

**Philosophy 310, Seminar in Analytic Philosophy:
Skepticism about the External World
Monday 7pm-10pm
Rockefeller Hall 304
Spring 2007 Syllabus and Reading Schedule**

Barry Lam
balam@vassar.edu
Office: Rockefeller Hall 401A
OH: Tues. Thurs. 1:30pm-3:00pm
and by appointment
Office Phone: 437-5528

This course will focus on the two central question of epistemology by surveying recent philosophical research at the intersection of epistemology and the philosophy of language. What is knowledge? Do we have any knowledge of the external world? Many very convincing arguments seem to conclude that we do not. Even worse, these arguments appeal to claims about the nature of knowledge that we ourselves accept. What is the right response to such skeptical arguments? In this course, we will engage in an extremely careful and in-depth analysis of skeptical arguments and the manners in which contemporary philosophers have responded to them. Standard responses have sought to identify and reject the skeptical principles implicit in our thinking about the nature of knowledge. More recently, philosophical reflections on “knowledge”-talk and language use in general have led to sophisticated linguistic solutions to the problem of skepticism. We will survey such recent research on the problem of skepticism with the aim of adopting our own view of the nature of knowledge and the viability of philosophical skepticism.

Texts: *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. DeRose, K. and Warfield, T., Oxford University Press (1999)

Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism, by Peter Unger, Oxford University Press (1975)

The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism, Barry Stroud, Oxford University Press (1984)

Knowledge and Lotteries, by John Hawthorne, Oxford University Press (2003)

A series of articles on Blackboard

Requirements: Class participation and short writing-assignments will make up 15% of the final grade. Students will be required to give an oral presentation which will be graded and worth 25% of the final grade. Guidelines for the presentation will be distributed. Students will also write two 10-page papers, worth 30% each, one due before Week 8 (flexible depending on the date of your oral presentation), the second due at the end of the semester.

Reading Schedule

(This reading schedule is tentative and subject to change and suggestions.)

Week 1: January 29th To Know and to Speak

Overview of contemporary epistemology, some skeptical arguments and responses. Overview of contemporary philosophy of language.

Week 2: February 5th That Skeptical 70s Show

Stroud, Chapters 1 and 2.

Unger, Chapter 1.

Week 3: February 12th Denying Closure and Tracking Truth

Dretske's "Epistemic Operators", in DeRose and Warfield. Presented by Ben Lennertz

Stine's "Skepticism, Relevant Alternatives, and Deductive Closure", in DeRose and Warfield.

Nozick's "Philosophical Explanations", in DeRose and Warfield.

Week 4: February 19th Semantic Responses Part I: Externalism

Putnam's "Brains in a Vat", in DeRose and Warfield.

Brueckner's "Semantic Answers to Skepticism", in DeRose and Warfield.

Forbes' "Realism and Skepticism: Brains in a Vat revisited", in DeRose and Warfield.

Presented by Max Brooks, with response by Jason Miller.

Week 5: February 26th From Semantics to Skepticism and Back Again

Unger, Chapters 2 and 3. Presented by Roxy Krawczyk

Lewis' "Score-Keeping in a Language Game", on Blackboard E-Reserves. Presented by Kate Tracy.

Lewis' "Elusive Knowledge" in DeRose and Warfield.

Week 6: March 5th Semantic Responses Part II: Contextualism

DeRose's "Solving the Skeptical Problem" in DeRose and Warfield.

Cohen's, "Contextualism, Skepticism, and the Structure of Reasons," on Blackboard.
Stanley's "On the Linguistic Basis for Contextualism" on Blackboard.

Presented by Liz Gadowski, with response by Lauren Fiedler.

Spring Break

Week 7: March 26th Hawthorne on Lotteries and Closure
Hawthorne, Chapters 1, 2, 3. Presentation by Matt Wise.

Week 8: April 2nd Subject-Sensitive Invariantism
Hawthorne Chapter 4.
Stanley, Chapters 5, 6 from *Knowledge and Practical Interests*, on Blackboard.

Week 9: April 9th The Road to Relativism
DeRose's "The Ordinary Language Basis for Contextualism and the New Invariantism" on Blackboard. Presented by Emily Thielmann.
MacFarlane's "The Assessment-Sensitivity of Knowledge Ascriptions", "Making Sense of Relative Truth", and "Relativism and Disagreement" on Blackboard.

Presented by Tracy Rosenthal and Eva Grenier.

Week 10: April 16th Epistemic Externalism and KK
Alston's "Level Confusions in Epistemology" on Blackboard E-Reserves.
Sosa's "Philosophical Scepticism and Epistemic Circularity" in DeRose and Warfield.
Hill's "Process Reliabilism and Cartesian Scepticism" in DeRose and Warfield.
Stroud's, "Scepticism, 'Externalism', and the Goal of Epistemology" in DeRose and Warfield.

Presented by Ben Gould and Zach Proulx.

Week 11: April 23rd A Defense of Mooreanism
Chisholm's "The Problem of the Criterion", on Blackboard E-Reserves.
Lycan's "Moore Against the New Sceptics" on Blackboard E-Reserves. Presented by Allon Dubler.
Kelly's "Moorean Facts and Belief Revision", on Blackboard.

Week 12: April 30th Dogmatism and its Critics
Pryor's "The Sceptic and the Dogmatist", on Blackboard.

Cohen's "Basic Knowledge and the Problem of Easy Knowledge" on Blackboard E-Reserves.
White's "Problems with Dogmatism" on Blackboard.

Week 13: May 7th Wright (and maybe Lam?)

Wright's "Scepticism and Dreaming: Imploding the Demon" on Blackboard.

Lam's "Defeating Skepticism without Denying It."

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities who are registered with the Office of Disability and Support Services. Students in need of disability accommodations should schedule an appointment with me early in the semester to discuss any accommodations for this course which have been approved by the Office of Disability and Support Services, as indicated in your DSS accommodation letter.