

Scheme of Work  
for  
**Epistemology: The Theory of Knowledge**

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Philosophy in Focus

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The authors welcome feedback and comments on the *Philosophy in Focus* series.

## **Scheme of Work for *Epistemology: The Theory of Knowledge***

Based on 2 x 1hr. 40 mins. sessions per week

**Prior learning** No prior knowledge of philosophy is required.

**Expectations** **Having completed the module students will be able to:**  
Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the topics covered (to meet A.Q.A. Assessment Objective 1); be able to select, apply and illustrate such knowledge effectively (to meet Assessment Objective 2); interpret and critically evaluate the philosophical positions and arguments covered (to meet Assessment Objective 3).

### **Week 1**

Induction

What is philosophy?

The syllabus

How to study philosophy

*Activities*

*Objectives*

Students will be able to:

Understand the nature of philosophical inquiry and its value and how best to approach the study of philosophy.

Understand the structure of the specification.

### **The Theory of Knowledge: 13 weeks**

#### **Week 2**

(pp. 1–6)

Chapter 1: Introduction

*Activities*

Time Capsule p. 2

Questionnaire, p.6

*Objectives*

Students will be have:

Begun to explore the nature of knowledge and belief.

They will recognise the importance of knowledge to our lives, and understand in outline the nature of epistemology and of the topics covered on the course.

#### **Week 3**

## Chapter 2: Knowledge and justification

(pp. 7–20)

How do we justify our beliefs?

Philosophical scepticism

The infinite regress of justification and scepticism

### *Activities*

Experimenting with ideas, p.8, p.16-19, p20

### *Objectives*

Students will be able to:

Identify different types of justification; distinguish philosophical and ordinary scepticism; understand and be able to explain the infinite regress of justification argument and its implications. They will have explored their own ideas of how to resist the sceptic.

*Homework:* Assignment 1: Reading of *Meditation 1*

## **Week 4**

(pp. 21–26)

Defeating scepticism

Descartes' method, the *cogito* and transcendental arguments

### *Activities*

p.25

### *Objectives*

Students be familiar with and be able to explain Descartes's arguments in *Meditation 1*. They will understand what is meant by a 'transcendental' argument.

## **Week 5**

(pp. 26–36)

Further ways of defeating scepticism, e.g. mitigated scepticism, the appeal to ordinary language and common sense

### *Activities*

p.34, p.36 Revision of the key points of the chapter.

### *Objectives*

Students will be able to evaluate different sceptical arguments and be able to write exam-style responses on scepticism.

*Homework:* Assignment 2: Exam style question on Philosophical scepticism

## **Week 6**

### Chapter 3: Rationalism, empiricism and the structure of knowledge

(pp. 37–50)

The sources of knowledge

The *a priori* and the empirical

Rationalism and scepticism about rational knowledge

#### *Activities*

p.38, p.45

#### *Objectives*

Students will be able to identify different sources of knowledge; understand and be able to explain the main features of rationalism and be familiar with the systems of key rationalist thinkers; and be able to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses.

Homework: Assignment 3: Exam-style question on Rationalism

## **Week 7**

(pp. 51–61)

Empiricism

The certainty of sensation

Empiricist foundationalism

#### *Activities*

p.52

#### *Objectives*

Students will understand and be able to explain the main features of empiricism: its foundationalist account of justification, and of its account of how we form concepts.

## **Week 8**

(pp.61–71)

Problems with empiricism

Can sense data be the foundation of knowledge?

#### *Activities*

p.62

#### *Objectives*

Students will be able to evaluate the empiricist foundationalist accounts of how we form concepts and of how knowledge is justified.

## **Week 9**

(pp. 71–83)

Coherentism and reliabilism

*Activities*

pp.72, 73, 77

p.83 Revision of key points of Chapter 3

*Objectives*

Students will be able to contrast foundationalism with coherentism and evaluate them, and be familiar with the main features of reliabilism.

## **Week 10**

Chapter 4: Knowledge and perception

(pp. 84–98)

Realism and anti-realism

Naïve realism

The primary/secondary quality distinction

*Activities*

p.84, p.86, p.94

*Objectives*

Students will: have explored some of the puzzles surrounding perception; have understood the distinction between realism and anti-realism; be able to evaluate naïve realism and be able to explain the arguments for the primary secondary quality distinction.

## **Week 11**

(pp. 98–109)

Representative realism and difficulties

Is there a physical world?

Idealism introduced

*Activities*

Drawing

p.105

*Objectives*

Students will understand representative realism and be able to evaluate it.

Homework: Assignment 4: Exam style question on philosophy of perception

## **Week 12**

(pp. 109–122)

Difficulties with idealism

Phenomenalism

*Activities*

pp.112, 115, 116, 119

p.121 Revision of key points of chapter 4.

*Objectives*

Students will be able to explain idealism and phenomenalism and evaluate them.

### **Week 13**

Chapter 5: The concept of knowledge

(pp. 123–133)

Different types of knowledge

Knowing that and believing that

Defining factual knowledge: justified, true belief

*Activities*

pp.126, 128, 129

*Objectives*

Students will have explored our ordinary concept of knowledge, and understood and be able to evaluate the tripartite definition.

### **Week 14**

(pp. 130–142)

Problems with the JTB account

Gettier

Conclusion

*Activities*

p.138,

p.142 Revision of key points of chapter.

Revision of key points of all chapters.

*Objectives*

Students will be able to understand and make up their own Gettier's counter-examples.

Homework: Assignment 5: Evaluative response on JTB

## Assignment 1            Reading of Meditation 1

Read Descartes' first *Meditation* and write short (3 - 6 sentence) answers to the following questions:

Identify:

- (i) Why Descartes resolves to rid himself all the opinions he had adopted up until now.
- (ii) Why in order to destroy his opinions he will not need to prove them false.
- (iii) Why he should not trust his senses.
- (iv) Why Descartes (initially) suggests he cannot reasonably doubt that he is sitting by the fire.
- (v) What Descartes' reasons are for supposing he could be asleep now.
- (vi) Why he supposes (provisionally) that his eyes, head, hands etc. are not imaginary.
- (vii) What remains 'certain and indubitable' even if he is asleep.
- (viii) Those things about which an all powerful God could deceive him.
- (ix) What he reckons would be contrary to God's goodness.
- (x) Why Descartes entertains the possibility that there is evil demon.
- (xi) Why Descartes likens himself to a slave.

## Assignment 2: Exam-style question on scepticism

Write a response to the following exam-format question.

- a) Briefly explain what is meant by philosophical scepticism. (6 marks)
- b) Outline and illustrate two ways in which beliefs can be justified.  
(15 marks)
- c) Assess whether or not scepticism can be defeated. (24 marks)

In answering exam questions it is important that you pay attention to the Assessment Objectives for which marks are awarded. There are 3 Assessment Objectives in the Philosophy A-level on which you will be judged, namely:

*Knowledge and Understanding*

*Selection and Application*

*Interpretation and Evaluation*

The marks for Unit 1 questions are distributed as follows:

- a) **6** for Knowledge and Understanding.
- b) **6** for knowledge and Understanding, and **9** for Selection and Application.
- c) **6** for Knowledge and Understanding, **9** for Selection and Application and **9** for Interpretation and Evaluation.

### **Assignment 3: Exam-style question on rationalism**

Write a response to the following exam-format question.

- a. Briefly explain what is meant by *a priori* knowledge.  
(6 marks)
- b. Outline and illustrate the view that all our beliefs are justified by experience.  
(15 marks)
- c. Assess the limitations of rationalism as an account of the nature of human knowledge.  
(24 marks)

#### **Assignment 4: Exam-style question on philosophy of perception**

Write a response to the following exam-format question.

- a) Briefly explain what is meant by idealism. (6 marks)
- b) Outline and illustrate **two** arguments for the primary secondary quality distinction. (15 marks)
- c) Assess whether representative realism gives a convincing account of the nature of perception. (24 marks)

## Assignment 5: Critical question on JTB

(c) *Critically assess the view that knowledge is justified true belief.*  
(24 marks)

### **Introduction**

The traditional analysis of knowledge claims that it is justified true belief. This means that if S knows that p, then S has a belief that p, p is true, and p is justified. These conditions are supposed to be (1) *individually necessary*, and (2) *jointly sufficient* for knowledge. In other words you have knowledge if and only if you have a justified true belief. So to answer the question we will *first* ask whether each conditions is necessary for knowledge. And *secondly* ask if together they are sufficient for knowledge.

#### (1) Are the JTB conditions individually necessary?

If we can show that any of these conditions is unnecessary than knowledge is not justified true belief.

- *Is the belief condition necessary?*

(Give objections and counter-examples, i.e. arguments and examples to show that we can or that we cannot have knowledge without *belief*.)

- *Is the truth condition necessary?*

(Give objections and counter-examples, i.e. arguments and examples to show that we can or that we cannot have knowledge without *truth*.)

- *Is the evidence condition necessary?*

(Give objections and counter-examples, i.e. arguments and examples to show that we can or that we cannot have knowledge without *evidence*.)

#### (2) Are the JTB conditions jointly sufficient?

We've examined whether each condition is needed for knowledge. So now we must ask whether together they're sufficient. If Gettier succeeds in giving an example of justified true belief which is not knowledge than (clearly) knowledge is not justified true belief.

- *Gettier counter example*

(Give your own Gettier-example.)

*An optional harder final paragraph*

- *Responses to Gettier.*

(Give a response to Gettier, e.g. indefeasibility.)