

# POLITICAL EPISTEMOLOGY

## Syllabus

### Semester 1

MODULE TUTOR: Dr. Rush Stewart  
LECTURE TIME: M 16:00-17:00  
SEMINAR TIME: M 17:00-18:00  
LOCATION (LECTURE AND SEMINAR): Philosophy Building, Room 605  
OFFICE HOURS: TBA  
CONTACT: [rush.stewart@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:rush.stewart@kcl.ac.uk)

## DESCRIPTION

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Political epistemology, put most simply, concerns issues at the intersection of epistemology and political philosophy/science/theory. On the one hand, politics provides a sustained setting for thinking about epistemological questions in a focused way. On the other hand, and more interestingly, political epistemology addresses important, even urgent, epistemological questions for political philosophy, questions at the center of popular political discourse as well as issues at the heart of policy making.

## AIMS

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The module aims to promote advanced critical perspectives on issues in political epistemology such as the epistemic standing of different political arrangements, the rational status of polarization and related phenomena, the effects of censorship, the roles of expertise and deliberation in social decision-making, and challenges involved in evidence-based policy.

## LECTURES AND SEMINARS

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This module runs for ten weeks. Each week, there is a one-hour lecture and a one-hour seminar. They are held consecutively in the same room.

## PREREQUISITES

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There are no formal prerequisites, although normally students taking this module will have taken the first year epistemology course (4AANB007 Epistemology I).

## KEATS

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Access to all materials relevant to the course, including readings and the current version of the syllabus, is available via [KEATS](#). Please check KEATS regularly for any announcements of modifications to the schedule or readings.

## ASSESSMENT

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This is an essay-based module. There is both a formative and a summative essay. Essay questions will be distributed in due course.

The **formative essay** does *not* count towards your degree. Formative essays are to be submitted via email by **16:00 Monday, November 7, 2022**. Formative essays must be completed by the deadline in order to receive feedback. This feedback is crucial for your summative assessment. From the [Student Handbook](#): “undergraduate formative essays are NOT a ‘draft’ of summative essays. You will be provided with separate essay questions for formative and summative coursework and a summative essay explicitly titled with a formative essay question will receive a mark of zero.”

The **summative essay** *does* count towards your degree. Summative essays are to be submitted via Turnitin by **16:00 Wednesday, January 11, 2023**.

For further information on assessment, including [what to do if you need an extension or you miss a deadline](#), please consult the [Student Handbook](#). An extension for a summative essay requires filing an MCF. The tutor cannot approve it.

## SCHEDULE

Please check [KEATS](#) regularly for any announcements of modifications to the schedule or readings.

All reading should either be available on [KEATS](#) or in the library. If you have difficulty accessing reading, please let me know.

Date	Topic
EPISTEMOLOGY AND POLITICAL ARRANGEMENTS	
26.09	<b>Epistemic Democracy</b> Anderson, “The Epistemology of Democracy” Brennan, <i>Against Democracy</i> , ch. 7
03.10	<b>Epistocracy</b> Brennan, <i>Against Democracy</i> , ch. 8
BELIEF DYNAMICS AND POLITICAL LIFE	
10.10	<b>Deliberation</b> Hedden, “Should Juries Deliberate?” Brennan, <i>Against Democracy</i> , ch. 3, § “Empirical Work on Deliberative Democracy,” pp. 62–67 (summarizes highlights of Mendelberg’s survey) Optional: Mendelberg, “The Deliberative Citizen: Theory and Evidence”
17.10	<b>Polarization, etc.</b> Nguyen, “Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles” Nielsen and Stewart, “Persistent Disagreement and Polarization in a Bayesian Setting,” §1 - §2.1 Brennan, <i>Against Democracy</i> , ch. 2, § “Political Tribalism,” pp. 39-43
24.10	<b>Censorship</b> Loury, “Self-Censorship in Public Discourse” Zollman, “The Communication Structure of Epistemic Communities” Optional: Zollman, “The Epistemic Benefit of Transient Diversity”
31.10	Reading Week
07.11	<b>Social Norms</b> Bicchieri and Fukui, “The Great Illusion: Ignorance, Informational Cascades, and the Persistence of Unpopular Norms” Optional: Bicchieri, <a href="#">Social Norms Are Bundles of Expectations</a> (video)
14.11	<b>Epistemic Injustice</b> Lackey, “Credibility and the Distribution of Epistemic Goods” Optional: Fricker, <i>Epistemic Injustice</i> , ch. 1
EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES IN POLICY-MAKING	
21.11	<b>Forecasting</b> Tetlock, <i>Expert Political Judgment</i> , pp. 1–19, 54–66 Tetlock, <i>Superforecasting</i> , chs. 4 and 9

28.11 **Evidence-Based Policy and RCTs**

Cartwright and Hardie, Evidence-Based Policy, ch. 1.A, pp.1–14

Deaton, *The Great Escape*, ch. 7, § “The Effectiveness of Development Projects,” pp. 273–277

05.12 No Class. We’ll have to make it up.

12.12 **The Value of Statistical Life**

Small, “On the Psychology of the Identifiable Victim Effect”

Daniels, “Can There Be Moral Force to Favoring an Identified over a Statistical Life?”