

PH4211 Issues in Epistemology

The Place of Knowledge in Epistemology

Meeting time: Friday, 2-5pm

Venue: AS3-0523

Modular Credits: 5

Prerequisites: Completed 80MC, including 28 MCs in PH, with a minimum CAP of 3.2 or be on the Honours track,

Cross-listing(s): Nil

Instructor: Bob Beddor

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Office Hours: Monday, 1-2pm, Tuesday 3-4pm, and by appointment

Course Description

Over the last thirty years, there has been extensive debate about the importance of knowledge in epistemology. According to one view, knowledge is relatively unimportant: the central notions of epistemology are justification and rationality; knowledge is at best derivatively valuable. According to an opposing view, often known as “Knowledge First” epistemology, knowledge is the central explanatory notion in epistemology; other epistemological concepts are best understood in terms of it. This course will explore this debate and assess the prospects for resolving it. Questions include: Can knowledge be analyzed in terms of other notions – e.g., belief, truth, justification – or is it unanalyzable? Is knowledge a mental state, akin to belief and desire? Does knowledge have a privileged role in explaining human behavior? What is the relation between knowledge and evidence? Does knowledge impose normative constraints on assertion, action, and belief?

Format and Reading Availability:

Since this is a small class, it will be largely discussion-based. Each week we will focus on a particular topic. You will be expected to have read the assigned texts in advance.

The main text for the class is Williamson’s *Knowledge and its Limits*. Since we will be reading most of this book during the course of the semester, students should acquire a copy. The full text is available online through Oxford Online Scholarship (available through NUS Libraries), though students may well prefer a physical copy, which can be ordered through the usual suspects.

Students may also wish to order *Williamson on Knowledge* (ed. Greenough and Pritchard), which contains useful discussions of some of the main themes in this class. (I will be posting select portions of this on IVLE.) An additional resource that some

students may find helpful is Aidan McGlynn's book, *Knowledge First?*, which gives a critical overview of many aspects of knowledge first epistemology.

Grading

The grade will consist of four components, summarized below.

Attendance/Participation (15%)

Participation is vital for a small honors level seminar – I certainly don't want to have to lecture for three hours every meeting! In order to encourage participation, part of the participation grade is to email me at least one short question/comment on the reading before each class.

Two Short Written Responses (20% total, 10% each)

You will also be expected to write two short responses to a specific aspect of one of the readings. The response should be focused on a particular argument in one of the papers – you should briefly summarize the argument, and then engage with it critically, by either offering an original criticism of it, or extending the argument in some way. These responses should only be 500 words (750 words max).

Presentation (20%)

You will also be expected to pick a topic from the syllabus to present on. Presentations can be devoted to a single reading on the topic, or they can be devoted to multiple readings relating to a topic. You should aim to present for about 10-15 minutes, and then field questions from the class for another 5-10 minutes. *You are expected to prepare a short handout to accompany your presentation, and you should email the handout to me at least three days (72 hours) before the presentation.* (Completing the handout and sending it in advance is part of the presentation grade.) You are encouraged to think of the presentations as warm up for the final paper: they're an opportunity to read papers on a topic with particular care, and develop original questions and objections in response to those papers.

Final Paper (45%)

The largest component of the grade is the final paper. Your final paper gives you the opportunity to research a particular topic in depth, culminating in a paper that develops a sustained argument and demonstrates a mastery of the relevant literature. The final paper is due **November 15th**.

Breakdown of Final Grade

The breakdown for the final grade will be as follows:

Attendance/Participation: 15%

Two Short Written Responses: 20% (10% each)

Presentation: 20%

Final Paper: 45%

Week 1 – August 18th

Introduction

Week 2 – August 25th

The Gettier Problem

Req'd Readings:

Gettier, “is justified true belief knowledge?”
Goldman, “Causal theory of knowing”,
Nozick, selections from *Philosophical Explanations*

Recommended reading:

Zagzebski, “Inescapability of Gettier Problems”
Ichikawa and Steup, “The Analysis of Knowledge”

Week 3 – September 8th

Is knowledge analyzable? Is it a state of mind?

Req'd Readings:

KAIL, Intro, Chapter 1
Nagel, “Knowledge as a Mental State”

Recommended Reading:

Cassam, “Can the Concept of Knowledge be Analyzed?”
Williamson, Reply to Cassam
Fricker, “knowledge is not a state of mind”,
Williamson, Reply to Fricker

Week 4 – September 15th

Knowledge, Luminosity, and the KK Thesis

Req'd Readings:

KAIL, Chapters 4 & 5
Hawthorne, “Knowledge and Evidence”

Recommended Reading:

Conee, “The Comforts of Home”

Week 5 - September 22nd

First Short Response Due

Skepticism

Req'd Readings:

Descartes, First Meditation
KAIL, Chapter 8
Lewis, “Elusive Knowledge”

Recommended Readings:

Schiffer, “Evidence = Knowledge: Williamson’s Solution to Skepticism”

Week 6 – October 6th

Evidence

Req'd Readings:

KAIL, Chapter 9
Goldman, "Williamson on Knowledge and Evidence"

Recommended Readings:

Kelly, "Evidence" SEP entry (<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evidence/>)
Zardini, "K is not a subset of E"
Comesaña and Kantin, "Is Evidence Knowledge?"

Week 7 – October 13th

Evidential Probability

Req'd Readings:

KAIL, Chapter 10
Greco, "Probability and Prodigality"

Recommended Readings:

Kaplan, "Williamson's Casual Approach to Probabilism"
Williamson, Reply to Kaplan

Week 8 – October 20th

Knowledge and Assertion

Req'd Reading:

KAIL, Chapter 11
Lackey, "Norms of Assertion"
Brown, "Knowledge and Assertion"

Recommended Reading:

Unger, selections from *Ignorance*
Turri, "Knowledge and the norm of assertion: A Simple Test";
"Experimental work on the norm of assertion"
Kelp, "Assertion: A Function First Account"
Stanley, "Knowledge and certainty"
McGlynn, *Knowledge First?*, Chapter 5: Assertion

Second Short Response Due October 25th

Week 9 – October 27th

Knowledge and Action

Req'd Reading:

Hawthorne and Stanley, "Knowledge and Action"
Brown, "Knowledge and Practical Reason"

Recommended Reading:

Lackey, "Acting on Knowledge"
Weatherson, "Knowledge, Bets, and Interests"
McGlynn, *Knowledge First?*, Chapter 6: Action

Week 10 – November 3rd

Epistemic Contextualism and Pragmatic Encroachment

Req'd Reading:

DeRose, "Assertion, Knowledge, and Context"
Kim, "Pragmatic Encroachment in Epistemology"

Recommended Reading:

Buckwalter and Schaffer, "Knowledge, Stakes, and Mistakes"
Greco, "Cognitive Mobile Homes"
Stanley, "On the Linguistic Basis for Contextualism"
Brown, "Subject-Sensitive Invariantism and the Knowledge Norm for Practical Reasoning"
Roeper, "The Pragmatic Encroachment Debate"

Week 11 – November 10th

Knowledge, Belief, and Justification

Req'd Reading:

Bird, "Justified Judging"
Williamson, "Justification, Excuses, and Skeptical Scenarios"

Recommended Reading:

McGlynn, "Believing Things Unknown"
Hawthorne, Levi, Spectre, "Belief is Weak"

Week 12 – November 17th

The Lottery Paradox

Req'd Reading:

Selections from Hawthorne, *Knowledge and Lotteries*
Nagel, "The Psychological Basis of the Harman-Vogel Paradox"