

4AANB007 - Epistemology I

Syllabus – Academic year 2014/15

Basic information

Credits: 15

Module Tutor: Clayton Littlejohn

Office: Philosophy Building 412

Consultation time: Mondays 2-3 and Wednesdays 11-12

Semester: Second

Lecture time and venue*: 11:05-11:55 K6.29 Kings Building

GTA: Mike Coxhead, Owen Englefield, Claire Field, Samuel Kimpton-Nye, Christian Stevens, Jennifer Wright

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

Module description (plus aims and objectives)

Module Description: This course aims to provide a basic grasp of the fundamental problems of epistemology, which is the philosophical study of knowledge – one of the most central areas in philosophy. The focus of this module is on scepticism and the theory of epistemic justification. Topics include foundationalist and coherentist theories of epistemic justification; internalist and externalist approaches to the theory of justification with their motivations, strengths and weaknesses; knowledge as reliably formed belief and knowledge as belief that tracks the truth; the problem of a priori justification.

Module Aims: To familiarize the student with the central problems of epistemology, and to provide some preliminary understanding of the main philosophical theories bearing upon those problems, and especially some understanding of the motivations behind those theories.

Lectures and Seminars

There will be lectures and seminars associated with this module. Attendance is required at both. For each seminar meeting, please bring at least one written question to share with your GTA. This question might be a question about the interpretation of the assigned readings or it might instead be a question about the content. These will be collected at the start of the session. Please also try to write a few sentences addressing the leading question that structures each lecture (see below) so that you are prepared for small group discussion.

Please read the required readings before attending the lecture. I cannot hope to cover all of the material in the readings in each lecture. Merely attending lectures and seminars will not be sufficient for mastering the material.

Questions

If you have trouble accessing something through Keats, please let me know as soon as possible. If you have any questions that are *not* about the content of this module (e.g., the timing of exams, numbers of

credits, etc.), these questions should be directed to the philosophy office, but only after you have checked the website and handbook. If you have questions about the content of this module, please feel free to contact me to discuss them.

Assessment methods and deadlines

- **Formative assessment:**
Spring miniterm 1: Fri Feb 20; Spring miniterm 2: Fri April 3
- **Summative assessment:** Exam (two hour)

Outline of lecture topics (plus suggested readings)

Readings for this course can be found through Keats.

1. The Regress Argument

Q: To know anything at all, must some things be known directly or immediately without any inference from anything else we believe?

L. BonJour. 1978. Can Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation? *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15: 1-13.
D. Smithies. 2014. Can Foundationalism Solve the Regress Problem? In R. Neta (ed.), *Current Controversies in Epistemology*. Routledge.

Recommended Additional Readings

R. Fumerton and A. Hasan. Foundationalist Theories of Epistemic Justification.

<<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/justep-foundational/>>

P. Klein. 2014. No Final End in Sight. In R. Neta (ed.), *Current Controversies in Epistemology*. Routledge.

J. Pryor. There is Immediate Justification.

<<http://www.jimpryor.net/research/papers/Noninferential.pdf>>

2. The Problem of Perception

Q: What are we most immediately aware of in perception? Is it something mind-dependent or mind-independent? Should we think of perception as involving representation?

G.E. Moore. 1953. Sense-Data. In his *Some Main Problems of Philosophy*. George Allen & Unwin, pp. 28-40.

A.J. Ayer. 1963. *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*. MacMillan and Co., Chapter One. [Optional]

W. Fish. 2010. *Philosophy of Perception: A Contemporary Introduction*, Chapters Two and Five.

Recommended Additional Readings

B. Brewer. *Perception and its Objects*, Chapters One, Four, and Five. <Available through oxfordscholarship.com>

T. Crane. The Problem of Perception. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/perception-problem/>>

3. Perceptual Knowledge and Justification

Q: Does perception halt the epistemic regress? If so, how?

M. Huemer. 2007. Compassionate Phenomenal Conservatism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74: 30-55.

J. McDowell. 1995. Knowledge and the Internal. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 55: 877-93.

N. Silins. 2014. Experience Does Justify Belief. In R. Neta (ed.), *Current Controversies in Epistemology*. Routledge.

Recommended additional readings:

- R. Fumerton. 2014. How Does Perception Justify Belief? In R. Neta (ed.), *Current Controversies in Epistemology*. Routledge.
- A. Goldman. Immediate Justification and Process Reliabilism. <<http://fas-philosophy.rutgers.edu/goldman/Immediate%20Justification%20and%20Process%20Reliabilism.pdf>>
- S. Siegel and N. Silins. The Epistemology of Perception. <<http://philpapers.org/archive/SIETEO.I.pdf>>

4. Testimony

Q: When is it appropriate to accept something on the word of another? Must we first have good reason to think that they're reliable? Should we trust others in the way that we trust ourselves?

- C. Coady. 1973. Testimony and Observation. *American Philosophical Quarterly* 108: 149-55.
- R. Foley, "Universal Intellectual Trust"
<<http://philosophy.fas.nyu.edu/docs/IO/1161/universaltrust.pdf>>
- Fricker, L. 1994. Against Gullibility. In B. Matilal and A. Chakrabarti (ed.) *Knowing from Words*. Kluwer, pp. 125-61.

Recommended additional readings:

- J. Adler, "Epistemological Problems of Testimony"
<<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/testimony-episprob/>>
- J. Lackey. 2005. "Testimony and the Infant-Child Objection", *Philosophical Studies* 126: 163-90.

5. Induction

Q: Is inductive reasoning a source of knowledge and justification? Is it possible to justify the use of inductive reasoning?

- D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 4
< <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/hume1748.pdf>>
- P.F. Strawson, "The Justification of Induction", *Introduction to Logical Theory*
- J. van Cleve. 1984. "Reliability, Justification, and the Problem of Induction", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 9: 555-67.

Recommended additional readings:

- J. Vickers. The Problem of Induction.
< <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/induction-problem/>>
- R. Weintraub. 2008. Skepticism about Induction. In J. Greco (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Skepticism*. Oxford University Press.

6. The Apriori

Q: What, if anything, can we know about the world without having to rely on experience? What, if anything, can we know without having to rely on experience?

- A. Casullo. 2002. Apriori Knowledge. In P. Moser (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*.
- W. V. O. Quine. 1951. Two Dogmas of Empiricism, *Philosophical Review* 60: 20-43.
- Grice, P. and P.F. Strawson. In Defense of a Dogma. *Philosophical Review* 65: 141-158

Recommended additional readings:

- C. Jenkins. 2014. What can we Know Apriori? In R. Neta and D. Pritchard (ed.), *Current Controversies in Epistemology*. Routledge.
- B. Russell, "Apriori Justification and Knowledge"
<<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/apriori/>>
- G. Russell, 2008. *Truth in Virtue of Meaning: A Defense of the Analytic-Synthetic Distinction*. Oxford University Press.

7. The Gettier Problem

Q: What distinguishes knowledge from merely true belief?

Gettier, E. 1963. Is Justified True Belief Knowledge? *Analysis* 23: 121-3

Nozick, R. 1981. *Philosophical Explanations*. Harvard University Press.

Sosa, E. How to Defeat Opposition to Moore. *Philosophical Perspectives* 13: 141-153

Recommended additional readings:

M. Steup. The Analysis of Knowledge.

< <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/knowledge-analysis/>>

8. Internalism and Externalism

Q: Is justification 'just in the head'?

Goldman, Alvin I. (1979). "What Is Justified Belief?" in G. Pappas (ed.), *Justification and Knowledge*, Dordrecht: Reidel.

Cohen, S. 1984. Justification and Truth. *Philosophical Studies* 46: 279-95

Goldman, A. 1999. Internalism Exposed. *Journal of Philosophy* 96: 271-93

Wedgwood, R. 2002. Internalism Explained. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65: 349-69

Recommended additional readings:

Littlejohn, *Justification and the Truth-Connection*, Chapter 1.

9. The Skeptical Challenge

Q: If it's possible for someone to have a mental life like yours and be systematically deceived, is it possible for you to know anything at all? Is it possible to know that you're not systematically deceived?

Pryor, J. 2000. The Skeptic and the Dogmatist. *Noûs* 34: 517-49

Lewis, D. Elusive Knowledge. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74: 549 - 67

Recommended additional readings:

McDowell, J. 1998. Criteria, Defeasibility, and Knowledge. In *Meaning, Knowledge, and Reality*. Harvard University Press, pp. 369-95.

Williamson, T. 1997. Knowledge as Evidence. *Mind*.

10. Disagreement

Q: If you discover that a peer disagrees with you about something, what should you do next? Does the discovery of such a peer require you to be conciliatory and suspend judgment or can it be acceptable for you to 'stick to your guns'? Is it possible for a disagreement between you and a peer to be reasonable?

Feldman, R. 2006. Epistemological Puzzles about Disagreement. In Stephen Hetherington (ed.), *Epistemology Futures*. Oxford University Press. 216-236.

Elga, A. 2010. How to Disagree about How to Disagree. In R. Feldman and T. Warfield (ed.), *Disagreement*. Oxford University Press.

Recommended additional readings:

Kelly, T. Disagreement and the Burdens of Judgment. <http://www.princeton.edu/~tkelly/datbj.pdf>

Enoch, D. 2010. Not Just a Truthometer: Taking Oneself Seriously (but not Too Seriously) in Cases of Peer Disagreement. *Mind* 119: 953-97.

Suggested essay questions

[The questions above are general questions that will be addressed in the relevant lecture. These are essay questions for the formative essays that should help you prepare for formative assessment.]

1. Explain the doxastic ascent objection in your own words and whether it works. OR. Explain the isolation objection to coherentism and whether it works. [PICK ONE! Do not attempt both in one paper.]
2. How do the indirect realists account for the possibility of illusion?
3. Can experience justify perceptual belief if it doesn't have representational content?
4. What's the strongest objection to Hume's reductionist view of testimony? Is this kind of objection decisive against all forms of reductionism? (Is it decisive against *any* form of reductionism?)
5. Does induction need to be justified for inductive inference to confer justification?
6. Has Quine shown that there is no cogent distinction between the analytic and the synthetic? Explain and assess his argument.
7. Does adding a sensitivity condition solve the Gettier problem?
8. What's the strongest argument for externalism? Is the argument successful?
9. How does Lewis reconcile infallibilism with the denial of skepticism?
10. Is the equal weight view self-defeating? If so, should we reject the equal weight view?