

Epistemology: Capita Selecta (A000143)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 5.0 **Study time 150 h**

Course offerings and teaching methods in academic year 2025-2026

A (semester 1)	Dutch	Gent	lecture
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Lecturers in academic year 2025-2026

Vanrie, Wim	LW01	lecturer-in-charge
Beck, Pieter	LW01	co-lecturer

Offered in the following programmes in 2025-2026

Master of Science in Teaching in Arts and Humanities (main subject Philosophy)	5	A
Master of Arts in Philosophy	5	A
Research Master of Arts in Philosophy	5	A

Teaching languages

Dutch

Keywords

Hinge epistemology, deep disagreement, Ludwig Wittgenstein

Position of the course

Person A believes that abortion is murder because the fetus has a soul from conception. This is argued on religious grounds. Person B believes that abortion is not murder, because the fetus does not develop the physiological structures necessary for experiences, pain, consciousness, and the like until later in pregnancy. This is argued on scientific grounds.

This is an example of what is called deep disagreement in the literature. It is a disagreement that takes place at the level of fundamental principles, and is therefore difficult to settle argumentatively. It is not so much a clash between opinions, but between worldviews. Any argument A puts forward will assume their religious perspective, and vice versa for B and their scientific perspective.

In contemporary literature, deep disagreement is regularly linked to hinge epistemology, a field of research that goes back to Ludwig Wittgenstein's late work 'On Certainty'. Hinge epistemology examines the epistemological status of the fundamental principles (called 'hinge propositions') that structure our knowledge practices. This can concern scientific knowledge, such as the principle 'The Earth moves around the Sun' within astronomy. But it also concerns more everyday matters, such as 'Tires only lose air through an opening' within the knowledge practice of bicycle repair.

In this advanced course, we explore both themes—deep disagreement and hinge epistemology—in order to gain insight into the nature and structure of knowledge practices, the role of fundamental principles in those practices, how knowledge practices can be intertwined with a particular worldview, and what happens when different knowledge practices and/or worldviews clash with one another.

Contents

The central text is 'On Certainty' by Ludwig Wittgenstein, which is the founding source of hinge epistemology. We will read it alongside contemporary texts on hinge epistemology and deep disagreement. A specific (yet to be determined) case of deep disagreement will be presented, which will structure our reflections. Central questions include the following:

- What structure do our knowledge practices have? In what way do they rely on

certain fundamental principles or not?

- How should we understand the epistemological status of such principles? What role do they play in our knowledge practices?
- Is a knowledge practice primarily a matter of having opinions, or of performing certain actions? How do these dimensions relate to each other?
- How should we understand deep disagreement—disagreement about fundamental principles? Can deep disagreement be settled rationally, or are we here reaching the limits of the use of 'good arguments'?

Initial competences

Having successfully finished the course Epistemology I, or an equivalent.

Final competences

- 1 To understand the central questions and problems of contemporary debates concerning hinge epistemology and deep disagreement
- 2 Understanding the historical background of hinge epistemology in Ludwig Wittgenstein's work 'On Certainty'
- 3 Being able to autonomously read and analyse contemporary texts on these themes
- 4 Being able to autonomously articulate and support one's own position on these themes
- 5 Being able to autonomously reflect on specific cases of deep disagreement

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is unrestricted: the student takes into consideration the conditions mentioned in 'Starting Competences'

Conditions for exam contract

Access to this course unit via an exam contract is unrestricted

Teaching methods

Lecture

Extra information on the teaching methods

The classes consist of a presentation and discussion of the course material.

Study material

Type: Handbook

Name: On Certainty
 Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
 Optional: no
 Language : English
 Author : Ludwig Wittgenstein
 ISBN : 0-631-16940-7
 Available in the Library : Yes

Type: Syllabus

Name: Primary texts
 Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
 Optional: no
 Language : English
 Available on Ufora : Yes
 Additional information: Additional texts will be made available through Ufora or the library.

References

Course content-related study coaching

After appointment, by the teacher.

Assessment moments

end-of-term and continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Written assessment open-book

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Written assessment open-book

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Participation, Presentation

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible

Extra information on the examination methods

- Continuous assessment: Individual presentations on the covered topics are given to the whole group, each time followed by a Q&A. Students are also evaluated on their participation in the Q&A of the other presentations.
- End-of-term: Open book exam testing the student's insight into the covered topics.
- Using any generative AI-system in making the assignments is explicitly forbidden and may lead to a disciplinary procedure.

Calculation of the examination mark

- Continuous: 50%
- End-of-term: 50%
- Only the total grade determines whether one has passed the course.

Facilities for Working Students

- Class attendance is not mandatory, but highly recommended.
- Attendance of the presentations is mandatory for the continuous assessment.
- No online/digital facilities (lectures take place on campus, without recordings).
- It is possible to take the exam at a different time within the regular exam period.
- Possibility to receive feedback at another time: by appointment.

For more information concerning flexible learning: contact the monitoring service of the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy