COURSE SYLLABUS

AP 631—Religious Epistemology
Patrick T. Smith, Course Instructor
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
South Hamilton Campus
Fall Semester 2009
Tuesdays, 1:15 PM–4:15 PM
Phone: (978) 468–7111
Email: ptsmith@gcts.edu

Course Description

This course is an analysis of the nature, origin, sources, methods, and the extent of human knowing. It covers classical views of knowledge and interacts with contemporary philosophical discussions. It also addresses the special problems and concerns of these broader areas to the questions of religious knowledge and epistemic justification in general and in a Christian theological context in particular.

Course Textbooks

Required:


Additional Articles:

The additional articles required for the course by Randall Basinger, Alvin Plantinga, J. L. Schellenberg, and William J. Abraham will be posted on E-Reserve.
Learning Outcomes

The student who successfully completes this course should have the ability:

1. To be familiar with many of the important concepts associated with epistemology.
2. To explain some of the major problems and positions in contemporary debates about knowledge and epistemic justification.
3. To identify some of the key figures who are part of contemporary discussions concerning religious epistemology.
4. To recognize and evaluate reasons for and against various views of religious epistemology.
5. To understand the questions that epistemology poses for claims to knowledge of God and to survey some of the distinctively Christian answers to these problems.
6. To integrate the study of course material with meditative reflections on the scriptural teaching concerning human knowledge of God.

Course Requirements

1. **Assigned Readings**—some of the reading material is covered in class. However, there are elements that will not be brought out in class but are still essential to gaining an understanding of the material and successfully completing the course. Therefore, the reading provides a rich and necessary component of the learning experience.
   a. **Textbook Reading**—The students will be responsible for reading the assigned sections of the course textbooks by the assigned dates stated below.
   b. **Reading Handouts**—Students are also responsible for reading all handouts, essays, and articles reserved by the instructor. These essays serve as a necessary supplement to the material discussed in class.

   Students are to indicate in writing how much of the assigned reading was completed. This is to be turned in with the final assignments by the last day of the semester, December 22, 2009.

2. **Reading Quizzes**—There will be three (3) reading quizzes given over weeks two through five covering the reading from the text on general epistemology. It is important that students stay current with the readings. The quiz dates may or may not be announced the week before. The quizzes are designed to indicate whether the student has done the assigned reading. The class schedule below lists the chapters or essays from which students can be quizzed.

3. **Short Papers**—students will be responsible for writing three (3) short papers over the course of the semester. The papers are to be reflection essays on portions of a text or select readings from the religious epistemology part of the course. They will primarily come from the Geivett/ Sweetman volume, though some of the other articles may be used. Students are to identify two to three theses or themes that are central to the particular reading. Then discuss and critique these core themes. Do you agree with them wholeheartedly or in part? What part(s)? Do you reject them outright? Why? What can you learn from them regardless of accepting or rejecting the theme(s) in question? Instead of attempting to answer each of the questions individually, try to write a reflective essay that answers all of them. In other words,
craft an essay that describes, evaluates, and learns from the perspectives in these chapters or articles.

The papers are not to exceed 600 words in total length. There are two main reasons for this assignment: (i) students will learn more about the subject matter, in more depth, if they do frequent analytical and philosophical writing on the topic. (ii) Short papers force students to focus arguments carefully, as they eliminate the opportunity for disorganization and for the excess “fluff” that is common to some academic writing. Students should not equate the brevity of the assignment length with a low level of difficulty. There should be enough time allotted to adequately plan for and write the papers in order for them to be done well.

The papers are to be typed, double-spaced, neatly formatted, stapled, and free of any spelling and grammatical errors. The papers will be graded on their clarity and faithfulness to the assigned topic. No late papers will be accepted.

4. **Final Integration/Integration Paper** - There will be a final integration paper for this course to be turned in by the last day of the semester, December 22, 2009. The paper is to interact with the contents of Ian Scott’s book *Paul’s Way of Knowing* and integrate it into broader discussions of religious epistemology.

Students are required to write a 1600 word interaction/integration paper and do three things. (1) Briefly identify Scott’s thesis. (2) Discuss the thesis and how he develops it in the text, and give your reflections on his claims. (3) Explain how you would integrate this understanding of the biblical material with some aspect or other of the various approaches to religious epistemology studied throughout the semester to describe what you would consider a genuine Christian religious epistemology. (4) Then state why you are attracted to that position and how it answers some of the more pressing questions in the larger contemporary debates in religious epistemology. So in other words, the goal is for this paper to be sufficiently reflective on Scripture and in dialogue with the contemporary philosophical discussions and not in isolation to them.

The papers are to be typed, double-spaced, 12 pt. Times New Roman font, neatly formatted, stapled and free from any spelling and grammatical errors. Do not place the papers in any type of plastic cover. Simply staple the pages together and turn it in to the instructor.

**Course Grading**

The student’s grade will be determined as follows:

- Quizzes: 30%
- Short Papers (3): 30%
- Final Interaction/Integration Paper: 40%
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th>Quality Points</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100-96 Work of exceptional quality</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>95-93 Work of commendable quality</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>92-90 Work of commendable quality</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>89-86 Work of commendable quality</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>85-83 Work of acceptable but minimal quality</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>82-80 Work of acceptable but minimal quality</td>
<td>2.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>79-76 Substandard and barely passing work</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>75-73 Substandard and barely passing work</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>72-70 Substandard and barely passing work</td>
<td>1.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>69-66 Failure</td>
<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>65-63 Failure</td>
<td>0.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>62-below Failure</td>
<td>0.00</td>
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**Grading Rubric:** After all the requirements of the course have been completed, the instructor will use the following rubric for the assignment of grades, based on the overall performance of the class. The grades assigned will represent the instructor’s interpretation of the following standard:

A = Outstanding mastery of the subject: excellence is evident in preparation for and attendance in class sessions; unusual ability to retain, analyze and synthesize the material; with a positive attitude making productive contributions to the learning community in the classroom.

B = Superior mastery of the subject: sincere effort in preparation for and attendance in class sessions; ability to master the essential aspects of the material; with a mostly consistent attitude in making contributions to the learning community in the classroom.

C = Basic mastery of the subject: inconsistent effort in preparation for and attendance in class sessions; engagement with the material but difficulty in grasping some of its aspects; with occasional contributions to the learning community in the classroom.

D = Inadequate mastery of the subject.

F = Failure: course must be repeated.

**Warning on Plagiarism:** Helpful guidelines on plagiarism can be found on the Indiana University website [http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/plagarism.html](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/plagarism.html). This document has the official recognition of the Gordon-Conwell faculty and provides very helpful tools to guide you as you prepare for your assignments. If a student is caught plagiarizing, the student will receive the consequences of this act according to the process established by the seminary.
Intuitive Property Rights: To protect the professor’s intellectual property rights with regard to classroom content, students are asked to refrain from audio and video recording of classes, as well as audio, video, and written publication (including internet posting and broadcasting) or live transmission of classroom proceedings.

Internet Usage: Students are asked to refrain from accessing the internet at any point during class sessions, unless otherwise instructed by the professor. “Surfing the web,” checking email, and other internet-based activities are distracting to other students and to the professor, and prevent the student from fully participating in the class session.

Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading/Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Introduction to Course, Standard Accounts of Knowledge</td>
<td>Plantinga, “Advice to Christian Philosophers”; Moser, et. al. Ch. 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Belief, Truth, and Justification</td>
<td>Moser, et. al. Chs. 2-3</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Issues in Epistemic Justification (cont.), Foundationalism</td>
<td>Moser, et. al. Chs. 4-5</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Some Sources of Knowledge</td>
<td>Moser, et. al. Chs. 6-7; Basinger “Faith/Reason…”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Week #1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Read Ahead (or catch-up)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Skepticism, Epistemology &amp; Explanation, Fideism</td>
<td>Moser, et. al. Chs. 8-9; Begin Reading Kelly James Clark, Return to Reason</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Faith &amp; Reason (F&amp;R): Natural Theology</td>
<td>Clark, Return to Reason, Part 1; Geivett and Sweetman, Chs. 13-15, 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>F&amp;R (cont.), Reformed Epistemology</td>
<td>Clark, Return to Reason, Part 2; Geivett and Sweetman, Chs. 9, 12 / Short Paper #1 Due</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Week #2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Read Ahead (or catch-up)</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Epistemology of Religious Experience</td>
<td>Geivett and Sweetman, Chs. 21-23 Short Paper #2 Due</td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Religious Diversity and the Epistemology of Religious Experience</td>
<td>Geivett and Sweetman, Ch. 24; J.L. Schellenberg, “The Questionableness of Religious Experience” in The Wisdom to Doubt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Prudential Reasoning/Jesus and Epistemology</td>
<td>Geivett and Sweetman, Chs.19, 20; William J. Abraham, “The Epistemology of Jesus: An Initial Investigation” / Short Paper #3 Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 22, 2009</td>
<td>Final Interaction/Integration Paper</td>
<td>All Remaining written work DUE</td>
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Select Bibliography for Further Study

General Epistemology:


Religious Epistemology:


