



## **Foundations of Epistemology: Scepticism**

The figure of the philosophical sceptic occupies a central place in philosophy—from antiquity to contemporary analytic epistemology. The sceptic asks us whether we can know anything. The problem of philosophical scepticism consists in how we ought to deal with the sceptic. Can we answer them? Can we refute their argument? If we can't, does this reveal something deep about human knowledge? Can we be sceptics and live without knowledge at all? Or can we just ignore the sceptic? This master-level course introduces the different sceptical arguments through seminal historical expositions before turning to the main strategies of answering the sceptic in current epistemology.

### **Examination**

Since this seminar is the basic module 1 (BM1) for the Master of Arts: Knowledge and Society all students have to write a term paper of not more than 6'000 words. If you would like the paper under my supervision please contact me before the end of term, i.e., 6.2.26, to arrange a preliminary meeting.

### **Participation Requirements**

There won't be any student presentations. Reading of the set texts is mandatory. A week in advance I will upload some questions intended to guide your reading and facilitate preparation (here: [pablohubacherhaerle.ch/scepticism](https://pablohubacherhaerle.ch/scepticism), the password is "certainty2025"). Moreover, everyone is required to send me—via email to [pablo.hubacher@icloud.com](mailto:pablo.hubacher@icloud.com)—two different questions about something they didn't understand or want to discuss until Tuesday evening. In our session on Wednesday we will then discuss all of those questions.

### **Time and Place**

The seminar takes place on Wednesdays from 14–15:30 in room 4.202.



## SYLLABUS

### 1. 15.10.2025: Welcome

No primary reading.

Further reading:

- Comesaña, Juan & Peter Klein (2024), “Skepticism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), [URL](#)
- Hookway, Christopher (1990), *Scepticism*, London: Routledge
- DeRose, Keith (1999), “Introduction” in DeRose, Keith & Warfield, Ted A. (eds.) (1999). *Skepticism: Contemporary Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press.

## BLOCK 1: HISTORICAL SCEPTICS

### 2. 22.10.2025: Pyrrhonism

Primary Reading:

- Sextus Empirics (2<sup>nd</sup> / 3<sup>rd</sup> Century), *Outlines of Scepticism* (ed and trans. Annas & Barnes 1994): Book 1 (pp. 1–64)  
[If pressed for time read sections i-xiv until the fifth mode (§§1-125 / pp. 3-32,) and section xv (§§164-177 / pp. 40-43).]

Further reading:

- Diogenes Laertius (3<sup>rd</sup> Century), “Pyrrho” and “Timon” (*Lives of Philosophers* IX.61–161), in *Pyrrhonian Skepticism in Diogenes Laertius*, Katja Vogt (ed.), Mohr Siebeck: pp. Katja Vogt (ed.): pp. 16–51.
- Hookway, Christopher (1990), *Scepticism*, London: Routledge: Chs. 1 & 2.
- Olfert, Christina M. M. (2015), “Skeptical Investigation and its Perks,” in *Pyrrhonian Skepticism in Diogenes Laertius*, Katja Vogt (ed.), Mohr Siebeck: pp. 147–170.
- Burnyeat, Myles (2012 [1980]), “Can the sceptic live his scepticism?” In: *Explorations in Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press: pp. 205–235.



### 3. 29.10.2025: Al-Ghazali #1

#### Primary Reading:

- Al-Ghazali (11<sup>th</sup> /12<sup>th</sup> Century) , “The Rescuer From Error” in Khalidi, Muhammad Ali (ed. & trans) (2005), *Mediaeval Islamic Philosophical Writings*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: pp. 59–98.

[Note that Khalidi’s translation of the title is somewhat idiosyncratic, the text is commonly known as “The Deliverance from Error”.]

#### Further Reading:

- Hadisi, Reza (forthcoming), “Ghazālī's epistemology”, In Kurt Sylvan, Ernest Sosa, Jonathan Dancy & Matthias Steup, *The Blackwell Companion to Epistemology*, 3rd edition. Wiley-Blackwell. [I highly recommend this short introduction to Ghazali’s argument.]
- Srinivasan, Amia (2019), “Genealogy, Epistemology and Worldmaking”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 119 (2): pp. 127-156.  
[I also highly recommend this Srinivasan paper, it’s my favourite contemporary paper period]

### 4. 05.11.2025: Al-Ghazali #2

#### Primary Reading:

- Hadisi, Reza (2021) “Ghazālī's Transformative Answer to Scepticism”, *Theoria*, 88(1): pp. 109-142.

[This is a rich and suggestive reconstruction of al-Ghazali’s argument. It presupposes some knowledge of the internalism/externalism debate about the nature of justification. The references below provide that.]

#### Further Reading:



- Goldman, Alvin I. (1979), “What is Justified Belief?” In George Pappas (ed.), *Justification and Knowledge: New Studies in Epistemology*. Boston: D. Reidel. pp. 1–25.  
[classic defence of externalism]
- Feldman, Richard, and Earl Conee (2001), “Internalism Defended.” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 38(1): pp. 1–18.  
[classic defence of internalism]
- Stroud, Barry (2002), “Understanding Human Knowledge in General”, in his *Understanding Human Knowledge: Philosophical Essays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: pp. 99–121.

#### 5. 11.11.2025: Descartes #1

Primary Reading:

- Descartes, Rene (2008 [1641]), *Meditations on First Philosophy*, (trans. M. Moriarty), Oxford: Oxford University Press: pp. 1–24 (Letter of Dedication, Preface to the Reader, Synopsis and First and Second Meditation).

Further Reading:

- Wilson, Catherine (2012), *Descartes's Meditations: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: Chs. 1 & 2.
- Hatfield, Gary (2002), *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Descartes' Meditations*, London: Routledge: Ch. 2.
- Williams, Bernard (2005 [1978]), *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*, London: Taylor & Francis Group: Chs. 1 & 2, Appendix 1 & 2.

[the most difficult introduction to Descartes of the three, but the most rewarding as well]

#### 6. 19.11.2025: Descartes #2

Primary Reading:

- Broughton Jane (2002), *Descartes' Method of Doubt*, Princeton: University Press.

Secondary Reading:



- Stroud, Barry (1984), *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press: Chs. 1–2.
- Nagel, Jennifer (2005), “Contemporary Skepticism and the Cartesian God”, *Canadian Journal Of Philosophy*, 35(3): pp. 465-49

### 7. 26.11.2025: Moore

#### Primary Reading

- Moore, G.E. (1959 [1925]), “A Defence of Common Sense” in *Philosophical Papers*: pp. 32–59.
- Moore, G.E. (1959 [1939]), “Proof of an External World” in *Philosophical Papers*: pp. 128-150.

#### Further Reading:

- McDowell, John (1982), “Criteria, Defeasibility and Knowledge”, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68: pp. 455-479.
- Pritchard, Duncan (2008), “McDowellian Neo-Mooreanism”, in In Adrian Haddock & Fiona Macpherson (eds.), *Disjunctivism: perception, action, knowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press: pp. 283–310.
- Pritchard, Duncan (2007), “How to be a Neo-Moorean”, in Goldberg, S. (ed.) *Internalism and Externalism in Semantics and Epistemology*, Oxford: Oxford University: pp. 68–99.
- Pryor, James (2000), “The Skeptic and the Dogmatist”, *Noûs* 34 (4): pp. 517–549.
- Wright, Crispin (2002), “(Anti-)sceptics simple and subtle: G. E. Moore and John McDowell”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (2): pp. 330-348.

### 8. 03.12.2025: Wittgenstein #1

#### Primary reading:

- Wittgenstein, L. (1969), *On Certainty*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, §§1–65



Further Reading:

- Moyal-Sharrock, D. & Pritchard, D. (2025), *Wittgenstein On Knowledge And Certainty*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**9. 10.12.2025: Wittgenstein #2**

Primary reading:

- McGinn, Marie (2021), “Wittgenstein on Certainty”, in her *Wittgenstein, Scepticism and Naturalism: Essays on the Later Philosophy*: Anthem Press: pp. 1–18.

Further Reading:

- Moyal-Sharrock, Danièle (2003), “Logic In Action: Wittgenstein's Logical Pragmatism And The Impotence Of Scepticism”, *Philosophical Investigations* 26(2): pp. 125-48.
- Wright, Crispin (1985), “Facts and Certainty”, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 71: pp. 429-472.
- Wright, Crispin (2004), “Warrant for nothing (and foundations for free)?”, *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 78 (1): pp. 167–212.

**10. 17.12.2025 Wittgenstein #3 (Scepticism about Other Minds)**

Primary Reading:

- Heal, Jane (2003), “What are Psychological Concepts for?” In her *Mind, Reason and Imagination: Selected Essays in Philosophy of Mind and Language*. Cambridge University Press: pp. 225-249.

Further Reading:

- Austin, J. L., (1979), “Other Minds”, in J. O. Urmson, & G. J. Warnock (eds.), *Philosophical Papers*, 3rd edn, Oxford University Press: pp. 76–116.
- McGinn, Marie (2021), “The Real Problem Of Others: Cavell, Merleau-Ponty And Wittgenstein On Scepticism About Other Minds”, in her *Wittgenstein, Scepticism and Naturalism: Essays on the Later Philosophy*: Anthem Press: pp. 19–30.



## BLOCK 3: CONTEMPORARY REPLIES TO SCEPTICISM

### 11. 07.01.2026 Neo-Pragmatism

#### Primary Reading:

- Rinard Susanna (2022), “Pragmatic Skepticism”, *Philosophical and Phenomenological Research*; 104(2): pp. 434–453.

#### Further Reading:

- Hookway, Christopher (2012), “Peirce and Scepticism”, in his *The Pragmatic Maxim: Essays on Peirce and pragmatism*, Oxford University Press: pp. 20–38.
- Hannon, Michael (2019), “Skepticism: Impractical, Therefore Implausible”, *Philosophical Issues*, 29 (1): pp. 143–158.
- Rinard, Suanna (2021), “Reasoning One’s Way Out Of Skepticism”, in McCain, K. & Poston, T. (eds.), *The Mysteries of Skepticism*, Brill: pp. 240–264.

### 12. 14.01.2026 Contextualism #1

#### Primary Reading:

- Lewis, David (1996), ‘Elusive knowledge’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (4):549 – 567.

#### Further Reading:

- Dretske, Fred (2004), “Externalism and Modest Contextualism.” *Erkenntnis*, 61(2/3): pp. 173–86.
- Williamson, Timothy, (2005), “Knowledge and scepticism”. In Frank Jackson & Michael Smith, *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press UK: pp.
- Marušić, Bersilav (2010), “Skepticism Between Excessiveness and Idleness”, *European Journal of Philosophy*, 18: pp. 60-83.



**13. 21.01.2026 Contextualism #2 (The Politics of Scepticism #1)**

Primary Reading:

- Ichikawa, Jonathan (2020), “Contextual Injustice”, *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 30(1): pp.1–30.
- [See also this interview in German for *Die Zeit* with Ichikawa: <https://www.zeit.de/kultur/2024-04/jonathan-ichikawa-zweifel-klimawandel-impfen/komplettansicht>]

**14. 28.01.2026 Contextualism #3 (The Politics of Scepticism #2)**

Primary Reading:

- McKenna, Robin & Ranalli, Christopher (forthcoming), “Skepticism and Conservatism”, *International Journal for the Study of Skepticism*, [URL](#).
- Levy, Neil (2025), “The Politics of Skepticism”, *Inquiry*: pp. 1–6, [URL](#).

**15. 04.02.2026 NO CLASS**