

**PHL 441 Epistemology**  
**Fall 2014**  
**T,Th 12:30 - 1:45 in Humanities 136**

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**Professor:** Dr. Poston, Humanities 124, [mylastname]@southalabama.edu, 460-6248

**Office Hours:** Tuesday & Thursday, Times: TBA

**Textbooks:** (1) *Epistemology: An Anthology*, 2nd edition, Blackwell: 2008. (2) John Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries* Oxford University Press. (3) David Christensen, *Putting logic in its place* Oxford University Press.

**Course Description:** Epistemology is a central area of philosophical inquiry. We shall begin by focusing on the question of skepticism. Skeptics argue that we lack knowledge because knowledge is inconsistent with some actuality; our evidence is underdetermined, our evidence doesn't logically imply the truth of our belief, we can't distinguish possibilities consistent with our knowledge and those inconsistent with our knowledge. Responses to skepticism raise interesting and difficult questions about successful human cognition. We shall carefully evaluate these responses. After examining the responses to skepticism, we will turn our attention to a survey of contemporary epistemology. We will read selections from John Hawthorne's book *Knowledge and Lotteries*. The lottery paradox is a relatively new problem centering on our willingness to claim that we know that we won't have enough money to go on Safari when we aren't willing to claim that we know that we won't win the lottery. This is a puzzle for epistemologists between the first fact implies that second and yet we think we know the first without knowing the second. Finally, we will devote our attention to David Christensen's book *Putting logic in its place*. This book examines the role that logic ought to play in characterizing rational belief.

**In General:** The instructor reserves the right to modify the contents of this syllabus at any time. Most importantly, students are responsible for being aware of the requirements and expectations noted in this syllabus, and for any changes to this syllabus that might arise.

**Disabilities:** Please notify me should you need any academic accommodation. You also need to provide certification from Disability Services (Office of Special Students Services, located in Room 270 of the Student Center, 251-460-7212).

**Academic dishonesty:** Academic dishonesty on your part will suffice for failure of this course. For details on what is expected (and not expected) of you in terms of academic conduct, please see the Student Academic Conduct Policy authorized by the University of South Alabama at the following website: [www.usouthal.edu/academicaffairs/studentacadconduct.pdf](http://www.usouthal.edu/academicaffairs/studentacadconduct.pdf)

**Electronic devices:** Recent scientific studies indicate that laptops and cell phones negatively affect both the users themselves and also the students around them in the classroom. From experience, they disrupt the classroom atmosphere and my teaching. Hence, no laptops are allowed. No phones (and related devices) should be used; don't even have them out. Having them out is grounds for

my asking you to leave from class or assigning a 5 or 0 for attendance grade. Moreover, individuals who by their actions disrupt the class will be asked to leave.

**Grade Policy:** Your final grade will be calculated as follows: 20% participation, 50% short responses, and 30% critical essays. The grade scale is as follows:  $100 \geq A \geq 93 > A- \geq 88 > B+ \geq 84 > B \geq 80 > B- \geq 76 > C+ \geq 72 > C \geq 68 > C- \geq 64 > D \geq 60 > F \geq 0$ .

Letter grades given on papers will correspond to the letter's maximum numerical value. For example, a grade of 'B-' will correspond to an 80 for the purposes of calculating your course average. The University of South Alabama does not do plus / minus grading. I use that only for final papers.

**Attendance:** Attendance is required. Each day you will receive an attendance score recorded on the online gradebook. 10 for full participation, 5 for being late, and 0 otherwise. I will drop the lowest attendance score.

**Participation:** This course is based on discussion rather than lecture. I am interested in what you think and so are your fellow students. This is the kind of class in which you learn just as much from discussion as you do from reading. It is therefore necessary that you do the assigned readings before class and get involved in classroom discussions. You are not expected to talk if you are uncomfortable or shy or have nothing to say. But in most cases you should be prepared to do your best to engage critically with the readings, your fellow students, and the instructor.

**Summaries:** A reading summary consists of (i) a statement of the author's thesis, that is, what he is arguing for or against. Occasionally this may include more than one statement. Also, sometimes you will have to paraphrase the author's thesis. Reading summaries also include (ii) a sketch of the author's main argument for his thesis. In the remainder of the summary explain the rationale of the major premises and any problems you see with the author's argument. Reading summaries *must* be between 400 - 500 words, more and less will be penalized by a lower grade. Every summary should have a word count at the top of the page.

Some of our readings will be difficult. However, it should be fairly easy to get the main gist of the article. For instance, if an article is on Bayesianism you should be able to determine whether the author is in favor of Bayesianism or against it. In cases where you don't know what the article is getting at, just say that and try to explain some of the sources of your bafflement.

These summaries are intended to encourage you to wrestle with these readings. Each essay is central to the development of epistemology and deserves careful scrutiny. Writing on an article forces you to be clear about your reaction to the article and your sense of what the author has accomplished. These summaries are also intended to improve your ability to write on and explain complicated issues.

Grading for a summary will be: A (10), B (9), C (8), D (7), or F(6-0, depending on my judgment).

**Critical Essays:** Critical essays are no less than 1500 words long and no more than 2000 words. They consist in a sustained argument for an explicitly stated thesis. Two critical essays will be assigned. My expectations for the quality of your writing and reasoning will increase slightly as the course progresses. I recommend that you discuss your ideas for critical essays in class before you begin writing and that you begin writing your essay two weeks before the date it is due.

**Extra Help:** Do not hesitate to come to my office or email me to discuss any aspect of the course.

**Important Dates:**

Add & Deadline .....	August 20
Labor day .....	September 1
Fall Break .....	October 6 & 7
First paper due .....	October 21
Last day to drop .....	October 24
Thanksgiving holidays .....	November 26-30
Last Day of Class .....	December 4
Final Paper Due .....	December 4

**Course Schedule:**

1. Skepticism

(a) Understanding skepticism

- i. Barry Stroud 'The Problem of the External World' (Thursday, August 21)
- ii. G. E. Moore 'Proof of an External World,' 'Four Forms of Scepticism' & 'Certainty' (Tuesday, August 26 & Thursday, August 28)
- iii. Peter Klein, 'How a Pyrrhonian Skeptic Might Respond to Academic Skepticism' (Tuesday, September 2)
- iv. Michael Williams, 'Epistemological Realism' (Thursday, September 4 (**summary due**))
- v. Barry Stroud, 'Classy Pyrrhonism' (Tuesday, September 9)
- vi. John Turri, 'Pyrrhonian skepticism meets speech-act theory' (Thursday, September 11 (**summary due**))

(b) Closure Based Responses to Skepticism (Epistemic Relevance)

- i. Dretske, 'Epistemic Operators' (Tuesday, September 16 (**summary due**))
- ii. Stine, 'Skepticism, Relevant Alternatives, and Deductive Closure' (Tuesday, September 23)
- iii. Nozick, 'Knowledge and Skepticism' (Thursday, September 25 (**summary due**))
- iv. Sosa, 'How to Defeat Opposition to Moore' (Tuesday, September 30)
- v. Vogel, 'Are There Counterexamples to the Closure Principle?' (Thursday, October 2)
- vi. Luzzi, 'Counter-Closure' (Thursday, October 9 (**summary due**))
- vii. Ball & Blome-Tillmann, 'Counter-Closure and Knowledge from falsehood' (Tuesday, October 14)

2. Survey of Contemporary Epistemology

(a) John Hawthorne 'Knowledge & Lotteries' Chapter 1 ((Thursday, October 16) (**summary due**))

(b) First paper due (Tuesday, October 21)

- (c) John Hawthorne 'Knowledge & Lotteries' Chapter 1 (Thursday, October 23)
- (d) John Hawthorne 'Knowledge & Lotteries' Chapter 2 (Tuesday, October 28 (**summary due**))
- (e) John Hawthorne 'Knowledge & Lotteries' Chapter 2 (Thursday, October 30)
- (f) David Christensen, 'Putting Logic in its Place' Chapter 1 (Tuesday, November 4 (**summary due**))
- (g) David Christensen, 'Putting Logic in its Place' Chapter 2 (Tuesday, November 11 (**summary due**))
- (h) David Christensen, 'Putting Logic in its Place' Chapter 3 (Thursday, November 13)
- (i) David Christensen, 'Putting Logic in its Place' Chapter 4 (Tuesday, November 18 (**summary due**))
- (j) David Christensen, 'Putting Logic in its Place' Chapter 5 (Thursday, November 20)
- (k) TBA (Tuesday, November 25)
- (l) TBA (Tuesday, December 2 (**summary due**))