Themes in Epistemology (2019–2020)

PHIL10072 — SCQF Level 10 (UG Year 3)

Course organiser:  Dr. James Openshaw (james.openshaw@ed.ac.uk).

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Course summary

This course introduces students to major ideas and themes in the philosophical study of knowledge and related epistemic phenomena. We will try to discover the nature of knowledge and the nature of justification. We will consider sceptical threats to what we take ourselves to know. We will examine how ascriptions of knowledge in language appear to vary with certain contextual features, and whether we ought to assert only what we know. We will reflect on the value of knowledge, explore epistemic paradoxes, and ask whether there are any conditions (such as being in pain or feeling cold) which are such that one is always in a position to know by reflection alone whether they obtain (or whether mistakes are possible in any domain). And we will explore whether there might be distinctively epistemic forms of injustice in society, and whether the practical importance or moral significance of being right or wrong whether \( p \) can affect whether one knows that \( p \).

Learning outcomes

To develop further the philosophical skills, and to extend as well as deepen the philosophical knowledge, acquired in previous philosophy courses.

Pre-requisites

Knowledge and Reality (PHIL08017) and Mind, Matter and Language (PHIL08014).

While students of MA Cognitive Science (Humanities) are permitted to take this course without having met the pre-requisites, it is advisable that they discuss the suitability of the course with their PT and the course organiser before enrolling.
1. Teaching

Seminars

The ‘seminars’ timetabled for this course will consist of short lectures interspersed with some activities and discussion in pairs.

Seminar time: Thursday 11:10–13:00 in Weeks 1–11 (no seminar in flexible learning week). Seminar location: F.21, 7 George Square.

Tutorials

In addition to the seminars, students will attend weekly tutorials for more focused group-discussion of the required readings for that week. Attendance is compulsory and students must do the required readings in advance of each tutorial. Tutorials begin in week 2.

You will be automatically signed to a specific tutorial group some time during week 1. This will appear in your Office 365 calendar automatically. All information about tutorial allocation can be found under the ‘Tutorials’ tab on the Learn page for this course. If you find that you need to reschedule which tutorial group you are in, the information on how to do this can be found here.

Attendance

Attendance at all tutorials is compulsory and attendance will be monitored. If for whatever reason, you are unable to attend a particular tutorial, please notify both your Tutor and the Teaching Office in advance of your tutorial session. When emailing, please ensure that you put the name of the course you are on plus the tutorial session you were due to attend. If you fail to do this, you will be marked as absent instead of exempt.

Office hours

My office hour is on Thursdays at 2–3pm in 5.01 of the Dugald Stewart Building. Feel free to drop in at this time without appointment. You may also feel free to contact me about meeting for a chat at another time if you are unable to make an office hour. You can also email me with short questions (but please reserve substantial questions for in-person).
2. **Assessment**

**Means of assessment:** Mid-term essay with a maximum word count of 1,500 words (40% of final grade for the course). End-of-semester essay with a maximum word count of 2,500 words (60% of final grade for the course).

A list of set essay prompts for each of these assessments will be provided in due course.

Word counts include footnotes but not the contents of the bibliography. There is no 10% leniency and requests to go beyond these word count limits will not be approved. The precise word count must be written on the coversheet of your submission. Overlong essays will be penalised according to the following rule: 1% of the maximum obtainable mark will be deducted for every 100 words, or part thereof, over the word limit. So, exceeding the word limit by 1-100 words incurs a deduction of 1%; exceeding by 101-200 words incurs a deduction of 2%; and so on.

**Deadlines for submission**

Mid-term essay: Thursday 27th February, by 12pm noon (mid-day).
End-of-term essay: Thursday 23rd April, by 12pm noon (mid-day).

**Marking schemes:** For Philosophy-specific marking guidelines see [here](#). For the University’s general marking scheme see [here](#).

3. **Course materials**

All of the readings for the course can be easily found online or in the libraries. Some can be found through a quick Google search, for others you may need to log in to your library account and search using [https://discovered.ed.ac.uk](https://discovered.ed.ac.uk). If for any reason you get stuck and cannot find a resource listed here, contact the libraries for help, or email me.

**Pre-reading**

For general introductory overviews of the field of epistemology, you may like to look at Jennifer Nagel’s *Knowledge: A Very Short Introduction* (OUP, 2014) or Duncan Pritchard’s

Additional resources

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy and the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy are good places for further reading. The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy can often be used to look up unfamiliar concepts and views in philosophy (it’s probably the closest thing there is to a philosophical dictionary).

To track down papers and books beyond those referred to in the reading list below, it is recommended that you use PhilPapers, Philosophy Compass, and the Diversity Reading List.

4. Syllabus and reading list

In addition to lecture content and required readings, students are encouraged to consult optional background readings and further readings for support. But at some point you’re bound to find a reading difficult. Don’t panic. Persevere. Extracting what you can from difficult texts which use concepts you’re unfamiliar with is an important skill to acquire throughout the course of your degree. The discussions we have in seminars and tutorials—and in my drop-in office hours—are an opportunity to ask any questions you might have.

1. What is knowledge?

Optional background reading:
- Jennifer Nagel, ‘Knowledge first epistemology’: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ll9xNI2-mI

Required reading:
- Timothy Williamson (2000), Knowledge and its Limits, §1.1, §1.2, §1.4.

Further reading:
- Quassim Cassam (2009), ‘Can the concept of knowledge be analysed?’ In D. Pritchard & P. Greenough (eds.), Williamson on Knowledge. (See also Williamson’s reply at pp. 285–292.)

2. **Scepticism: Contemporary responses**

Optional background reading:
- Peter Unger (1978), Ignorance: A case for scepticism.

Required reading:

Further reading:

3. **Luminosity**

Optional background reading:
- §§4–5 of David Hemp, 'The KK principle': [https://www.iep.utm.edu/kk-princ/](https://www.iep.utm.edu/kk-princ/)

Required reading:
- Timothy Williamson (2000), Chapter 4 (but skip §4.7 and §4.8) and Chapter 8 of *Knowledge and its Limits*.

Further reading:
- Aidan McGlynn (2014), Chapter 7 of *Knowledge First*?

4. **Contextualism about the expression ‘knows’**

Optional background reading:

**Required reading:**

**Further reading:**

5. **Justification**

**Optional background reading:**
Required reading:

Further reading:
- Timothy Williamson (2007), ‘On being justified in one’s head’. In M. Timmons, J. Greco, and A. R. Mele (eds.), Rationality and the Good.

6. **Epistemic paradoxes**

Optional background reading:

Required reading:

Further reading:
- John Hawthorne (2004), Knowledge and Lotteries. Chapters 2–.

7. **The value of knowledge**

**Optional background reading:**

**Required reading:**

**Further reading:**

8. **Knowing as the norm of assertion**

**Optional background reading:**
- Matthew Benton, ‘*Knowledge norms*’. *Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. §1.
- J. L. Austin (1955/62), *How to Do Things with Words*. 
Required reading:
- Timothy Williamson (2000), Chapter 11 of *Knowledge and its Limits*.

Further reading:
- Aidan McGlynn (2014), Chapter 5 of *Knowledge First*?
- Sanford C. Goldberg (2009), ‘The knowledge account of assertion and the nature of testimonial knowledge’. In D. Pritchard & P. Greenough (eds.), *Williamson on Knowledge*.

9. **Pragmatic encroachment and moral encroachment**

Background reading:

Required reading:

Further reading:
- Jeremy Fantl, Matt McGrath, and Baron Reed (2014), Chapter 4 of Steup, Turri, and Sosa (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology 2nd edition*.

10. **Testimonial injustice**

**Background reading:**
- Kristie Dotson interview, *The Unmute Podcast* (episode 9).

**Required reading:**

**Further reading:**
- Aidan McGlynn (2019), ‘Epistemic Objectification as the Primary Harm of Testimonial Injustice’, *Episteme*.

11. **Revision**