Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge  
Fall 2013  
Peter Klein

The Goals of the Course: The goals of the course are 1) to explore two of the most basic questions in epistemology (the theory of knowledge) and 2) to understand the complexities involved in the questions and 3) to develop some answers to the questions. The questions are: i) What differentiates knowledge from mere true belief? ii) What is the extent of our knowledge?

1) Re the first question: That knowledge is not just mere true belief should be obvious from the following example: Assume that the magic eight ball is not a reliable source for predicting the future but that Jones is a fervent believer in its power. He “asks” the ball whether it will snow today, shakes the cylinder, and turns it over. The little triangle reads “Yes.” On the basis of that, Jones comes to believe that it will snow today and, as luck would have it, it does snow today. So, Jones has a true belief but it is clearly not knowledge; it is no better than a lucky guess. THE question, then, is this: What has to be added to true belief in order to convert it to knowledge? It’s not as easy to answer that question as you might think. Our task – yours and mine – is to come up with the best answer that we can.

2) Re the second question: We will begin and end the course by examining some answers to the second question. Skeptics hold that if we have any knowledge at all, it is much more limited than we ordinarily think it to be. For example, could it be, for all we know, that the world was created just minutes ago but it appears just as though it had been here for billions of years? (Just for the fun of it ask yourself whether the trees in the so-called Garden of Eden would have had growth rings and whether the rivers in the Garden would look like they had cut deep channels through the various layers of rock for millions and millions of years. Would Adam and Eve know how to speak a language? And would they have been created with “memories” of past events – just like the tree rings are seeming traces of past events? Would they have belly buttons?) Our task is to determine (to the extent possible!) whether skepticism is the proper attitude to have towards the nature and limits of our knowledge.

Course Requirements: In accordance with the University policy which states that students are expected to attend all classes, class attendance is required. If you expect to miss any classes for any reason whatsoever, please use the University absence reporting website: https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/ An email is automatically sent to me, so you needn’t inform me directly of your expectation that you will miss a class. Nevertheless, if you miss a class (or classes), you should discuss the absence with me immediately after the first class meeting that you return. If you don’t, the absence will not be excused.
All papers, exams, and class assignments must be handed in on time. Neither “the printer didn’t work” nor “my hard drive crashed” provides a legitimate reason for papers being late because those things happen often enough to require some backup plan. There will be two short papers, each with a maximum of five (5) pages, an in-class midterm, and a take-home final.

The class will be divided into study/presentation groups of 4-6 people. The groups will have the responsibility for preparing a class discussion as outlined in the “Schedule of Assignments” (below). The members of the group will also have a paper due at the beginning of the next class period. Your paper need not take the same position that your group will have defended.

**Final Grade:** The points towards the final grade are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short papers</td>
<td>50 points each (there are two)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term exam</td>
<td>200 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>300 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Surprise quizzes</td>
<td>100 points (25 points each; the best four will count towards the final grade)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>25 bonus points (This will be based on the overall group presentation and your own class participation in the discussions. It is the quality of your discussion not the amount that matters!)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>-25 points for each unexcused absence, except that everybody has one free one that can not be used on the day of your class presentation</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>50 point scale</th>
<th>100 point scale</th>
<th>200 point scale</th>
<th>300 point scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>≥ 45</td>
<td>≥ 90</td>
<td>≥ 180</td>
<td>≥ 270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>42-44</td>
<td>85-89</td>
<td>170-179</td>
<td>255-269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>40-41</td>
<td>80-84</td>
<td>160-169</td>
<td>240-254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>37-39</td>
<td>75-79</td>
<td>150-159</td>
<td>225-239</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>35-36</td>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>140-149</td>
<td>210-224</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>120-139</td>
<td>180-209</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>≤ 29</td>
<td>≤ 59</td>
<td>≤ 119</td>
<td>≤ 179</td>
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There is a total of 700 possible points (not including the bonus ones.) The final grade
will be based on your total points as follows:

A $\geq 624$
B+ = 589 - 623
B = 554 - 588
C+ = 519 - 553
C = 484 - 518
D = 414 - 483
F $\leq 413$

Please keep all papers, exams and surprise quizzes. I try to keep accurate records, but being a fallible human being, there is some real (as opposed to mere logical) possibility that I will make a mistake in recording the grades and, therefore, it would be in your interest to keep the papers/quizzes so that if my records are incorrect, they can be corrected.

**Surprise Quizzes:** There will be at least six surprise quizzes. The quizzes will be on the reading assigned for the day of the quiz. There are no make-up surprise quizzes, but none will be given on religious holidays. Typically, they will be of this general form: State as carefully as you can X’s argument that y and, then, state the best objections to the argument. You may consult any notes you have taken on the reading(s) but you may not consult the reading itself or your computer. The quiz will be given at the beginning of the class and will last **ONLY** 15 minutes. Thus, if you are 5 minutes late to class, you will have only 10 minutes to complete the quiz. If you have scored 25 points on four surprise quizzes, you need not take any more of them.

**Papers:** As mentioned above, no late papers will be accepted unless something that you could not anticipate prevented you from getting them to class on the day they are due. If you miss a class on the day that the paper is due because of a religious holiday or University sponsored event, please make sure either that someone else hands in the paper for you or it is put in my mailbox before the class session in which it was due (5th floor Gateway Building, 106 Somerset St.). All papers must be double spaced, in font 12, one inch margins, and free of grammatical/spelling errors. For each page on which there are more than two such errors, the paper will automatically lose five (5) points from the total it would have otherwise received.

All papers must employ some standard reference form for footnotes and bibliography. Here’s a good website: [http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/search.php](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/search.php)

Every paper must have a thesis. The first sentence of the paper **MUST** state the thesis and begin as follows: “The purpose of this paper is to . . . First, I will . . . Second, I will . . . etc. . . . Finally, I will . . .” Papers that do not begin that way will lose ten (10) points. No paper should have more than five steps. The word “argument” has just one
“e.” It is a sacred word!

This is not a thesis: “The purpose of this paper is to explore . . .” These are theses: “The purpose of this paper is to show . . .” “The purpose of this paper is to defend the claim that . . .” “The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that . . .”

Please do not use the expression “I feel that . . .” to express what you believe to be true; use “I believe that . . .” Of course, “I feel warm” is fine but “I feel that Descartes is right” or “I feel that we have knowledge of the past” are not acceptable in philosophy papers because using those expressions tends to provide a license for not giving reasons. Feelings might be apt or inapt, but they are neither true nor false. Beliefs are true or false. Philosophy papers should be designed to present the reasons you have for what you believe to be true.

A title for your paper that encapsulates your thesis is required.

No BS is allowed. What you would not say to a thoughtful roommate you should not write in a philosophy paper. Don’t make claims that you cannot substantiate with good, generally available, and acknowledged evidence that you have examined carefully. For most of us that means we should not make claims about Einstein’s relativity theory, Darwin’s account of the transmission of traits, or properties of infinitely large sets.

Always give examples of generalizations. And never, ever, ever, ever use “therefore” (or some synonymous expression) unless the reasons that you presented entitle you to make such a claim.

Finally, writing a philosophy paper is a way of discovering what you ought to think, not a way of describing what you thought before you began writing the paper. Have fun with the ideas. The truth is not always (in fact, it hardly ever is) the first or second or third thing that pops into your head. Unexamined thoughts aren’t worth having – to (mis)appropriate what Socrates said in the Apology, 38a.

**Plagiarism:** Academic communities depend upon academic integrity, and a necessary condition of your having academic integrity is that the work you represent as yours is, in fact, yours. You **MUST** indicate **when and to what extent** you have relied upon anyone else’s **words** or **ideas**. That being said, we all profit from discussing important issues with others. Your study groups will certainly provide useful insights into the material. But when an idea was not yours, you should indicate that it was not. (In a footnote, you can say “I am indebted to . . .”)

**Disabilities:** If you have a learning disability (I have dyslexia, so I know what that’s like), please see me and we can make some appropriate arrangements.
Office Hours: I strongly encourage you to come to my office to discuss the readings, your papers, the class lectures and discussions with me. I will have regularly scheduled office hours on Thursday from 2:00-4:00 in the Gateway Building, Rm 516, but I could meet you at other times as well if you have a class during that time. To set up an appointment, even during the regularly scheduled time, please email me at: pdklein@rci.rutgers.edu. I ask that you set up an appointment in order to minimize your waiting.

Schedule of Assignments for 220, Fall 2013

9/4 Introduction to the course
9/9 Descartes, Russell: 513-523; 88-90
9/11 Hume, Edwards: 298-310; 311-320
9/16 Group Presentations by G1 and G2. The topic: Can we know anything about the future? G1, yes. G2, no. (note: This is a limited form of skepticism)
9/18 Goodman: 320-332; paper due from the members of G1 and G2
9/23 Foster: 333-343
9/30 Sextus, Oakley: 372-374; 375-386; paper due from the members of G3 and G4
10/2 BonJour: 387-401
10/7 Alston: 402-416
10/14 Ayer, Gettier, Clark: 440-443; 444-446; 447-449; paper due from the members of G5 and G6 (sample mid-term questions distributed)
10/16 Goldman: 450-463
10/23 Mid-term Exam (You may bring a one page study sheet.)
10/28 Lehrer and Paxson: 464-474; paper due from the members of G7 and G8
10/30 Group Presentations by G1 and G2. The topic: Does the defeasibility theory of knowledge solve the Gettier problem? G2, yes. G1, no.
11/4 Nozick: 475-490; paper due from the members of G1 and G2.
11/6 DeRose: 491-506
11/13 Putnam: 524-538; paper due from the members of G3 and G4
11/18 Dretske: 539-551
11/20 Group Presentations by G5 and G6. G5: Putnam’s semantic account provides a good basis for understanding skepticism. G6: Dretske’s pragmatic account provides a good basis for understanding skepticism. (Final exam questions distributed)
11/25 Klein, 552-574; paper due from the members of G5 and G6
12/2 Huemer: 575-589
12/4 Group Presentations: Does Klein’s diagnosis of the evil genius argument provide a good basis for understanding skepticism? G8, yes. G7, no.
12/9 Catch-up day. We are bound to fall behind somewhere because of the weather. Paper due from the members of G7 and G8.
12/11 Review
12/18 Final Exam The final exam is a take-home exam, due in the Undergraduate Philosophy Department Office in Rm 518, Gateway Bldg., 106 Somerset St. by 11:00 am. (Sharp!). The exam will be distributed on 11/20. You may not talk with anyone (including a writing tutor) about the exam until after 11:00 am on 11/20. At any time, you may consult any written material you wish in preparing your answers, but be sure to make clear the extent to which you have relied upon it. (Please re-read the section on plagiarism in the syllabus.) Note: If you have 360 points (not including class participation, but including absences) prior to the final exam, you do not have to take it. You will be assigned an “A” for the course. (If you do take the final and your total points are less than 624, you will not be assigned an “A.”)