

7AAN2007

Syllabus – Academic year 2015/16

Basic information

Credits: 20

Module Tutor: Littlejohn

Office: 412

Consultation time: TBD

Semester: Autumn

Lecture time and venue: TBD

Seminar time and venue (if different): TBD

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.

By the end of the module, the students will be able to demonstrate intellectual, transferable and practicable skills appropriate to a level-7 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

- Formative assessment: two x 1,500–2,000-word essays (The first will be due by the start of the lecture on week 6 and the second will be due by noon on Tuesday 4 December 2015.)
- Summative assessment: one x two-hour examination in May/June

Outline of lecture topics (plus suggested readings)

The readings for this module can all be found through Keats. If you are looking for good introductory textbooks, you might look at Pritchard's introductory texts (although *Knowledge* is much better than *What is this Thing Called Knowledge?*) and a new introduction to formal epistemology from Darren Bradley. Also, Jennifer Nagel's short introduction is excellent. Alvin Goldman and Matt McGrath just published a non-standard introduction and I'm finishing off a more standard introduction (although it's unclear whether I'll finish it in time for this module).

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. Requirements of Rationality

John Broome, "Normative Requirements"

Niko Kolodny, "How Does Coherence Matter?"

Jonathan Way, "Reasons and Rationality"

Recommended

Patricia Greenspan, "Conditional Oughts and Hypothetical Imperatives"

5. 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*

6. 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"

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

1. 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. Is there always a reason to conform to the requirements of epistemic rationality?
6. Should we think of reasons as mental states, propositions, or facts?
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?
11. 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?