

## An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge

Now revised and containing three new chapters, this book provides a clear and accessible introduction to epistemology, or the theory of knowledge. It discusses some of the main theories of justification, including foundationalism, coherentism, reliabilism, and virtue epistemology. Other topics include the Gettier problem, internalism and externalism, skepticism, the problem of epistemic circularity, a priori knowledge, naturalized epistemology, and the epistemic significance of testimony and disagreement. Intended primarily for students taking their first classes in epistemology, this lucid and well-written text will provide an excellent introduction to anyone interested in knowing more about this important area of philosophy.

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# An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge

*Second Edition*

NOAH LEMOS  
*The College of William & Mary*



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## Preface to the Second Edition

The theory of knowledge, or epistemology, is one of the main areas of philosophy. Some of the problems are as old as Plato, yet they remain alive and interesting today. This book is intended to introduce readers to some of the main problems in epistemology and to some proposed solutions. It is primarily intended for students taking their first course in the theory of knowledge, but it should also be useful to generally educated readers interested in learning something about epistemology. I do not assume that the reader has an extensive background in philosophy.

In writing an introductory text, one must balance many things. I have sought to strike a balance between impartial presentation and advocacy. In general, I have tried to be fair and neutral between competing positions, yet in some places I defend various views. I have also sought to hit the mean between breadth and depth of coverage. I have not tried to cover every important or recent position or to cover every recent development within the views I discuss. I have not, for example, included discussions of formal epistemology, pragmatic encroachment, or detailed discussions of the ethics of belief. Some of these, such as formal epistemology, are likely beyond the level of students taking a first course in epistemology. Instead, I have tried to focus with clarity on some main features of a few major positions, issues, and debates. I hope this approach will be helpful to readers seeking an introduction to epistemology, and I would urge anyone interested in more information to make good use of the notes provided in-text, as they provide helpful guidance for further reading. In balancing breadth and depth of coverage, I have tried to hit the mean, but, as Aristotle says, the mean rests with perception. I apologize for my blind spots.

This second edition contains new material reflecting some important developments since the publication of the first edition. The first edition contained, for example, a single chapter on externalism, internalism, and

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the problem of epistemic circularity. This edition has a new chapter devoted solely to the debate on externalism and internalism about justification. This allows for a deeper examination of the issues than was offered in the first edition. This edition also includes a new chapter devoted to the problem of epistemic circularity that includes new material addressing that vexing issue. In addition, this new edition includes an entirely new chapter that deals with the epistemology of testimony and disagreement. There have been many important contributions to the growing field of social epistemology, and this new chapter focuses on some of the recent developments not covered in the first edition.

In addition to these new chapters, much new material has been added to the other chapters. For example, the chapter on foundationalism presents the problem of the speckled hen as a challenge to certain forms of foundationalism, and presents and examines Phenomenal Conservatism as a response to that challenge. Phenomenal Conservatism is an important version of foundationalism and deserves attention in our consideration of foundationalist views. The chapter on reliabilism and virtue epistemology has been re-written to include an entirely updated discussion of Sosa's recent work on virtue epistemology. It reflects his views on knowledge and justification as they have developed since the publication of the first edition. Finally, I would note that the chapter on the Gettier problem and subsequent attempts to analyze knowledge includes a brief discussion of Williamson's view that knowledge is a simple and unanalyzable concept. There are other changes and additions as well, but it would be tiresome to try to catalog them all.

In Chapter 1, I distinguish between some senses of "knows" and note that our primary focus will be on propositional knowledge. I introduce the traditional view that propositional knowledge is justified true belief, and discuss in a general way the concepts of belief, truth, and justification. In Chapter 2, we consider some problems for this traditional view, problems made prominent in a brief essay by Edmund Gettier. Much of Chapter 2 is devoted to considering some simple ways of analyzing or defining knowledge that avoid the problems to which Gettier calls our attention. Unfortunately, none of these are successful, but they represent some basic attempts upon which others have tried to improve. As noted above, I also discuss briefly Williamson's view that knowledge is a simple, unanalyzable mental state, and, that therefore, attempts to analyze the concept of knowledge rest on a

mistake. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, we explore some views about what makes beliefs justified. In these chapters we will look at versions of foundationalism, coherentism, reliabilism, and virtue epistemology. I have tried not to discuss every version or nuance of these views. Most likely, too much detail would overwhelm the readers and prevent them from understanding the main points of the theory. In Chapter 6, I distinguish between two main forms of internalism about justification before taking up the debate between internalism and externalism. Various arguments in support of internalism are considered critically. In Chapter 7 we turn to the problem of epistemic circularity. The problem of epistemic circularity arises when we consider how we can know that our ways of forming beliefs are reliable. Can one use a way of forming beliefs to support the belief that that way of forming beliefs is reliable? Can one use memory, for example, to support the belief that memory is a reliable way of forming beliefs? Chapter 8 addresses the problem of skepticism. We consider several skeptical arguments and consider some main responses to them. These include the Moorean response, the relevant alternatives response, the contextualist response, and the inference to the best explanation response. In Chapter 9, we turn to the problem of the criterion. We focus on Roderick Chisholm's formulation of the problem and his favored position, "particularism." Throughout much of this book, we will appeal to particular examples of knowledge and justification in assessing criteria of knowledge and justification. Is this an epistemically unsatisfactory procedure? In Chapter 10, we will explore some views about a priori knowledge and justification, and consider whether our a priori knowledge and justification are confined to what is "analytic." Chapter 11 examines some central themes in naturalistic epistemology and considers some forms that naturalistic epistemology might take. Chapter 12 examines some main views in the epistemology of testimony and disagreement. We examine some views about the nature of testimony and the debate between "reductionism" and "non-reductionism" about testimony. We also explore some main views concerning the epistemology of disagreement. What, for example, is the reasonable stance for us to take when we find that our "epistemic peers" disagree with us about some proposition? Should we suspend judgment, stick to our guns, or modify our views in some other way?

Again, I have tried to balance breadth with depth, and always with an eye to providing a clear and useful introduction to epistemology. I would recommend that anyone seriously interested in studying the subject read this book

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in conjunction with a good anthology of contemporary essays in the field. In that way a reader will be exposed to more sophisticated and detailed versions of the views considered here.

I wish to thank Hilary Gaskin of Cambridge University Press for her support and patience. I wish to thank several people who read and commented on parts of the manuscript: Nathaniel Anderson, Charles Cooper, and most especially Yuan Dong, who read carefully every chapter and provided many helpful comments and suggestions. Finally, I wish to thank my wife, Jill, for her help and support in this project. Without her love and support, this new edition could not have been written.