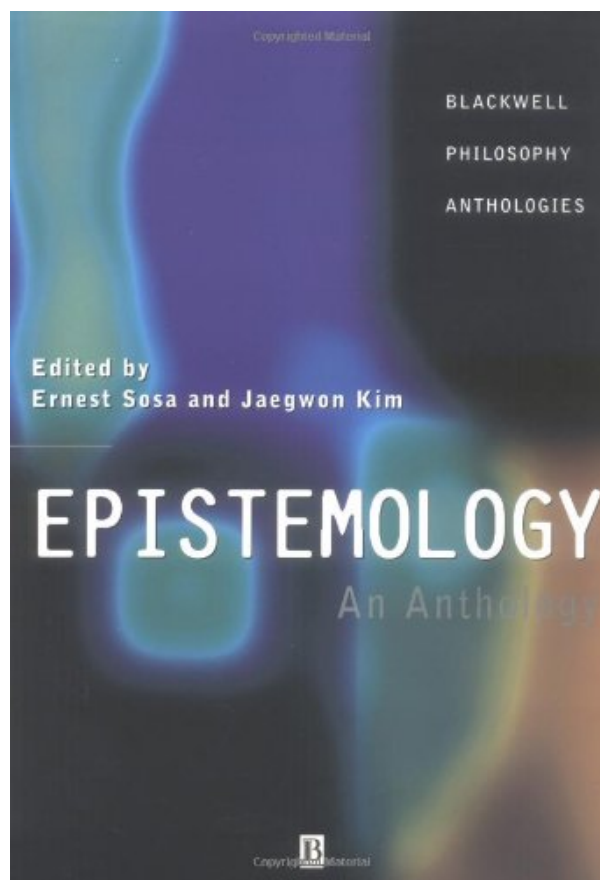
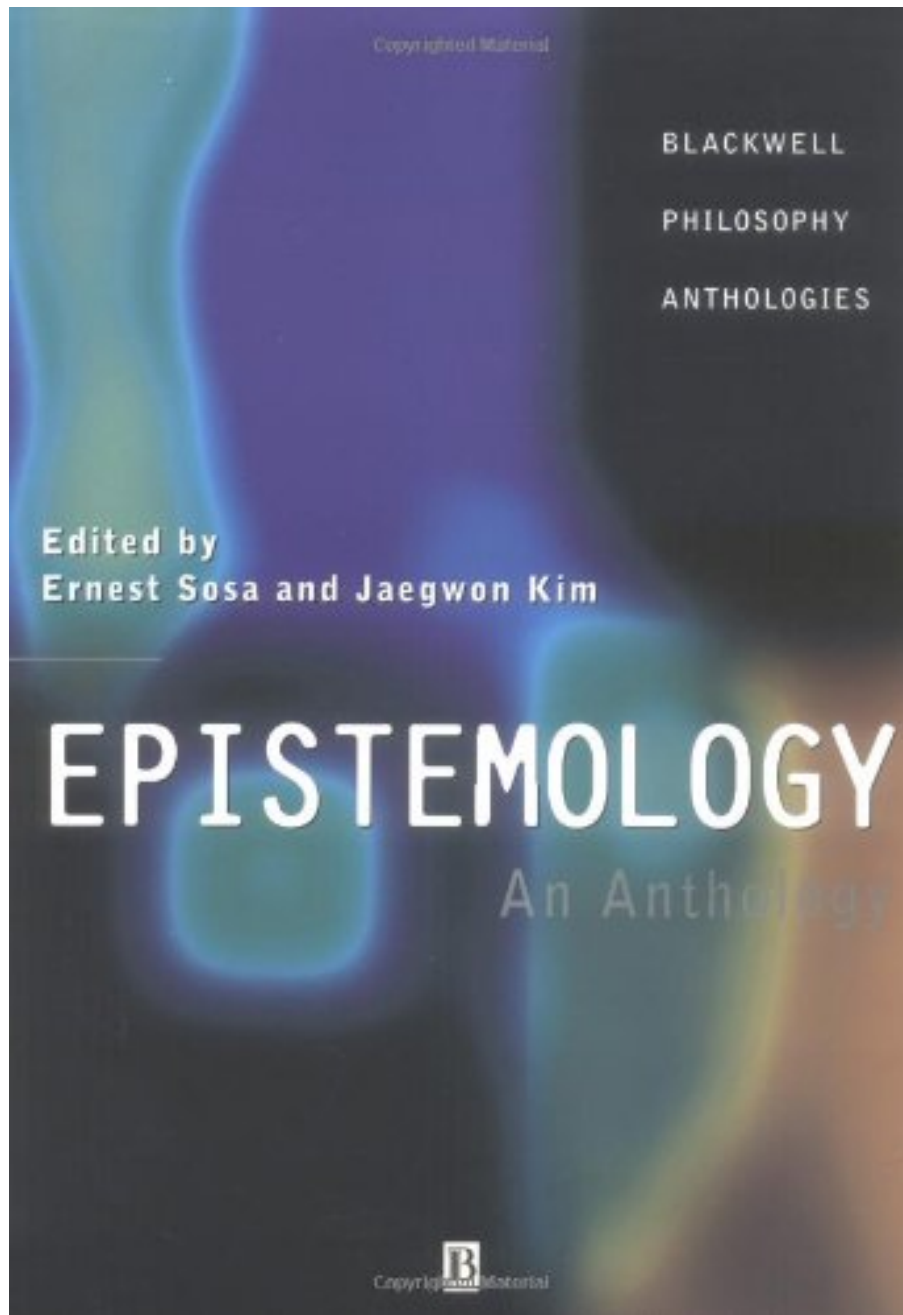


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It is ideal as a reader for all courses in epistemology.

About the Author

Ernest Sosa has taught since 1964 at Brown University, where he is now Romeo Elton Professor of Natural Theology and Professor of Philosophy. He is the author of *Knowledge in Perspective* (1991). He is co-editor (with John Greco) of *The Blackwell Guide to Epistemology* (1999); and co-editor (with Jaegwon Kim) of *A Companion to Metaphysics* (Blackwell, 1995) and *Metaphysics: An Anthology* (Blackwell, 1998).

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Excellent Anthology of Contemporary Epistemology

By ctdreyer

I've already reviewed the Kim and Sosa anthology in contemporary metaphysics, and I have much the same verdict on their anthology in contemporary epistemology: this, to the best of my knowledge, is the single best anthology of contemporary philosophical work in this area for advanced students of philosophy. (That, of course, isn't to say that there isn't a better anthology in epistemology; there are simply far too many philosophy anthologies for me to know that with any certainty.) The virtues of this anthology are considerable. Its coverage of most areas is broad, the readings have been carefully selected from the contemporary classics of the field, and it touches on the most of the central areas of research in contemporary epistemology. Furthermore, this anthology is packed with papers displaying the virtues of good analytic philosophy: patience in explaining the nature and importance of the issues, precision in exposition and description, clarity and honesty of argument, and carefulness in analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of various positions.

The reader should know that this is emphatically not a historically anthology--they don't even include a selection on skepticism by Descartes! Since these are all contemporary readings, this anthology isn't a place to go for knowledge of the epistemological views of the great philosophers. Nearly every election is from the last fifty years, and a good many of them are from the last twenty or so. So the focus of this anthology is on the sort of metaphysics that is being done in analytic philosophy right now.

The subjects covered include, inter alia, the following: skepticism, the analysis of knowledge, justification, foundationalism vs. coherentism, naturalized epistemology, externalism vs. internalism, virtue epistemology, and contextualism. The aim of the individual sections on each of these questions isn't to provide a synoptic view of the positions in these areas. That, of course, simply couldn't be done in an anthology of this sort. The aim instead is to give the reader a sense of the positions defended in this area, to provide her with the outlines of a couple possible positions on each of the issues, and to give her the background to enter into the contemporary literature on the subjects.

Now, it may seem that there are some obvious lacunae in this list. Where, for instance, is coverage of rationalism and a priori knowledge or of the problem of induction? It is, of course, true that more could have been added to this anthology--but that's going to be true of any anthology. I doubt it's a major problem here, though, as it seems to me that you'll have no problems engaging with most of the literature in contemporary epistemology if you've mastered the material covered in this anthology. And it seems to me that this is the role that an anthology of this sort should play--providing the reader with an entry into contemporary literature in the field.

But while I think this is an ideal way to introduce oneself to the contemporary literature, the reader should know that this isn't an anthology filled with introductory material by the editors themselves. Most of the sections begin with only a page or two of introductory material, and those few pages are expected to both introduce the basic issues in a few paragraphs and relate the readings included to the basic issues and to one another. It's not clear to me that much more than this sort of brief introductory material is necessary here, though. First, as is often the case in philosophy, many of the basic issues discussed don't need much motivation since they can be stated in a few words and since they concern questions that, on their face, are quite straightforward and simple. But there is more to it than that. What seems most important is that the

subject matter of most epistemological worry is pretty narrowly focused. For epistemology is really concerned with a small number of very basic and interrelated questions (viz. Can we know anything? And, if so, how can we know it? What is it to know something?), and so it's possible to see most all of these selections as engaged with a limited range of general issues. Moreover, it is possible to see general connections between the different subjects here since many of the positions discussed are motivated by a concern with rebutting skepticism. In fact, the structure of anthology mirrors the structure of epistemology from Descartes to the present day: we begin with challenge presented by skepticism, and we go from there. The anthology begins with a section on skepticism, and it's possible to see almost everything thereafter as involving an attempt to deal with skepticism and what it shows us about our knowledge of the world. Many papers discuss how the skepticism is formulated, why it seems plausible, why it goes wrong (if it does), how we can meet the skeptic's demand, or why the skeptic doesn't really present us with a challenge.

Naturally, this material is going to be helpful for people working in other areas of philosophy, as epistemological issues turn up everywhere. Skepticism and responses to it have a role to play in every area of philosophy, and so understanding the material in this anthology should be helpful if you're going to study just about anything in contemporary philosophy. But, unless you already have some background in contemporary philosophy, this is not an anthology I'd recommend for someone beginning study of the subject. While some of its selections should be accessible to anyone with an interest in this subject, many of them technical and philosophically sophisticated. Since many of these selections are journal articles or selections from book-length treatises on the issues, the authors often assume that the reader is coming to this material with a thorough grounding in the aims and methods of contemporary philosophy. So, before you try to tackle most of this anthology, I'd recommend reading an introductory text in contemporary epistemology or at least doing some coursework in related areas.

This is an ideal anthology for courses surveying contemporary metaphysics that are aimed at graduate students and advanced undergraduates. The only drawback is the fairly high price, but this book is certainly worth it if you're interested in this area of contemporary analytic philosophy.

3 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

An Exemplary Epistemology Text.

By A Customer

Sosa and Kim's text is a guide through the most influential and provocative articles in philosophical epistemology. Provides a good background for issues regarding knowledge and skepticism, and includes classic essays as well as contemporary journal articles. Perfect for an introductory graduate level epistemology course.

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