

Philosophy 513/Topics in Recent and Contemporary Philosophy: Epistemology after the Modal Turn

Princeton University
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Tuesdays 7-9:50
Marx 201

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Traditionally, philosophers have often given a starring role to notions like *evidence* and *reasons for belief* when theorizing about knowledge. However, in the last decades of the twentieth century and the opening decades of the twentieth-first, this traditional paradigm has been largely supplanted by alternative approaches. There are at least two complementary sources for this relatively recent, radical break with tradition. First, Edmund Gettier's apparent refutation of "the traditional analysis of knowledge," along with the failure of early, theoretically conservative attempts to "patch" that analysis, loosened the hold of the traditional paradigm on the philosophical imagination and created a demand for novel theoretical frameworks. More constructively, that demand for innovative approaches was met when the modal revolution, which had first entered analytic philosophy through logic and metaphysics (think Kripke, Lewis) hit epistemology. When epistemology took the modal turn, the result was an entirely new set of intriguing frameworks and powerful conceptual tools for theorizing about knowledge and related notions. Among these are the ideas that that we should think of knowledge in terms of the *elimination of contextually salient possibilities* (Lewis), that it consists in *tracking* facts (Nozick, Roush), and the increasingly influential picture of knowledge as *safe belief* (Williamson, Sosa). We will critically examine this currently flourishing tradition, beginning with seminal accounts by Lewis and Nozick, and continuing up to some of the latest developments.

In addition, we will supplement this primary focus of the seminar by looking at a number of other issues in contemporary epistemology, devoting a couple of sessions each to social epistemology (belief polarization, disagreement) and to some recent theorizing about *belief*. Our main goal will be to learn as much epistemology as we can over the course of the semester.

All readings listed below will be available on the Princeton blackboard site for the course under *Course Materials*. The schedule is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

1. February 5th. Introduction/Overview.

2. February 12th. Lewis on knowledge: “Knowledge as a modality.”

Lewis, “Elusive Knowledge.”

3. February 19th. Knowledge as tracking.

Nozick, “Knowledge and Skepticism.” Chapter 3 of his *Philosophical Explanations* (abridged).

4. February 26th. Knowledge and sensitivity.

DeRose, “Solving the Skeptical Problem.” Reprinted as Chapter 1 of his *The Appearance of Ignorance*.

5. March 5th. Knowledge as safe belief.

Sosa, “How to Defeat Opposition to Moore.”

Williamson, “Close Possibilities” pp.123-130 of *Knowledge and Its Limits*.

Williamson, “Probability and Danger” sections 4 and 5 only.

6. March 12th. Tracking, take two: from conditionals to conditional probabilities.

Sherrilyn Roush, *Tracking Truth: Knowledge, Evidence and Science* (excerpts).

March 19th—NO CLASS (Princeton University Spring Break)

7. March 26th. Luck and risk.

Pritchard, "Anti-Luck Epistemology." *Synthese* (2007).

Pritchard, "Epistemic Risk". *The Journal of Philosophy* (2016).

8. April 2nd. Reliability.

Dretske, "Two Conceptions of Knowledge: Rational vs. Reliable Belief." Reprinted as Chapter 5 of his *Perception, Knowledge and Belief*.

Gigerenzer and Brighton, "Why Biased Minds Make Better Inferences." *Topics in Cognitive Sciences* (2009).

9. April 9th. Knowledge and disagreement.

Readings TBA.

April 16th. NO CLASS->PACIFIC APA

10. April 23rd. Belief polarization.

Sunstein, "Polarization." Chapter 3 of his *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*.

Dorst, "Why Rational People Polarize."

Kelly, "Belief Polarization as a Collective Action Problem" (draft).

11. April 30th Belief, etc. Lara Buchak visits the seminar.

Buchak, "Belief, Credence, Norms."

[Another paper by LB, TBA]

12. May 7th. Belief, etc. (continued)

Hawthorne, Rothschild, and Spectre. "Belief is Weak."