Formal Epistemology Reading Group

Iteration Principles in Formal Epistemology

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Iteration Principles in Formal Epistemology

Does knowledge iterate freely, in the sense that knowing p entails knowing that one knows p?

The principle was notoriously rejected by Timothy Williamson. Williamson argues that, since each additional iteration of knowledge imposes a non-trivial demand on one's epistemic state, freely iterated knowledge is unattainable. Much subsequent work in epistemology has taken Williamson's refutation as decisive and the iteration principles for knowledge as a non-starter.

Nevertheless, could iteration principles be vindicated? In the last decade, renewed attention has been given to iteration principles, looking both at where they might be needed, as well as how they can be attained. It has been suggested that iteration principles play an important role in assertion, inquiry, and action. The significance of iteration principles has in turn been taken to motivate exploring formal models of knowledge on which they hold, as well as the conditions required to vindicate such models.

This reading group has the objective to explore the growing literature on iteration principles and assess the case for their (re-)adoption. In reading the texts on the subject, we'll focus on the methods used by epistemic logic to model knowledge, as well as the abductive approach to theory-choice employed in contemporary analytic philosophy. By way of discussing knowledge iteration, we'll touch on various topics of interest in contemporary epistemology, such as skepticism, assertion, inquiry, the normality and fragmentariness of one's epistemic position, etc.

The reading group welcomes philosophers and students of philosophy of any level, as well as researchers/ students working in other fields. No substantial prior knowledge of formal epistemology and epistemic logic is required, as the plan is to cover some basic ground in the first weeks. Although the articles in focus are technical, the hope is that lively discussion will make them more accessible to everyone. To express interest, please contact the organiser through the email above.

Reading List

Background: Modelling Knowledge

1: Epistemic Logic

– Fagin et al. (2009), *Reasoning About Knowledge* (Chs. 1-2)

– M. Fitting R. Mendelsohn (1998), "Epistemic Logic" (pp. 28-32, *First-Order Modal Logic*)

2: Is There a Right Way to Model Knowledge?

– R. Stalnaker (2005), "On Logics of Knowledge and Belief"

[1] This is intended as a two-semester reading group, meeting three times a month.

Against Iteration I

3: Williamson: KK, Safety, Margins of Error

– T. Williamson (2000), "Anti-Luminosity" (Ch. 4 of *Knowledge and its Limits*)

– T. Williamson (2000), "Margins and Iterations" (Ch. 5 of *Knowledge and its Limits*)

4: Williamson: Highly Improbable Iteration

– T. Williamson (2014), "Very Improbable Knowing"

5: Common Iteration

– H. Lederman (2018), "Uncommon Knowledge"

  – Optional: D. Greco, "Modeling Common Knowledge", Ch. 7 of *Idealization in Epistemology*

Vindicating Iteration

6, 7: Why Iterate?

– S. Goldstein (2024), "Omega Knowledge Matters" (Ch. 1 of *Iterated Knowledge*)

– K. Dorst (2019), "Abominable KK Failures"

8: Fragmentation: Multiple Epistemic States?

– D. Greco (2015), "Iteration and Fragmentation"

9, 10: Normality: A Guide to Iteration?

– R. Stalnaker (2015), "Luminosity and the KK Thesis"

– D. Greco (2014), "Could KK be OK?"

11: Iteration and Knowledge of the Future

– C. Dorr, J. Goodman J. Hawthorne (2014), "Knowing Against the Odds"

– J. Goodman B. Salow (2018), "Taking a Chance on KK"

Weakening Iteration

12: Iteration and Knowability

– W. K. San (2023), "KK, Knowledge, Knowability"

13: Optimism about Iteration

– S. Goldstein (2022), "Fragile Knowledge"

Against Iteration II

14: Failures of Iteration without Margins of Error

– S. Carter (2024), "Brute Ignorance"

15: Iterating Normality

– S. Carter (2019), "Higher-Order Ignorance Inside the Margins"