GHENT UNIVERSITY

Course Specifications

Valid as from the academic year 2025-2026

Epistemology II (A001235)

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 2026-2027

A (semester 1)	Dutch	Gent	independent work
			lecture

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

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

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027	**crdts**	**offering**
Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy	5	A

Teaching languages

Dutch

Keywords

Rationality, epistemic relativism, epistemic absolutism, science, objectivity, historical epistemology, social epistemology, epistemic values and virtues, tacit knowledge, anti-representationalism, expertise, Kuhn

Position of the course

In this in-depth course, we will start from a critical reading of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* to explore various epistemological issues. We will compare Kuhn's *Structure* with Paul Boghossian's *Fear of Knowledge*. Special attention will be given to Boghossian's criticism of epistemic relativism and constructivism. We will investigate whether Kuhn and Boghossian (implicitly or explicitly) start from a different view on the nature of knowledge, which leads them to draw different epistemological conclusions. We will explore the implications of both views for questions regarding the relationship between science and other epistemic practices, and the place of science in society.

Contents

We start from Kuhn's attempt to trace the rationality of scientific practices back to the nature of their historical developmental processes. This analysis contains some innovative epistemological ideas, but has also been criticized for its relativistic and anti-objectivistic implications. We will specifically look at Paul Boghossian's criticism, which he developed in his *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism*. We will also compare the epistemological implications of Kuhn's work with the view on knowledge central to "classical", analytic epistemology, in which knowledge is defined as "justified, true belief". We investigate whether and how Kuhn departs from this tradition and how this can help provide an explanation for Boghossian's critique.
We additionally pay attention to the implications of these insights for the place of science in society, in relation to other knowledge practices. Topics discussed: underdetermination of theories by empirical evidence, theory-ladenness of perception, the historical and social nature of (scientific) knowledge, epistemic values and virtues, non-propositional knowledge, anti-representationalism, rationality, relativism and objectivism, the nature of expertise.

Initial competences

The student has successfully completed the course Epistemology I, or has acquired

the relevant competences in another way.

Final competences

1 Having an understanding of the epistemological implications of Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.
2 Having an understanding of the anti-relativistic criticism of Boghossian on Kuhn's work.
3 Being able to identify the similarities and differences between the epistemological assumptions of Kuhn and Boghossian.
4 Being able to bring the epistemological implications of Kuhn's work in dialogue with the classical definition of knowledge as "justified, true belief."
5 Having an understanding of the epistemological relevance of non-propositional aspects of knowledge such as skills, values, and virtues.
6 Having an understanding of the relationship between the specific question of the status of scientific knowledge and the broader epistemological question concerning the general nature of knowledge.
7 Being able to correctly use crucial concepts used in the debates concerning the rationality of science (paradigm, incommensurability, theory-ladenness, ...).
8 Understanding the implications of underdetermination and theory-ladenness for scientific rationality.
9 Being able to put the debates concerning the rationality of science in a wider philosophical context.
10 Being able to assess the relevance of the debates concerning the rationality of science for the place of science in our society.
11 To be able to make an epistemological analysis of a social case in which expertise plays a role.

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, Independent work

Extra information on the teaching methods

In addition to Kuhn's book, a number of texts must be read in preparation for the lectures.

Study material

Type: Handbook

Name: The Structure of Scientific Revolutions
Indicative price: € 16
Optional: no
Language : English
Author : Thomas Kuhn
ISBN : 978-0-22645-812-0
Online Available : No
Available in the Library : Yes
Available through Student Association : Yes
Usability and Lifetime within the Course Unit : not applicable

Type: Handouts

Name: Other reading material
Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty
Optional: no
Additional information: Other reading material will be made available through Ufora or by other means.

References

Course content-related study coaching

By the lecturer, on appointment.

Assessment moments

end-of-term and continuous assessment

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

Oral assessment, Presentation

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

Oral assessment, Presentation

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible

Extra information on the examination methods

- And-of-term assessment: Two essays must be written during the semester, and feedback will be provided on each essay.
- Continuous assessment: oral examination
- The use of any kind of generative AI for either the assignments or the examination is strictly prohibited and can lead to disciplinary measures.

Calculation of the examination mark

Essays: 50%; Exam: 50%

Facilities for Working Students

Facilities:

1 Possible exemption from educational activities requiring student attendance
2 Possible rescheduling of the examination to a different time in the same academic year
3 Feedback can be given during an appointment during and after office hours

Extra information:
For more information concerning flexible learning: contact the monitoring service of the faculty of Arts and philosophy