

## Phil. 5340: Epistemology

Fall, 2003

Class time: MW, 1:30-2:45, Hlms 177  
Professor: Michael Huemer  
Web page: [home.sprynet.com/~owl1](http://home.sprynet.com/~owl1)

Office: 266 Hellems  
Office Hours: MW, 12:00-1:20, Prufrock's  
W, 3:00

### General Description:

The course will examine some classic and contemporary problems of epistemology. There will be 5 units, on the following topics:

*First unit:* Perceptual knowledge, external-world skepticism.

*Second unit:* A priori knowledge.

*Third unit:* Induction.

*Fourth unit:* Irrationality, and applied epistemology.

*Fifth unit:* Recent epistemology: the analysis of “knowledge”, justificatory structures.

The plan will be to have some amount of lecture at the beginning of each class, followed by or interspersed with discussion by *you*. We will try to go fairly quickly and have a good amount of reading.

### Readings:

The readings are my *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings* and *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*, and some articles that will be left to photocopy in the office.

### Course Requirements:

You will write a term paper for the class. It should be at least 15 pages, at most 30. Halfway through the semester (see schedule below), you will give me a draft of (at least some of) your paper, which you will subsequently revise for the final paper.

### General Guidelines:

1. To contact me: send email to the address listed above, and I will probably respond the same day. Or call between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. Leave a message, since I screen my calls.
2. Please feel free come to my office hours to talk about philosophy, or play chess. Prufrock's coffee shop is at 1322 College Ave. (on the hill). Also, I will usually be at my office (266 Hellems) at 3:00 on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday (except when colloquia and department meetings conflict).
3. During class, please do not hesitate to comment on or ask questions about anything we discuss. Class participation is important.
4. Lastly, do not whine about the professor assigning his own work, “teaching his own views,” or calling philosophical positions “true” and “false.” If you don't want to hear a professor's views, you shouldn't be in his class (and probably shouldn't be in graduate school at all). And if you don't believe in philosophical truth, then you're in the wrong line of business.

## Paper Guidelines:

- Recommended length: between 15 and 30 pp., double-spaced, with 10-12 point font and 1 or 1¼" margins. Please do not mess with the spacing, font, etc. to try to make it look longer or shorter.
- Write *clearly* and *directly*. Don't repeat yourself. Don't waste your and my time with unnecessary verbiage--every sentence should be contributing to making your overall point. Your overall point should be explicitly stated.
- Have something interesting to say. Do not merely retell me what you and I already read in the readings. Advance the discussion to the next stage.
- When you turn in your final paper, pretend that you are sending it to a journal. Among other things, that means the final version should look polished. There shouldn't be any missing references/footnotes, and certainly not any grammar, spelling, or punctuation errors. All the references should be in a standard format. And there should be some references.
- What are you going to write about? Any topic in epistemology. You may want to criticize a position/argument taken in one of the readings. Or you may want to write about something not covered in the readings. Remember, you're learning to write like a professional philosopher, and professional philosophers (a) don't have anyone writing up questions for them to answer, and (b) attempt to *advance* the academic discussion beyond what has hitherto been said.

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## Schedule

This shows what we're probably going to talk about and what you should read for each day. Notation: "*Skepticism*" refers to the book, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception*. Articles from *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings* are referred to by author's last name and starting page number. Thus, "Hume (46)" refers to the Hume selection starting on page 46 in that book. Note that there might be more than one Hume selection in the book. Finally, the following articles are not in the book, and are instead in a file folder in the Philosophy Department office. You need to photocopy them (please do not take them home, spill coffee on them, write on them, etc.):

Mike Huemer, "Introduction to Bayesian Confirmation Theory."

Mike Huemer, "Is Critical Thinking Epistemically Responsible?"

Richard Feynman, "Cargo Cult Science."

Michael Shermer, "Smart People Believe Weird Things."

Robin Hanson and Tyler Cowen, "Are Disagreements Honest?"

Hilary Kornblith, "Distrusting Reason."

Bryan Caplan, "Rational Ignorance and Rational Irrationality."

Mike Huemer, "Why People Are Irrational about Politics."

Perception, Skepticism	M, Aug 25	History of skepticism/philosophy of perception. Hume (46); Descartes (513); Locke (32); Berkeley (37).
	W, Aug 27	Arguments for skepticism. <i>Skepticism</i> , ch. 1-2.
	M, Sept 1	<i>No class — Labor Day</i>
	W, Sept 3	Easy answers to skepticism. Moore (602); Moore (606); <i>Skepticism</i> , ch. 3.
	M, Sept 8	Direct realism. <i>Skepticism</i> , ch. 4.
	W, Sept 10	Foundationalist direct realism. <i>Skepticism</i> , ch. 5.
	M, Sept 15	Objections. <i>Skepticism</i> , ch. 6-7.
	W, Sept 17	Answers to skepticism. <i>Skepticism</i> , ch. 8.
A priori knowledge	M, Sept 22	A priori knowledge. Analytic vs. synthetic. Plato (131), Kant (pp. 142-7).
	W, Sept 24	Positivism, radical empiricism. Ayer (166), Quine (176).
	M, Sept 29	Kant. Kant (pp. 147-51).
	W, Oct 1	Rationalism. Russell (152).
	M, Oct 6	Non-Euclidean geometry. Carnap (194). <b>Think about:</b> have an idea what your paper for the class will be.
Induction	W, Oct 8	Non-Euclidean geometry & rationalism. BonJour (208).
	M, Oct 13	The problem of induction. Hume (298), Edwards (311).
	W, Oct 15	Grue. Goodman (320).

Irrationality & Applied epistemology	M, Oct 20	Inference to the best explanation. Foster (333). <b>Due:</b> Give me a (partial) paper draft.
	W, Oct 22	Bayesianism. “Introduction to Bayesian Confirmation Theory”; Howson & Urbach (344).
	M, Oct 27	More on probability & induction. Stove (352).
	W, Oct 29	More Stove.
	M, Nov 3	Critical Thinking. Huemer, “Is Critical Thinking Epistemically Responsible?”
	W, Nov 5	Cognitive illusions, unscientific thinking, biases. Feynman, “Cargo Cult Science” Shermer, “Smart People Believe Weird Things”
	M, Nov 10	Hanson & Cowen, “Are Disagreements Honest?”
	W, Nov 12	Kornblith, “Distrusting Reason”
	M, Nov 17	Caplan, “Rational Ignorance and Rational Irrationality” <b>Due:</b> If you didn’t give me a complete paper draft, give me one now. If you did, you may give me a second draft now.
	W, Nov 19	Huemer, “Why People Are Irrational about Politics”
Analysis of “knowledge,” structure of justification	M, Nov 24	Gettier problem. Ayer (440); Gettier (444); Clark (447).
	W, Nov 26	Causal theory of knowledge, defeasibility theory. Goldman (450); Lehrer & Paxson (464).
	M, Dec 1	Counterfactual analysis. Nozick (475).
	W, Dec 3	Relevant alternatives & contextualism. Dretske (539); DeRose (491).
	M, Dec 8	Regress problem, Coherentism. Sextus (372); BonJour (387).
	W, Dec 10	Foundherentism. Haack (417). <b>Due:</b> Final paper.

