Stanley, J. & T. Williamson 2001: Knowing how. *The Journal of Philosophy* 98(8), pp. 411–444. Section I. (Available in course reader)

### 2. The nature of knowledge: The Gettier Problem

Required:

- Pritchard, D. *WTK*, Ch. 3.

Recommended:

- Feldman, R. 2003: *Epistemology*. Pearson. Ch 3. (Available in course reader)

- Gettier, E. L. 1963: Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?. *Analysis* 23(6), pp. 121-3. (Available in course reader)
- Hetherington, S. 2005: Gettier Problems. In F. Fieser & B. Dowden (eds.), *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Sections 1–7, 9 & 10. (Available [here](#))

### 3. The nature of knowledge: More on the Gettier Problem

Required:

- Pritchard, D. *WTK*, Ch. 6.

Recommended:

- Feldman, R. 2003: *Epistemology*. Pearson. Ch 5. (Available in course reader)
- Williamson, T. 2011: Knowledge first epistemology. In S. Bernecker & D. Pritchard (eds) *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*. London: Routledge, pp. 208-218. (Available in course reader)
- Zagzebski, L. 1994: The inescapability of Gettier problems. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 44(174), pp. 65–73. (Available in course reader)

### 4. The value of knowledge

Required:

- Pritchard, D. *WTK*, Ch. 2.

Recommended:

- Olsson, E.J. 2011: The Value of Knowledge. *Philosophy Compass* 6(12): 874–883. (Available in course reader)
- Pritchard, D. and Turri, J. 2014: The Value of Knowledge. In Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2014 Edition)*. Sections 1–4 & 8–9. (Available [here](#))

### 5. Rational belief and practical interests

Required:

- Pritchard, D. *WTK*, Ch. 5.

Recommended:

- Chignell, A. 2016. The Ethics of Belief. In Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2016 Edition)*. (Available [here](#))
- Pojman, L. & M. Rea 2008. *The Philosophy of Religion: an anthology (5<sup>th</sup> Edition)*. Thomson Wadsworth. Section VIIa ‘The Pragmatic Justification of Religious Belief’ (incl. selections from Pascal, Clifford and James), pp. 362–379. (Available in course reader)
- Marusic, B. 2011. The Ethics of Belief. *Philosophy Compass* 6(1):, p. 33–43.

### 6. Wrapping up weeks 1–5: class discussion

No reading.

### 7. The limits of knowledge: Agrippa’s Trilemma

Required:

- Pritchard, D. *WTK*, Ch. 4.

Recommended:

- Klein, P.D. 2008: Contemporary Responses to Agrippa's Trilemma. In J. Greco (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Skepticism*. New York: Oxford, pp. 484-503. (Available in course reader)
- Lemos, N. 2008: *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Ch. 3 'Foundationalism' & 4 'The Coherence Theory of Justification'. (Available in course reader)

### **8. The limits of knowledge: the argument from ignorance and invariantism**

Required:

- Pritchard, D. *WTK*, Ch. 13, except final section titled 'Contextualism'.

Recommended:

- Dretske, F. & J. Hawthorne 2013: Is Knowledge Closed under Known Entailment? In M. Steup, J. Turri and E. Sosa (eds) *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology, 2nd Edition*. Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 27-59. (Available in course reader)
- Sosa, E. 1999: How to Defeat Opposition to Moore. *Philosophical Perspectives* 13, pp. 141-53. (Available in course reader)

### **9. The limits of knowledge: the argument from ignorance and contextualism**

Required:

- Pritchard, D. *WTK*, Ch. 13, final section titled 'Contextualism'.

Recommended:

- Cohen, S. & E. Conee 2013: Is Knowledge Contextual? In M. Steup, J. Turri and E. Sosa (eds) *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology, 2nd Edition*. Wiley-Blackwell, pp. 60-83. (Available in course reader)
- DeRose, K. 1995: Solving the Skeptical Problem. *The Philosophical Review* 104(1), pp. 1-52. (Available in course reader)
- Rysiew, P. 2016: Epistemic Contextualism. In Edward N. Zalta (ed.) *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2016 Edition)*. Sections 1-4. (Available [here](#))

### **10. The limits of knowledge: the argument from genealogy**

Required:

- Griffiths, P. & J. Wilkins 2013: Evolutionary debunking arguments in three domains: fact, value, and religion. In J. Maclaurin & G. Dawes (eds.) *A New Science of Religion*. NY: Routledge, pp. 133-146. (Available in course reader)

Recommended:

- Pigden, C. 2013: Subversive explanations. In J. Maclaurin & G. Dawes (eds.) *A New Science of Religion*. NY: Routledge, pp. 147-161. (Available in course reader)
- Plantinga, A. 2002: Introduction. In J. Beilby (ed.) *Naturalism Defeated? Essays on Plantinga's Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, pp. 1-12. (Available in course reader)

- Sober, E. 1994: Prospects for an Evolutionary Ethics. In E. Sober *From a Biological Point of View*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 93-113. (Available in course reader)

### **11. How to think about knowledge: From the armchair to the lab**

Required:

- Beebe, J. 2012: Experimental Epistemology. In A. Cullison (ed.), *Companion to Epistemology*, Continuum, pp. 248–69. Sections I and IV. (Available in course reader)

Recommended:

- Weinberg, J.M., S. Nichols & S. Stich. 2001: Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions. *Philosophical Topics* 29, pp. 429–460. (Available in course reader)
- Weinberg, J.M., Gonnerman, C., Buckner, C., & Alexander, J. 2010: Are philosophers expert intuiters? *Philosophical Psychology*, 23(3), pp. 331–355. (Available in course reader)
- Weinberg, J.M. 2010: Experimental Epistemology. In S. Bernecker & D. Pritchard (eds.), *Routledge Companion to Epistemology*. New York: Routledge, pp. 823–835. Sections I and III. (Available in course reader)

### **12. Wrapping up weeks 7–11: class discussion**

No reading.