Knowledge and its Limits

Hauptseminar, Summer 2022
Humboldt University, Berlin

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THU 14:00-16:00, DOR 24, R. 1404

Course Description

One of the central projects in epistemology has traditionally been to give an analysis of the concept of knowledge, i.e. a specification of the necessary and sufficient conditions that determine whether or not someone knows something. Typically, such approaches proceed by trying to analyse knowledge in terms of a combination of truth, belief, and other factors such as a justification. However, in his pioneering book Knowledge and Its Limits, Timothy Williamson argues that this explanatory programme should be reversed, developing a conception of epistemology on which knowledge itself is used to explain a variety of other phenomena such as belief, evidence, and assertion. On this picture, knowing is itself a mental state (like believing or imagining) but is a distinctively externalist state since one can only be in the state of knowing a proposition if that proposition is true. Exploring the "knowledge first" approach to epistemology, Williamson argues for a number of striking claims such as a) that one can know something without being in a position to know that one knows it, b) that we are often in a position to know that we are not being deceived, and c) that our evidence is just what we know. This course will examine the central aspects of Williamson's picture — its motivations, components, and consequences — and assess whether the radical departure from traditional epistemology that he recommends pays dividends, and is furthermore intended to provide a clear introduction to a broad range of central topics in epistemology.

Administrative Matters
Readings & Moodle course
- o   Purchasing Williamson's *Knowledge and its Limits* (OUP, 2000) might make sense for this course, but it is not necessary as you can access the book via the library's online resources. Links will be made available on Moodle.
- o   The password for the moodle course is "E=K".

Assignments
Reading notes:
Over the course of the semester you'll have to submit at least four short reading notes (~ 1 page) commenting on the week's readings. These should:

  (i)   briefly state the project and main theses of the relevant chapter;
  (ii)   take note of clarificatory questions you may have;
  (iii) sketch one argument from the chapter you found particularly compelling;
  (iv) formulate one objection to one of the arguments in the chapter.

The point of the reading notes is to facilitate your and our preparation. They will <u>not</u> be graded.

Deadlines:
Please submit your readings notes **at least 24h prior** to each session **via Moodle**, so **by Wednesday 2pm**.

Assessment
Final paper:
To do the "Modulabschlussprüfung" in this seminar, you'll have to write a final paper at the length stated in the examination guidelines of your course. The topic **must** be discussed with us in advance.

Contact Details

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Office Hours: By appointment. Just e-mail us.

Note: We try to answer all e-mails swiftly, nevertheless it can happen that something slips through. So if after a few days you haven't received a response, just send a reminder—you'd be doing us a favour!

Syllabus

[1]   *21.04.22*   Introduction

Readings: Timothy Williamson (2000): *Knowledge and its Limits,* Introduction

[2]   *28.04.22*   Knowledge as the most general factive mental state

Readings: *Knowledge and its Limits,* Ch. 1

[3]   *05.05.22*   Against Internalism

Readings: *Knowledge and its Limits,* Ch. 2

[4]   *12.05.22*   Knowledge and Action

Readings: *Knowledge and its Limits,* Ch. 3

[5]   *19.05.22*   Against Transparency

Readings: *Knowledge and its Limits,* Ch. 4

[6]   *26.05.22*   **no class (Ascension Day)**

[7]   *02.06.22*   Margin for Error Explanations
NB: double session, 12:00-16:00.

Readings: *Knowledge and its Limits,* Ch. 5-6

[8]   *09.06.22*   Against Sensitivity

Readings: *Knowledge and its Limits,* Ch. 7

[9]   *16.06.22*   Scepticism

Readings: *Knowledge and its Limits,* Ch. 8

[10]   *23.06.22*   E=K

Readings: *Knowledge and its Limits,* Ch. 9

[11]   *30.06.22*   Assertion

Readings: *Knowledge and its Limits,* Ch. 11

[12]   *07.07.21*   Final Discussion
No readings