

Course Description

Title	The Epistemology of Modality
Type	Seminar (SE)
Time/Place	Monday, 5-6:30 pm (weekly) / SR 09.53
Content	<p>Let's set aside skepticism for a moment. Let's also suppose you have normal eyesight, that you are not color-blind and that the light in the following scenario is entirely ordinary. Looking at my car you will come to know that it is blue. Epistemology is concerned with the story of <i>how</i> you come to know this. That it's blue, however, is not the only thing you know about my car. You also know that (even though it is actually blue) it <i>could have been</i> red. You know that—being a car—it <i>could not have</i> failed to be a material object. The epistemology of modality, a flourishing discipline in contemporary theoretical philosophy, is concerned with the story of how we come to know these and other <i>modal propositions</i>.</p> <p>The epistemology of modality, in other words, poses the question of how we know (or have justified belief of) what is possible and what is necessary. In the last couple of years, many answers have been proposed. An initially plausible account is that we judge that some scenario is possible when we can <i>conceive</i> or <i>imagine</i> it. Yet, how reliable is this path to possibility? What about the fallibility of our imaginative exercises? Might there be possibilities that are not conceivable? Some philosophers have suggested that we can simply rely on our <i>modal intuitions</i> when pondering the modal status of a proposition. If this is so, where do these intuitions come from? Maybe our ability to competently judge the modal status of (some) propositions can be traced back to our ability to understand and evaluate counterfactual conditionals. Are there <i>empirical</i> ways to modality? Can we, for instance, say that we <i>see</i> that something is possible? Might our modal knowledge come from our knowledge of the essences or natures of things? If yes, how does the latter come about?</p> <p>These questions will take center-stage in the seminar. We will set the scene with an introduction to the most influential accounts of the last two decades. We will then go on to read and discuss the recent research literature in this exciting field.</p>
Previous Knowledge Expected	This is an advanced course. Prior experiences in logic and theoretical philosophy (as well as good English skills) are expected.
Language of Instruction	English
Objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an excellent preparation on the field of the epistemology of modality. • Get a good sense of what it is like to study philosophy at a more advanced level, engaging closely with vast, specialized literature and trying to develop your own point of view on the topic. • Develop your skills in presenting philosophical arguments clearly and effectively. These skills will prove extremely useful in a number of other contexts. • Gain the ability to write a long philosophy essay, in which you will attempt to present your own thesis and give clear, rigorous arguments in its defense. Writing an essay of this length requires good preparation and reflection on the themes of the module: this will be very useful in other courses and in preparing your dissertation.
Teaching and Learning Method	interactive
Assessment	obligatory attendance in class, participation in discussion, short written homework assignments, maybe short presentations, final paper
Reading	<p>Kment, B. (2017): "Varieties of modality", <i>The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> (Spring 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/modality-varieties/>.</p> <p>Legg, C. & Franklin, J. (2017): "Perceiving Necessity", in: <i>Pacific Philosophical Quarterly</i>, 98 (3).</p> <p>Lemos, N. (2007): <i>An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge</i>. Cambridge: CUP.</p> <p>Lowe, E. J. (2008): "Two Notions of Being: Entity and Essence", in: <i>Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement</i>, 62, pp. 23-48.</p> <p>Lowe, E. J. (2012): "What Is The Source Of Our Knowledge Of Modal Truths?", in: <i>Mind</i>, 121 (484), pp. 919-950.</p>

- Pappas, G. (2017): "Internalist vs. Externalist Conceptions of Epistemic Justification", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/justep-intext/>.
- Roca-Royes, S. (2011): "Conceivability and De Re Modal Knowledge", in: *Noûs*, 45 (1), pp. 22-49.
- Strohmingner, M. (2015): "Perceptual Knowledge of Non-Actual Possibilities", in: *Philosophical Perspectives*, 29 (1), pp. 363-375.
- Strohmingner, M. & Yli-Vakkuri, J. (2017): "The epistemology of modality", in: *Analysis*, 77 (4), pp. 825-838.
- Tahko, T. E. (2017): "Empirically-Informed Modal Rationalism" in: R.W. Fischer & F. Leon (eds.), *Modal Epistemology After Rationalism*. Dordrecht: Springer, Synthese Library, pp. 29-45.
- Tahko, T. E. (2018): "The Epistemology of Essence", in: A. Carruth, S.C. Gibb & J. Heil (eds.), *Ontology, Modality, Mind: Themes from the Metaphysics of E. J. Lowe*. OUP, pp. 93-110.
- Vaidya, A. (2017): "The epistemology of modality", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/modality-epistemology/>.
- Williamson, T. (2007): "Philosophical Knowledge and Knowledge of Counterfactuals", in: *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, 74 (1), pp. 89-123.
- Yli-Vakkuri, J. (2013): "Modal skepticism and counterfactual knowledge", in: *Philosophical Studies*, 162, pp. 605-623.