

History of Epistemology

Course 2CT508
Course Handbook

John M. Frame

Spring Term, 2005

Thursdays, 9-12 AM

Office Hours, Tuesdays, 8-11, others by appointment (see Jan Brubaker). Feel free also to discuss course matters by email: jframe@rts.edu.

Texts and Abbreviations

- BGE: John Greco and Ernest Sosa, *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).
- DKG: Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987).
- CPRE: R. Douglas Geivett and Brendan Sweetman, *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology* (NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- DTRS: Jose Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (Phila.: Fortress Press, 1975).
- EBIV: W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998).
- ECR: David E. Cooper, ed., *Epistemology: the Classic Readings* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).
- LO: Lecture Outline. (available at www.reformedperspectives.org)
- LTK: Esther Meek, *Longing to Know* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003).
- SD: Supplementary Documents (available at www.reformedperspectives.org)
- Edgar, William, "No News is Good News."
- Frame, "Christianity and Contemporary Epistemology"
- , Review of Paul Helm, *Belief Policies*
- , Review of Esther Meek, *Longing to Know*
- , "Study Guide to *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*" (SG)

Objectives

1. To show that Scripture teaches and implies a distinctive epistemology, antithetical to the epistemologies of non-Christian thought.
2. To familiarize students with the history of Christian and non-Christian approaches to epistemology.
3. To show that non-Christian epistemologies make knowledge impossible.

4. To show that the biblical epistemology makes knowledge possible.
5. To help students develop an epistemological apologetic, challenging unbelievers to justify their claims to knowledge.
6. To help believers understand something of the wonder and joy of knowing God and knowing his creation.

Assignments

1. Class attendance is required. I won't always call the roll, but students who are often absent or late without excuse will be penalized.
2. Parts of the course may be taught by directed discussion, rather than by lecture. In these discussions, I may call on you to summarize or evaluate lecture material and assigned reading. Your class participation will count as part of your grade.
3. To facilitate these discussions, I am asking you to bring to each class one carefully formulated question or comment on the reading and/or lecture material. I won't collect these as a rule, but I may call on you to share them with the class. That is, for Feb. 10, bring a question or comment bearing on the lecture of Feb. 3 or on the reading assigned for Feb. 3. Similarly with other assignments. The point of the question or comment should be to provoke class discussion.
4. Final Exam, time to be announced, covering the entire course.
5. Research Paper, due Fri., May 13 (!), at 11 am. It should be around 4500 words (about 15 pp., doublespaced). It may be on any topic relevant to the course: a thinker, a problem, exegesis of a relevant Bible passage, a comparison of two or more views, application of epistemology to apologetics, preaching, theology, or other aspects of the ministry of the church. The paper should include research beyond the assigned readings, and you should indicate these by footnotes and/or bibliography. (I don't care about what bibliographic style you use; just make it consistent.) In your paper, do not merely describe a position, but argue it, anticipating objections. See discussion below for my grading criteria and abbreviations for comments on papers.

Grading Weights

Final Exam: 40%
Term Paper: 50%
Class Participation: 10%

Hall of Frame

I would like to post the best papers written in the course at www.reformedperspectives.org. These will serve as examples to other students of excellent writing and as resource materials. Please let me know in advance if you do not want your paper to be used in this way.

Schedule of Assigned Readings (subject to change)

Feb. 3: The Bible and Human Knowledge

DKG, 1-18, 40-75
LO, 1-13
SG, Lessons 1-3

Feb. 10: Biblical Epistemology Continued: Justification

DKG, 93-164
EBIV, 1-76
SG, Lessons 5-6

Feb. 17: Biblical Epistemology Continued: Human Faculties of Knowledge

DKG, 319-346
EBIV, 175-196
SG, Lesson 10
Frame, Review of Helm, *Belief Policies*, in SD

Feb. 24: Greek Philosophy

ECR, 9-59
LO, 13-24

Mar. 3: Medieval, Oriental Philosophy

ECR, 60-96
LO, 26-37

Mar. 10: Rationalists and Empiricists

ECR, 97-147
LO, 37-41

Mar. 17: Spring break, no class.

Mar. 24: Attempts to Confront the Skeptical Challenge, 1650-1900

ECR, 148-195
LO, 42-82

Mar. 31: Pragmatism, Phenomenology

ECR, 196-231
LO, 82-114

Apr. 7: Structuralism, Deconstruction, Liberation

DTRS, 86-105.
William Edgar, "No News is Good News" in SD.
Helen E. Longino, "Feminist Epistemology" in BGE, 327-53.
LO, 153-159

Apr. 14: Language Analysis: Early Twentieth Century

ECR, 232-280
LO, 153-159

Apr. 21: Language Analysis: Late Twentieth Century

EBIV, 77-153
Frame, "Christianity and Contemporary Epistemology" in SD.
LO, 159-167

Apr. 28: Epistemology and Religious Belief

CPRE, 81-128, 295-353
Frame, Review of Esther Meek, *Longing to Know*.
LO, 167-178
LTK (all)

May 5: Epistemology and Religious Belief, Continued

CPRE, 133-178
EBIV, 154-174

FRI., MAY 13, 11:00: TERM PAPERS DUE.

The Exam

The exam may include, (1) some multiple choice questions, (2) some brief definitions or identifications, and (3) some short essays.

Abbreviations for Comments on Papers

A - awkward

Amb - ambiguous

Arg - more argument needed

C - compress

Circle (drawn around some text)

- usually refers to
misspelling or other
obvious mistake

D - define

E - expand, elaborate, explain

EA - emphasis argument

F - too figurative for context

G - grammatical error

Ill - illegible

Illus - illustrate, give example

Int - interesting

L1 - lateness penalty for one
day (similarly L2, etc.)

M - misleading in context

O - overstated, overgeneralized

R - redundant

Ref- reference (of pronoun, etc.)

Rel- irrelevant

Rep - repetitious

Resp - not responsive (In a dialogue: one party raises a good
question to which the other does not respond.)

S - summary needed

Scr - needs more scripture support

Simp - oversimplified

SM - straw man (a view nobody holds)

SS - problem in sentence structure

St - style inappropriate

T - transition needed

U - unclear

V - vague

W - questionable word-choice

Wk - weak writing (too many
passives, King James
English, etc.)

WO - word order

WV - whose view? yours?
another author?

Grading System for Papers

A: Good grasp of basic issues, plus something really extraordinary, worthy of publication in either a technical or popular publication. That special excellence may be of various kinds: formulation, illustration, comprehensiveness, subtlety/nuance, creativity, argument, insight, correlations with other issues, historical perspective, philosophical sophistication, research beyond the requirements of the assignment. One of these will be enough!

A-: An A paper, except that it requires some minor improvement before an editor would finally accept it for publication.

B+: Good grasp of basic issues but without the special excellences noted above. A few minor glitches.

B: The average grade for graduate study. Good grasp of basic issues, but can be significantly improved.

B-: Shows an understanding of the issues, but marred by significant errors, unclarity (conceptual or linguistic), unpersuasive arguments, and/or shallow thinking.

C+: Raises suspicions that to some extent the student is merely manipulating terms and concepts without adequately understanding them, even though to a large extent these terms and concepts are used appropriately. Does show serious study and preparation.

C: Uses ideas with some accuracy, but without mastery or insight; thus the paper is often confused.

C-: Problems are such that the student evidently does not understand adequately the issues he/she is writing about, but the work may nevertheless be described as barely competent.

D: I don't give D's on papers or exams.

F: Failure to complete the assignment satisfactorily. Such performance would disqualify a candidate for ministry if it were part of a presbytery exam.

Most of my students get B's. I try to keep A's and C's to a relatively small number. F's are extremely rare, but I have given a few.

Grading System for Class Participation

I realize that not everybody is equally adept at contributing to discussions. But, of course, not everybody is equally adept at taking exams and writing papers either. And it does seem to me that the ability to contribute orally to a theological discussion is an important skill for ministry and scholarship. It is at least equal in importance to the ability to write papers and take exams. At seminary, we give students experience in preaching and counseling. I see the discussions in this course as opportunities for students to develop additional oral skills.

So I will grade your class participation. That does not mean that I will grade every comment you make, though I will probably have to take some notes on your responses. But I do hope over the semester to get a clear impression of how you have fulfilled this responsibility. Here, in general terms, is what I am looking for, and how I correlate these values with letter grades:

A: The student has intelligently understood and evaluated the assigned material and is able to discuss it with extraordinary insight.

B: Good understanding and sound evaluation. No extraordinary insight.

C: Shows serious study of the material, but inadequate comprehension.

D: No D grades given.

F: Frequently late, absent, unprepared. (Lateness, unexcused absence and lack of preparation will also lower grades at the upper range of the scale, e.g. from A to A-.)

Bibliography

Below are some of the sources that I have found helpful in developing the course (and some that I have reason to think might have been helpful if I had had time to read them). I'm listing the topics more or less in the order they appear in the course. At the end are some titles on epistemology in science and history, topics I do not presently plan to discuss in the course, but which you might want to investigate for your term papers.

Christian Epistemology

Bahnsen, Greg, *Always Ready* (Atlanta: American Vision, 1996). Includes Bahnsen's valuable survey of Biblical passages relevant to epistemology and apologetics.

--, "The Crucial Concept of Self-Deception in Presuppositional Apologetics," *WTJ* 57:1 (Spring, 1995), 1-32.

--, *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and Commentary* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1998). Includes a number of Van Til texts relevant to epistemology.

Clark, Gordon H., *A Christian View of Men and Things*

- (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952). Last chapter deals with epistemology.
 --, Religion, Reason and Revelation (Phila.: P&R, 1961.)
 --, Faith and Saving Faith (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1983).
 --, "How Does Man Know God?" Trinity Review 68 (July-Aug., 1989).
 --, Language and Theology (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1980).
 --, Three Types of Religious Philosophy (NP: Craig Press, 1973).
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 Personal glimpses at some contemporary Christian philosophers.
- Evans, C. Stephen, Faith Beyond Reason: a Kierkegaardian Account (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).
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 --, "Christianity and Contemporary Epistemology," in WTJ 52 (1990), 131-141.
 --, Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1995).
 --, Doctrine of the Knowledge of God (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987).
 --, Review of Paul Helm, Belief Policies, in WTJ 57:1 (Spring, 1995), 248-251.
- Meek, Esther, Longing to Know: The Philosophy of Knowledge for Ordinary People (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003).
- Nash, Ronald, Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988).
 --, ed., The Philosophy of Gordon H. Clark (Phila.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1968). Includes Clark's "Wheaton Lectures," the statement of the "later Clarkian epistemology."
 --, The Word of God and the Mind of Man (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).
- Plantinga, Theodore, Christian Philosophy Within Biblical Bounds (Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1991).
- Poythress, Vern, God-Centered Biblical Interpretation (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1999).
 --, Philosophy, Science, and the Sovereignty of God (np: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976).
 --, "Reforming Logic and Ontology in the Light of the Trinity," WTJ 57:1 (Spring, 1995), 187-220.
 --, Science and Hermeneutics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988).
 --, Symphonic Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987). A definitive statement of "multi-perspectivalism." Poythress is my theological soul-mate.
- Reymond, Robert L., The Justification of Knowledge (NP: P&R, 1976). Van Tillian; occasionally veers toward Clark.
- Schaeffer, Francis, He Is There and He Is Not Silent (Wheaton: Tyndale,

- 1972).
- Van Til, Cornelius, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phila.: P&R, 1969).
- , *The Defense of Christianity and My Credo* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1971). If you are new to Van Til, here is the place to begin.
- , *The Defense of the Faith* (Phila.: P&R, 1975), third edition, revised.
- , *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Phila.: P&R, 1974). Note especially his account of the interactions between different kinds of divine revelation.
- , *A Survey of Christian Epistemology* (NP: Den Dulk Foundation, 1969).
- Wolfe, David, *Epistemology: The Justification of Belief* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1982).
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976, 1984). Important work.
- Wood, W. Jay, *Epistemology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998).
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Histories of Philosophy (Western), Reference Works, and Primary Sources

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- , *From Shakespeare to Existentialism* (Boston: Neacon Press, 1959). 5.95. 404. h. Anti-Christian.
- , *Nietzsche* (NY: Meridian, 1950, 1956). 412. p.
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Deconstruction, Postmodernism

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"Reformed Epistemology"

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Recent Epistemology of Religion

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