Overview This course deals with collective and social aspects of knowledge, belief, justification, agency, and decision-making. We shall examine four topics:

- Justification conditions of testimonial belief

A friend of yours tells you that planet Earth is warming and human activity is the primary cause. Although you didn’t have any opinion about global warming before, based on your friend’s testimony you come to believe in global warming. Is your belief justified in this situation? Should you just believe what your friend says? Suppose that your friend is a climatologist. Would you be any more justified to believe in global warming? And if she was instead the CEO of an oil company? Under what conditions is somebody’s testimony sufficient to justify your beliefs? What sources are good epistemic sources?

- Peer disagreement

You and your friend disagree about a painting. You both have the same amount of knowledge about art and its history. You have common interests. And you are equally smart. You believe that Michelangelo painted The Calling of Saint Matthew. Instead, your friend believes that Michelangelo did not paint it. Should you revise your belief in the light of this disagreement? After all, if you are really epistemic peers—if you and your friend share all the relevant evidence about The Calling of Saint Matthew and have equally good reasoning skills—then you cannot both be correct. But could you be rational to stick to your own initial belief when you both know you have the same evidence and you respect one another as equally good reasoners?

- Group agency and judgement aggregation

Consider the following situation. Tilburg University wants to hire several Dante’s scholars because, it believes, they will attract a lot of new students. Isn’t it strange? After all, Tilburg University is not an individual human being. So, it cannot literally want to hire several Dante’s scholars and it cannot literally believe they will attract students. Yet, we often ascribe mental states like beliefs and desires to universities, and also to football teams, business companies, churches, courts, flocks of birds, and to many other groups indeed. When does a collectivity constitute a group agent with genuine beliefs and desires? Under what conditions do collective beliefs attain the status of group knowledge? And how should the various beliefs and desires of individual members be aggregated so that the group can reach a rational decision?

- Social epistemic systems and institutions

You need do some research, and want to rely on an encyclopaedia. You can consult either Wikipedia or the encyclopaedia Britannica. What should you do? Wikipedia should be more up-to-date than a traditional encyclopaedia like the Britannica. After all, an enormous army of volunteers create and modify its entries every day. But what about accuracy? You have no idea of the expertise and sincerity of the large, diverse, and anonymous crowd that keep modifying and re-modifying the entries in Wikipedia. Instead, the entries in the Britannica are written by a small number of recognized experts in their field. Is the Britannica more reliable then? Should you instead rely on the “wisdom of the crowd” encapsulated in Wikipedia? More generally, how does the social structure of systems like Wikipedia, but also of other knowledge-seeking enterprises like science, education and journalism, influence their chances of producing knowledge? How do social epistemic institutions influence the beliefs of their members and of the people that rely on them?
One book will guide us in our exploration:


You are expected to have a copy of this book by the start of this course.

For each class, you are expected to read the compulsory readings and to prepare for discussion.

Exam and grade regulations:
15% Class preparation and engagement with the course
30% Assignment 1 (max. 1000 words excluding references, deadline: 4 November)
30% Assignment 2 (max. 2000 words excluding references, deadline: 9 December)
25% Sit-in final exam. Check the online study guide for the date. Remember to register

The two assignments are to be handed in via email. Detailed instructions will be given at the beginning of the course.

Classes and Readings

Class 1
Date: 1 September
Topic: A gentle introduction to the content of the course and to all practical matters.
Read:

Class 2
Date: 5 September
Topic: Epistemic justice
Compulsory readings:

If you have time, read also:

Suggested readings:

Class 3
Date: 12 September
Topic: Trust and testimony
Compulsory readings:
- G&W: Chapter 4. Lackey “Testimony”

Suggested readings:

### Class 4
**Date:** 19 September
**Topic:** The epistemology of coverage.
**Compulsory readings:**
- G&W: Chapter 5, Goldberg “If that were true I would have heard about it by now.”

**Suggested readings:**

### Class 5
**Date:** 29 September
**Topic:** Expertise and experts.
**Compulsory reading:**
- G&W: Chapter 6, Goldman “Experts: Which ones should you trust?”

**Suggested readings:**

### Class 6
**Date:** 06 October
**Topic:** Disagreement about religious matters.
**Compulsory reading:**
- G&W, Chapter 7, Feldman “Reasonable Religious Disagreement”

**Suggested readings:**
Class 7
Date: 13 October
Topics: Disagreement and the reflection principle
Compulsory reading:
  - G&W, Chapter 8, Elga “Reflection and Disagreement”

Suggested reading:

Class 8
Date 27 October
Topic: Peer disagreement as evidence
Compulsory reading:
  - G&W, Chapter 9: Kelly “Peer Disagreement and Higher Order Evidence”

Suggested readings:

Class 9
Date: 3 November
Topic: Judgement and preference aggregation
Compulsory reading:
  - G&W, Chapter 10: List “Group Knowledge and Group Rationality”

Suggested readings:

Class 10
Date: 7 November
Topic: Presentation of your own essay.

Class 11
Date: 17 November
Topic: Group agency
Compulsory readings:
  - G&W, Chapter 11: Pettit “Groups with Minds of Their Own”

Suggested readings:

**Class 12**

Date: 24 November  
Topic: Social epistemology and the law  
Compulsory reading:  
- G&W, Chapter 12: Laudan “Thinking about Error in the Law”

Suggested readings:  

**Class 13**

Date: 1 December  
Topic: Wisdom of crowds?  
Compulsory reading:  
- G&W, Chapter 14: Sunstein “Deliberating groups versus prediction markets (or Hayek's challenge to Habermas)”

Suggested readings:  

**Class 14**

Date: 8 December  
Topic: The social organization of science  
Compulsory reading:  

Suggested readings:  
- G&W, Chapter 15: Zollman “The Communication Structure of Epistemic Communities”  