

# 5AANA009

Syllabus – Academic year 2015/16

## Basic information

*Credits:* 15

*Module Tutor:* Clayton Littlejohn

*Office:* 412

*Consultation time:* TBD

*Semester:* Autumn

*Lecture time and venue\*:* TBD

*\*Please note that tutorial times and venues will be organised independently with your teaching tutor*

## Module description (plus aims and objectives)

The Epistemology module aims to bring students to a critical understanding of some of the central problems in the theory of knowledge, via a close reading and discussion of some of the key recent texts in this area. Students taking this course will acquire a good sense of the nature and range of the subject-matter of epistemology itself, and its relation to other philosophical areas. Students will acquire an appreciation of how the problems under discussion are motivated and generated, by examining particular claims concerning the nature, source and extent of human knowledge.

### Learning outcomes.

By the end of the module, the students will be able to demonstrate intellectual, transferable and practicable skills appropriate to a level-5 module and in particular will be able to demonstrate that they have:

An ability to read closely and gain an understanding of relevant texts;

An ability to summarize arguments and positions;

An ability to support and to challenge views and positions, by constructing arguments and citing relevant considerations;

The formation of philosophical views of their own, which they are prepared to defend or amend in the light of criticism.

## Assessment methods and deadlines

Summative assessment: one x two-hour exam in May/June (100%)

Formative assessment: two x 1,000-word essays

- First formative essay due 16:00 on Friday 30.10.2015
- Second formative essay due 16:00 on Friday 11.12.2015

Formative work must be submitted by these deadlines to receive feedback.

## Outline of lecture topics (plus suggested readings)

This semester begins with a discussion of evidentialism, the view that says that our rational beliefs are rational because they're the ones supported by our evidence (or, if you prefer, because they're the ones held for good reasons). We will look at some challenges for the view.

### **1. Internalism and Evidentialism**

Stewart Cohen, "Justification and Truth" [Focus on the objection to reliabilism.]  
Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, "Internalism Defended"

#### *Recommended*

Michael Huemer, "Phenomenal Conservatism and the Internalist Intuition"  
Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, "Evidence"  
Barbara Herman, "What Happens to the Consequences?" [An ethics paper, but one that discusses some issues related to issues that we'll discuss in this module.]

### **2. Some Paradoxes of Belief**

D.C. Makinson, "The Paradox of the Preface"  
Dana Nelkin, "The Lottery Paradox, Knowledge, and Rationality"

#### *Recommended*

Sharon Ryan, "The Preface Paradox"  
John Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries*  
Sydney Shoemaker, "Moore's Paradox and Self-Knowledge"

### **3. Belief and Degrees of Belief**

Richard Foley, "Belief, Degrees of Belief, and the Lockean Thesis"  
Kenny Easwaran and Branden Fitelson, "Accuracy, Coherence, and Evidence"

#### *Recommended*

James Joyce, "A Nonpragmatic Vindication of Probabilism" [Highly recommended but challenging.]  
Richard Pettigrew, "Epistemic Utility and Norms for Credences"  
Darren Bradley, *A Critical Introduction to Formal Epistemology*.  
David Christensen, "Arguments for Deductive Cogency"

### **4. Epistemic Value and the Aim of Belief**

Linda Zagzebski, "The Search for the Source of the Epistemic Good"  
Michael Lynch, *True to Life*  
John Hyman, "The Road to Larissa"

#### *Recommended*

Ralph Wedgwood, "On the Aim of Belief"  
Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*

### **5. Evidence, Reasons, and Justification**

Maria Alvarez, *Kinds of Reasons*  
Peter Unger, *Ignorance*  
John Hyman, "How Knowledge Works"

#### *Recommended*

Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes"  
Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, "Evidence"

### **6. Contextualism & Skepticism**

Keith DeRose, "Solving the Skeptical Puzzle"  
Timothy Williamson, "Knowledge, Context, and the Agent's Point of View"

#### *Recommended*

Jennifer Nagel, "Knowledge Ascriptions and the Psychological Consequences of Thinking about Error"  
Jennifer Nagel, "Epistemic Anxiety and Adaptive Invariantism"

### **7. Epistemological Disjunctivism**

Duncan Pritchard, *Epistemological Disjunctivism* (Part One)  
John McDowell, "Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge" and "Knowledge and the Internal" [Don't worry! This will be just a few short passages.]

*Recommended*

Susanna Siegel, "Do Visual Experiences Have Contents?"  
Ulrike Heuer, "Intentions and the Reasons for which we Act"  
G.E.M. Anscombe, "On Sensations of Position"

**8. Memory and Knowledge**

Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* and *The Analysis of Mind*  
Norman Malcolm, *Knowledge and Certainty*  
P.M.S Hacker, *The Intellectual Powers*  
Michael Huemer, "The Problem of Memory Knowledge"

*Recommended*

Sven Bernecker, *Memory*

**9. Normative Externalism**

Amia Srinivasan, "Normativity without Cartesian Privilege"  
Michael Titelbaum, "Rationality's Fixed Point"  
John Gibbons, "You Gotta Do What You Gotta Do"

*Recommended*

Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits*  
John Gibbons, "Things That Make Things Reasonable"  
Clayton Littlejohn, "A Plea for Epistemic Excuses"

**10. Epistemic Responsibility**

William Alston, "The Deontological Conception of Justification"  
Pamela Hieronymi, "Responsibility for Believing"

*Recommended*

Conor McHugh, "Epistemic Deontology and Voluntariness"

**Suggested essay questions**

- I. Discuss the relationship between internalism and evidentialism.
2. Do we have to have consistent beliefs to be rational?
3. What is the relationship between confidence and full belief? (You can focus on the metaphysical issues or the normative issues.)
4. Should we think of the rational requirements on full belief as wide-scope or narrow-scope requirements?
5. Should we think of reasons as mental states, propositions, or facts?
6. Does contextualism conflict with the idea that knowledge is normative?
7. What is the relationship between epistemological and metaphysical disjunctivism?
8. What is the relationship between epistemological disjunctivism and evidentialism?
9. Does perception provide us with reasons that support our perceptual beliefs?
10. What is the relationship between episodic and factual memory? What does this tell us about evidentialism?
- II. What, if anything, do the arguments for/against normative externalism tell us about evidentialism or internalism? (Pick one author from week 9 and focus on either internalism or evidentialism.)
12. Can we be held responsible for our attitudes if we don't have voluntary control over them?