

# PHL2124/3123 - Social Epistemology

The production and transmission of knowledge do not take place in a vacuum but are influenced by institutional arrangements and social norms. This module will explore several questions that arise from this observation. When deferring to others, whose testimony should we trust? Do pragmatic or moral considerations affect what it is rational to believe? This module will offer an opportunity to explore these and related questions in social epistemology broadly speaking. Additionally, this module also explores issues in social epistemology of science. To what extent should politics and morality influence the activity of scientists? To what extent should we trust in scientists?

Module level: 3; Credit value: 15; ECTS value: 7.5; Pre-requisites: None; Co-requisites: None

Duration of Module: One semester – Semester 2

Module Leaders:

Dr. Silvia Milano (SM) [s.milano@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:s.milano@exeter.ac.uk)

Dr. Celso Neto (CN) [c.alves-neto@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:c.alves-neto@exeter.ac.uk)

Office Hours: **see the ELE page.**

## Assessment

### Formative:

Attendance at - and participation in - weekly seminars.

Weekly compulsory readings; 5x150 words reading reports, to be submitted by 2pm the day before class. The reading reports can be one of the two following types:

1. “Lock & Key” Reading Report

Provide two paragraphs. The first carefully articulates and explores something from the reading you could not understand. (That is, a lock.) The second explains an important but unobvious insight—a key—you gained from the reading. The key should not be a central claim of the reading. It should be an interesting new idea, such as an application or consequence of the ideas in the reading. Typically, the lock and the key focus on unrelated aspects of the reading. Perhaps your key will open another reader’s lock.

## 2. "Question & Next Step" Reading Report

Provide two paragraphs. The first articulates a question for the author. The second supplies a next step, such as (i) how the author would, could, or should respond, (ii) a meta-comment about your question, such as what the dialectic indicates about the topic or a problem with your question, (iii) a distinct but connected follow-up question (perhaps it powerfully tightens your original objection, for example), or (iv) some other next step, such as how your question impacts other course topics or how to develop an essay idea from your question.

### Summative:

**One Presentation** of 10 minutes; due in **Week 8**.

- The presentation must be narrated and contain slides. Guidelines for developing the presentation and submission will be available on ELE.

**One Essay** of 2000 words; due **in the exam period** (the exact date will be posted on ELE).

- Essay questions will be provided half-way in the module. Students are also encouraged to come up with their own essay questions. Guidelines will be provided on ELE.

Assessment: Essay = 70%; Presentation = 30%.

### **Criteria for marking essays**

The essay will be graded by standard university and school conventions.

70 to 100: First class grades are awarded to essays which answer the question precisely, clearly and comprehensively by reference to primary scholarly literature (generally not textbooks). The debates in the relevant literature are addressed pertinently and accurately in order to forward a coherent argument. Evidence and interpretations are assessed critically and shows clear individual engagement with the topic. Marks of 85 and over are awarded to outstanding scripts which could not realistically be better at this level of study.

60 to 69: Upper second grades are awarded to essays which answer the question well but which lack the precision or comprehensiveness of a first class script. Scripts of above 65 will address the relevant literature and will answer the question very well but typically lack the individuality of a first class script or feature a significant omission. Scripts below 65 show promise but omissions are more serious.

50-59: Lower second grades are awarded to essays which answer the question adequately but are dependent upon the lecture and show lack of personal engagement and understanding. Major references are omitted or understood only casually and the argument as a result lacks rigour and clarity. Towards the lower end of the grade, the scripts show some significant misunderstandings and errors.

40-49: Third class grades are awarded to essays which are weak in conception and execution. The essays show little understanding and reference to the relevant literature. There are often major errors and misunderstandings and gross omissions in the work.

0-39: Fails are given to essays which lack any significant knowledge of the literature and fail to answer the question at all.

## Course Outline and Required Readings

### 1. **Introduction:** Background to Social Epistemology

*No Required Readings*

Suggestion: Goldman, Alvin and Cailin O'Connor, "Social Epistemology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/epistemology-social/>.

### 2. **Trust (SM)**

Simon, J. The entanglement of trust and knowledge on the Web. *Ethics Inf Technol* 12, 343–355 (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-010-9243-5>

### 3. **Polarisation (SM)**

O'Connor, C., Weatherall, J.O. Scientific polarization. *Euro Jnl Phil Sci* 8, 855–875 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13194-018-0213-9>

### 4. **Epistemic democracy (SM)**

Landmore, H. (2021). An epistemic argument for democracy. In *The Routledge Handbook of Political Epistemology* (pp. 363-373). Routledge.

### 5. **Attention (SM)**

Gardiner, Georgi. Attunement: On the Cognitive Virtues of Attention. In *Social Virtue Epistemology*. Alfano, Mark ; De Ridder, Jeroen & Klein, Colin (eds.) (2022). *Social Virtue Epistemology*. Routledge.

## **6. Guest Lecture: Rose Trappes**

Required reading TBA.

## **7. Values in Science (CN)**

Brown, M. J. (2013). Values in science beyond underdetermination and inductive risk. *Philosophy of Science*, 80(5), 829-839.

## **8. Democracy in Science (CN)**

Intemann, K. (2015). Distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate values in climate modeling. *European Journal for Philosophy of Science*, 5(2), 217-232.

## **9. Trust in Science (CN)**

Wilholt, T. (2013). Epistemic trust in science. *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*.

## **10. Peer – Review (CN)**

Heesen, R., & Bright, L. K. (2021). Is peer review a good idea?. *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*.

## **11. Revision and Q&A (Preparation for Exam)**

*No required readings*