

# Epistemic Capacities and the Good

Participants: Anne Meylan, Kurt Sylvan, Heather Battaly, Chris Kelp, Maria Lasonen-Aarnio, and Mike Deigan.

Dates & Times: Friday 1<sup>st</sup> of April and Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> of April at 13:20-18:30 (CEST/UTC+2).

Description: This online workshop investigates the role of capacities in epistemology and their interaction with different sorts of norms. The workshop encourages exchange between scholars that focus upon either side of that interaction. It features work from virtue epistemologists that have been at the forefront of such developments. And it also features new approaches to the topic, like whether there are connections between abilities and epistemic norms or between capacities and internalism about justification.

**To register, please email [human-abilities@hu-berlin.de](mailto:human-abilities@hu-berlin.de) with the subject [Registration - Epistemic Capacities and the Good].**

The workshop is organized by the research project Capacities and the Good, funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). For more information and contact details, please go to <https://www.capacities-and-the-good.de/>. Further questions and inquiries can be directed to christian[dot]kietzmann[at]fau[dot]de.

<b>Schedule</b>			
<b>EDT</b>	<b>UTC+2</b>	<b>Fri 1st April</b>	<b>Sat 2nd April</b>
7:20-7:30	13:20-13:30	Welcome	
7:30-9:00	13:30-15:00	Chris Kelp: <b>Defeat and Proficiencies</b>	Anne Meylan: <b>Reasons to suspend judgement: evidential, zetetic, practical</b>
9:15-10:45	15:15-16:45	Kurt Sylvan: <b>Internalism and capacities-first epistemology</b>	Maria Lasonen-Aarnio: <b>Knowledge-Conducive Dispositions: How to do Consequentialist Epistemology</b>
11:00-12:30	17:00-18:30	Heather Battaly: <b>Solidarity: Virtue or Vice?</b>	Mike Deigan: <b>Questions Should Have Answers</b>

# Abstracts

Christoph Kelp

## **Defeat and Proficiencies**

Virtue epistemology is the view that beliefs are attempts at truth (or perhaps knowledge) and, as a result, can be assessed as successful, competent, and apt. Moreover, virtue epistemology identifies central epistemic properties with normative properties of beliefs as attempts. In particular, knowledge is apt belief and justified belief is competent belief. This paper develops a systematic virtue epistemological account of defeat (of justification/competence). I provide reason to think that defeat occurs not only for beliefs but for attempts more general. The key constructive idea is that defeaters are evidence that attempting (in a certain way) isn't successful and that defeaters defeat the competence of an attempt when one stands in a certain normative relation to the defeater. I argue that while this account handles paradigm cases of defeat both within epistemology and beyond nicely, cases of external (sometimes also 'normative' or 'propositional') defeat continue to cause trouble. To handle these cases, I develop a distinctively functionalist version of virtue epistemology. This functionalist version of virtue epistemology allows me to countenance proficiencies, that is, roughly, abilities that have the function to produce successes under certain conditions. It is the normative import of proficiencies that delivers the normative relation that serves to explain defeat in cases of external defeat. In this way, the functionalist version of virtue epistemology ushers the way towards a satisfactory account even of external defeat.

Kurt Sylvan

## **Internalism and capacities-first epistemology**

This talk argues that the consistent pursuit of capacities-first epistemology leads to a novel form of internalism about epistemic normativity, which I call 'transcendental internalism', and redraws the internalism/externalism divide in light of this fact. It also argues that some common reasons for adopting externalism provide better support for transcendental internalism.

Heather Battaly

## **Solidarity: Virtue or Vice?**

What is group solidarity and is it always a virtue? This paper proposes a working analysis of the trait of group solidarity, and argues that the trait of group solidarity is not always a virtue.

It suggests that a group has the trait of solidarity to the extent that its members are disposed to: (1) share values, aims, or goals; (2) care about those values, aims, or goals; (3) act in accordance with those values, aims, or goals; (4) trust the testimony of other group members with respect to those values, aims, and goals; and (5) feel a sense of belonging to the group. It argues that the trait of group solidarity isn't always a virtue. For the trait of solidarity to be a virtue, the group's aims must be good (e.g., morally or epistemically), and the group must exercise good judgment, which reigns in excesses of the trait of solidarity. Without good judgment, too much solidarity can result in (or constitute) epistemic vices, e.g., mindless outsourcing, uncritical deference and conformity, self-silencing, and epistemic stagnation.

Anne Meylan

### **Reasons to suspend judgement: evidential, zetetic, practical.**

There is a growing debate about the normativity of suspension of judgement. What are the reasons to suspend judgement? The classical approach is as follows: just as for beliefs, the reasons to suspend are evidential. My first goal, in this presentation, is to review and evaluate some of the already existing arguments that tend to show that the evidentialist approach is misleading. A popular alternative to the evidentialist approach is the zetetic one in which the reasons to suspend judgement have to do with the good way of inquiring (Friedman forthcoming). In the second part of this presentation, I would like to show that the focus on the inquiry leads to an overly restrictive conception: it leaves out the practical reasons to suspend judgement. Just like the attitude of imagining that p, to suspend judgement as to whether p is an attitude that might be required for zetetic but also for practical reasons.

Maria Lasonen-Aarnio

### **Knowledge-Conducive Dispositions: How to do Consequentialist Epistemology**

An evaluative framework that deploys knowledge as its only standard seems impoverished. For one thing, a belief can be positively evaluable (and not merely blameless) from a distinctively epistemic perspective even if it does not constitute knowledge – indeed, even if it is false. Further, we should be able to evaluate suspending judgment. But at least on a rather standard view, suspending judgment cannot, as a state of committed neutrality, constitute knowledge.

I have argued that the missing evaluative standard can be found by looking at the knowledge-conduciveness of the dispositions manifesting as events of forming and retaining doxastic states. A doxastic state that falls short of knowledge can nevertheless be reasonable in virtue of being formed and retained by manifesting the most knowledge-conducive feasible

dispositions. Feasible dispositions are ones that are, in a relevant sense, available to be manifested by a subject. I have argued that the resulting view can solve a range of problems in epistemology, especially ones that have plagued externalist views. The basic framework, however, can be detached from a knowledge-first way of thinking. Moreover, dispositional evaluations apply straightforwardly not only to beliefs, but to actions and/or intentions: what we have is a general account of a more subjective kind of evaluation across different normative domains, one that is an alternative to what I have called perspectivism.

Given a rather broad way of understanding consequentialism, my epistemological framework looks consequentialist, for reasonable belief is understood in terms of a kind of conduciveness to knowledge. However, several authors have argued that any form of consequentialism faces an array of insurmountable objections. I focus on three prominent objections: the problem of trade-offs, suspension of judgment, and the so-called swamping problem. I argue that none of these have bite against the dispositional evaluative standard.

Michael Deigan

### **Questions Should Have Answers**

I propose and defend a norm of rationality linking wondering, belief, and abilities to conceive: one must not both wonder a question and reject all answers to it that one can conceive. This norm explains judgements about an array of cases, some of which cannot be explained by appeal to more familiar doxastic norms or zetetic instrumental norms. In particular, the posited norm explains our judgements about cases of rational conceptual innovation.

If I am right that there is such a norm, then norms of rationality extend beyond actions and attitudes to mental states which aren't attitudes at all, but rather abilities to have attitudes. On this view, to rationally inquire is not just to manage one's beliefs and evidence gathering activities well, but also to manage one's concepts well.