

FIL 2208 EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge

Its Nature, Value and Social Role

FIL 2208 will focus on epistemology this year rather than on philosophy of science, although there will be many connections between the topics we raise and issues in philosophy of science. Our aim is to discuss and investigate the nature of knowledge in light of the social function and –role that knowledge has in our epistemic– and/or scientific practices. However, our investigations into these topics will be guided by questions and notions traditionally associated with ethics and moral philosophy rather than epistemology. We shall learn that the borders between ethics and epistemology are ripe with discoveries that are of great value to both these neighbouring fields.

Traditional epistemology has often – and sometimes rightly – been accused of too much abstraction from relevant social factors and for championing a narrow conception that treats the universal, non-situated and solipsistic individual as its point of departure for investigating knowledge and epistemic rationality. The result is, or so its critics have suggested, that epistemology makes itself irrelevant to the kind of real-life, flesh-and-bone, socially situated epistemic beings that we are. Many philosophers and scientist have therefore argued that we must reject traditional epistemology with its weight on objective knowledge and universally applicable standards of epistemic rationality and replace this with a *social* epistemology whose epistemic notions and principles are truly socially constituted. Some of the most radical critics of epistemology have also used this criticism to favour a kind of naturalization of epistemology where traditional epistemic notions are replaced or reduced – or understood in terms of – descriptive, non-normative notions (e.g. in terms of empirical psychology or sociology).

We will investigate several elements in these debates – such as the value and social role of knowledge, different social factors, and so on – in order to decide whether a more traditional notion of knowledge (viz. as a normative and objective notion) can survive philosophical confrontation with the phenomena that some critics of epistemology treat as their doom. In particular, we will need to find out whether such a more traditional notion of knowledge is

compatible with and can incorporate – or even explain – some or all of these social phenomena.

The main topics of this course will therefore be: what is the nature of knowledge, what is its value and what is its social role. To make progress we shall spend time on understanding social aspects of knowledge by inquiring the nature of shared knowledge and knowledge through testimony, as well as normative aspects of knowledge (viz. epistemic injustice, the value of knowledge, and so on). A claim to be defended at this course is that these phenomena will shed important light on epistemology and the nature of knowledge.

We will mainly read Miranda Fricker's book, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowledge*, Benjamin McMyler's *Testimony, Trust and Authority* and Timothy Williamson's *Knowledge and Its Limits*. In addition there will be papers by philosophers such as John McDowell, Helen Longino, Linda Zagzebski, Robert Brandom, and so on.