

College de France Lecture Summaries
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Lecture of 9 March, 2012: INTERPERSONAL SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Interpersonal social epistemology involves single epistemic agents who learn about other agents' statements or opinions and form or revise their own opinions in response. The fundamental case is an agent who hears the testimony of another decides to accept the statement as true. The theory of *testimony* is addressed to this question. When is an agent justified in doing so? What kinds of evidence does a hearer need to be justified in relying on another's testimony? Must he know the speaker's reliability on the subject in question? We often trust people we have never met before. Perhaps it suffices to know that people in general are reliable. Is such knowledge necessary? A special class of testimonial evidence is testimony by *experts*. When are novices (in a given domain) justified in trusting an expert? When they hear two experts deliver contradictory statements, which one should they trust and why? Five criteria of superior expertise are proposed and examined. A second problem in interpersonal social epistemology is the problem of *peer disagreement*. What should you do if you find another person, whom you respect as an intellectual peer and has exactly the same evidence you do, has a different opinion with respect to a proposition. She believes it but you do not. All your evidence has been shared but you still disagree. Can each of you reasonably "hold your ground" in the face of other's opposing view? Or must each of you change your belief and move in the other's direction? What does reason require?

Lecture of 19 March, 2012: INSTITUTIONAL SOCIAL EPISTEMOLOGY

Institutional social epistemology can be motivated by the interpersonal kind. Suppose a respected former government official recommends a new anti-terrorism practice based on his specialized experience. Should he (without prompting) disclose the fact that he stands to profit from this practice? Should there be a norm of public speech that requires this of speakers in the public sphere? What norms in general should govern public speech and media practices? These are institutional questions of social epistemology -- because speech and reporting practices bear on the public's warrant for belief. When journalists report various alleged facts, what should they be required to disclose about their sources? Another subject where institutional social epistemology can "weigh in" is the design of legal trials. How should trials be designed so as to elicit the greatest proportion of accurate verdicts? How do the two principal traditions of Western law -- the civil-law and common-law traditions -- compare in this respect? How might each be improved? Finally, what is the role of knowledge in a democracy? Epistemic approaches have gained popularity in recent democratic theory, partly because of Condorcet's jury theorem (CJT). How does CJT advance the theory of democracy? Where does other work in social epistemology fit within the theory of democracy?