**Social Epistemology and Post-truth**

Prof. Bennett Holman

Description: This course addresses philosophical perspectives on knowledge. It

briefly considers two extremes of knowledge: The isolated asocial knower and the

social construction of knowledge. The course then traces out what an

epistemology must look like if it acknowledges knowledge is social, while denying

that it is merely social. Within this framework, new questions come to the fore:

How should the testimony of others be treated? What is the epistemological

implication of disagreement? How should testimony be handled when it comes

from an expert? After a first brush with these questions in abstract, the class looks

at several different specific epistemic contexts (Science, Medicine, Law) as test

cases for philosophic accounts. In conclusion, students are asked to consider

whether, given the diversity of epistemic contexts, any general answer can be

given to the basic questions of social epistemology, or if such questions must be

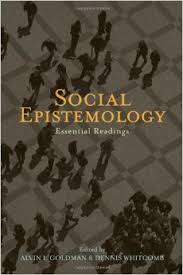
contextualized to be answered meaningfully.

**Materials:**

All the readings will be available in a course reader.

often come from :

1. *Social Epistemology: Critical Readings* (Ed. A. Goldman; D. Whitcomb, 2011)



Students should also refer to the University General Catalog about standard policies and procedures.

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| Week | Topic | Readings |
| 1  March 4th | Intro to the course/  Justified True Belief/  Symmetry principle | ❖ Goldman: “A Guide to Social Epistemology” (S.E. Ch 1)  ❖ Barnes, Barry and Bloor, David (1982), "Relativism, Rationalism, and the Sociology of Knowledge," |
| 2  March 11th | Testimony | ❖ Lackey: “Testimony: Acquiring Knowledge from Others” (S.E. Ch. 4)  ❖ Shapin (1995): “A Social History of Truth Telling: Knowledge, Social Practice and the Credibility of Gentlemen.” |
| 3  March 18th | Peer disagreement | ❖ Feldman: “Reasonable Religious Disagreements”  (S.E. Ch. 7)  ❖ Thune, M. (2010). Religious belief and the epistemology of disagreement. *Philosophy Compass*, 5(8), 712-724. |
| 4  March 25th | Epistemic Injustice | ❖ Fricker: “Rational Authority and Social Power: Towards a Truly Social Epistemology” (S.E. Ch. 3)  ❖ McKinnon, R. (2016). Epistemic Injustice, *Philosophy Compass,* 11, 437-446. |
| 5  April 1st | **Paper 1 due**  **Monday** | ❖ **No Reading this week** |
| 6  April 8th | Inference from Ignorance: | ❖ Goldberg “If that were true I would have heard about it by now.” (S.E. Ch. 5)  ❖ Gelfert, A. (2013). Coverage-reliability, epistemic dependence, and the problem of rumor-based belief.  *Philosophia*, 41(3), 763-786. |
| 7  April 15th | Agnotology | ❖ Fernández Pinto, M. (2015). Tensions in agnotology: Normativity in the studies of commercially‐driven ignorance. *Social Studies of Science*, 45, 294–315.  ❖ Biddle, J., & Leuschner, A. (2015). Climate skepticism and the manufacture of doubt: Can dissent in science be epistemically detrimental? *European Journal of Philosophy*, 5, 261–278. |
| 8  April 22nd | No Midterm, no class |  |
| 9  April 29th | Industry-funding and the production of scientific knowledge | ❖Sismondo, S. (2009). Ghosts in the machine: Publication planning in the medical sciences. *Social Studies of Science*, 39, 171–198.  ❖ Holman and Elliott (2018): The promise and perils of industry-funded science *Philosophy Compass* |
| 10  May 6th | **Paper 2 due Wednesday** | ❖ **No class May 6th**  ❖ **No Reading this week** |
| 11  May 13th | Trust in Experts | ❖ Goldman: “Experts: Which Ones Should You Trust” (S.E. Ch. 6)  ❖ John: Expert testimony and epistemological free-riding: a case-study of the controversy over the MMR vaccine  ❖ Sismondo, S. (2013). Key opinion leaders and the corruption of medical knowledge: What the Sunshine Act will and won't cast light on. The Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics, 14, 635–643. |
| 12  May 20th | Post-truth | ❖ Fuller, S. 2016a. “Science Has Always Been a Bit ‘Post-truth.”  ❖Fuller (2016b) Embrace the Inner Fox: Post-truth as the STS symmetry Principle Universalized.  ❖ Lynch (2018) STS, Symmetry, and post-truth  ❖ Sismondo, S. (2017). ‘Post-Truth?’ Social Studies of Science 47(1): 3-6.  ❖ Marres (2018) Why we can’t have our facts back |
| 13  May 27th | Fake News | ❖ Gelfert, A. (forthcoming) Fake News: A definition  ❖Mihailidis, P., & Viotty, S. (2017). Spreadable spectacle in digital culture: Civic expression, fake news, and the role of media literacies in “post-fact” society. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *61*(4), 441-454. |
| 14  June 3rd | Post-truth II | ❖ Jansanoff & Simmett (2017) No Funeral bells: Public Reason in a “post-truth” age  ❖ Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K., & Cook, J. (2017). Beyond misinformation: Understanding and coping with the “post-truth” era. |
| Final | **Paper 3 due Saturday, June 15th** |  |
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Requirements:

**Attendance & Grading:** Attendance will be taken in accordance with Yonsei Policy: missing 1/3 of all classes, regardless of having legitimate, official excuses, is to result in an F grade. Being more than twenty minutes late will be counted as an absence. You will be allowed six absences (excused/unexcused). Long days count as two classes. (Hence, you`re allowed two weeks of absences).

There are 100 available points.

**1.** **Active and informed participation (25%)**: Students are expected to come to class prepared and ready to engage in an informed discussion of the material. Students are expected to actively participate in classroom discussions. Participation includes asking questions, raising objections, offering defenses, commenting on the significance of a point, clarifying an argument or a claim, and drawing out the connections between an issue from our current discussion and issues raised in our other readings.

**2. Topic papers (75%):** Over the course of the class students will write 3 papers (950-1450 words—roughly 3-4 pages), papers will lose 5 points for every 100 words (or any portion thereof) over the limit. If you are under the limit, please take this as sign you have not given due consideration to the course material. The papers will be spread out over the class. The prompts are focused on clarifying the topic and understanding the arguments covered in the reading. Students should make reference to (**and cite!**) the material, but should express the ideas in their own words (i.e. no long block quotes). Citations should be MLA style. The purpose of these papers is to learn to digest and understand philosophic arguments (i.e. these are not research papers). Accordingly, students **should not** use outside resources to answer questions. Evidence of outside research will be considered cause to reduce a grade, or in extreme cases lose all credit. Students may confer with each other, but all writing should be done independently. Significant overlap in student papers is academic dishonesty (see below).

**4.** **Extensions:** The due dates for each assignment are posted on the syllabus above. Students will have a ten minute grace period after which point the assignment will be considered late. Generally, no changes will be made to the dates listed. Exceptions will be handled on a case by case basis and will not, in any circumstances, be altered without supporting documentation. The penalty for turning in an assignment late will be 1/3 grade deduction per day (or any portion thereof). It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that the paper they submit is the correct paper. If the wrong paper is uploaded to the drop box it will be treated as if no paper had been turned in and late penalties will accrue accordingly.

**5. Academic Integrity:** Plagiarism, cheating, etc. will not be tolerated and the University policy on Academic Honesty will be followed strictly. Students who have any questions or uncertainty whatsoever about this policy are responsible for meeting individually with the instructor to discuss the policy. Anyone found violating this policy will receive an D for the course and will be reported to the appropriate University officials. I am extremely firm on this matter.

**6. Disabilities**: It is the student's responsibility to notify the instructor in advance of the need for accommodation of a University verified disability. I will gladly provide the required accommodations.

**7. Preferred names and gender pronouns:** I would like to make every effort to create a safe space. If you have a preferred name or gender pronoun that is not reflected in the roster, please let me know.