**Epistemology Key Words**

These are the terms that are likely to be asked about in a 3 mark question.

**Ability knowledge**: this is knowledge about how to do something. It involves you being able to carry out a task using a skill you may or may not have learned. It is knowledge that you don’t need to explain and that doesn’t involve any facts.

**Acquaintance knowledge**: this is knowledge ‘of’ something. It is knowledge you acquire because you have become familiar with it through direct interaction. It is knowledge that you don’t need to explain and that doesn’t involve any facts.

**Analytic**: this refers to a statement where the predicate adds nothing to the subject. The statement is true based on the words used. You cannot deny them without there being a contradiction.

**A posteriori**: this means ‘after experience’. You can know something a posteriori because you have experienced it in some way.

**A priori**: this means ‘before experience’. Knowing something a priori means you cannot have experienced it.

**Belief**: is a thought about the world and the way it is.

**Clear and distinct ideas**: are ideas of truth that are self-evident. They are ideas that are both vivid and pure. They cannot be doubted. They are acquired in the mind through reasoning.

**Contingent**: refers to truths that could be otherwise. With respect to objects and people, they are contingent because they rely on other things for their existence and have a beginning and an end.

**Deduction/deductive arguments**: deductive arguments do not require experience for you to work them out. They present premises (propositional statements) that lead to a conclusion, and, if those premises are true, then the conclusion has to be true.

**Direct realism**: is an approach to perception that argues that we see the world directly, with no intermediary. The properties we perceive objects as having belong to those objects.

**Empiricism**: is an approach to knowledge that claims that all our knowledge is gained through experience.

**Epistemology**: this is a branch within philosophy. It is the philosophical study of knowledge. It is derived from the ancient Greek word ‘episteme’, which is a type of intellectual virtue that involves knowing as having a scientific understanding of things.

**Fact**: is a claim about the world that is the case.

**Fallibilism**: this is a position that allows for mistakes to be made.

**Hallucination**: this is when an object is perceived that does not exist.

**Hypothesis**: a proposed explanation of something.

**Idealism**: is an approach to perception that claims that perception consists of a perceiver and the sense data only. Objects are collections of ideas. Objects cease to exist if nobody is perceiving them because objects are in the mind of a perceiver.

**Illusion:** this is when an object appears differently from how it actually is.

**Induction/inductive arguments**: inductive arguments start with premises that are based on experience. You start with specific examples you have experienced and then you make a generalisation about all cases that are similar to your examples. The conclusions to inductive arguments are never 100% certain because you will never be able to experience absolutely everything for your conclusion to be certain. With your conclusion, you are just assuming that the same will be the case for all things based on what you have experienced.

**Indirect realism**: this is a realist theory that believes that there is a world external to our minds and that we perceive the world indirectly through an intermediary of sense data.

**Indubitable**: this means something cannot be doubted.

**Infallibilism**: this means something cannot be mistaken.

**Innatism**: this is the approach that claims that we are born with some ideas or knowledge.

**Intuition**: something mental, as opposed to a gut feeling. It is mental clarity that allows us to recognise truth. It is direct and non-referential knowledge.

**Justification**: evidence, testimony or observation for your belief.

**Lemma**: a step/premise in an argument.

**Metaphysics**: a branch of philosophy that studies the nature of reality and existence.

**Necessary:** describes a truth that will always be the case. It cannot be otherwise. Necessary truths are true in all possible worlds.

**Perceptual variation:** this is variation in perception, usually depending on the perceiver.

**Perspectival variation:** this is variation in perception, usually depending on the position the perceiver is taking.

**Possible worlds:** are all worlds, including worlds in addition to our world of everyday reality. This might include the dream world, the world if we lived on Mars, the world in a parallel universe and so on. It also includes all possible situations. This might be a situation in the past, a hundred years ago, a thousand years ago, the future and so on. Possible worlds refers to any possible scenario that is imaginable.

**Predicate**: this is the part of a statement that tells you something about the subject of the statement. For example, in the statement ‘John is married’, married is the predicate of the statement because it tells us something about John, the subject.

**Proposition**: is a factual statement. A statement that is truth-apt.

**Propositional knowledge**: this is knowledge that is factual. It is knowledge that can be true or false. It is knowledge ‘that’ something is the case.

**Rationalism**: is a school of thought that claims that reason is the most reliable source of knowledge.

**Realism**: the belief that there is a world external to the mind.

**Reliabilism**: a way of defining knowledge as true belief obtained through a reliable cognitive process.

**Scepticism**: in this course, it refers to philosophical scepticism, which is the position of doubting everything.

**Sense data**: this is the plural of sense datum. It is the information we receive through our five senses (sight, smell, sound, smell, taste and touch).

**Solipsism**: the idea that only your mind exists / the idea that you can only know your mind exists.

**Synthetic**: refers to statements that do not need to be shown to be true when we examine the terms used in the sentence. They need experience in order to be known.

**Tautology**: a proposition where the predicate does not add anything to the subject. It is saying the same thing in another way. Definitions tend to be tautological.

**Time lag:** a delay in perception due to light taking time to go from the object to the eye.

**Tripartite view**: this is the traditional way of defining knowledge according to what its components are. It is the view of Plato and defines knowledge as justified true belief (also known as JTB).

**Truth**: usually considered to be something that is the case in the world.

**Virtue epistemology**: an approach to defining knowledge that claims knowledge is true belief formed from an epistemic virtue being used. The focus is on the person and their application of their intellectual virtues.

Possible Exam Questions: Epistemology

1. What is knowledge?

Explain the tripartite definition of knowledge. (5 marks)

Explain why the justification condition of knowledge might not be necessary. (5 marks)

Explain why the belief condition of knowledge might not be necessary. (5 marks)

Explain why the truth condition of knowledge might not be necessary. (5 marks)

Explain what a Gettier case is. (5 marks)

Explain one of the **original** Gettier cases. (5 marks)

Explain what the infallibilist definition of knowledge is. (5 marks)

Explain the reliabilist definition of knowledge. (5 marks)

Explain the definition of knowledge which includes epistemic virtue. (5 marks)

Explain the tripartite definition of knowledge **and** how a Gettier case shows the conditions to be insufficient. (12 marks)

Explain the tripartite definition of knowledge and how an **original** Gettier case shows the conditions to be insufficient. (12 marks)

Explain an **original** Gettier case is and how adding a ‘no false lemmas’ condition might solve it. (12 marks)

Explain an **original** Gettier case is and how a reliabilist definition of knowledge might solve it. (12 marks)

Explain an **original** Gettier case is and how an account of epistemic virtue might solve it. (12 marks)

How should propositional knowledge be defined? (25 marks)

To what extent is the tripartite definition of knowledge the correct one? (25 marks)

To what extent is reliabilism the correct definition of knowledge? (25 marks)

To what extent does virtue epistemology give the correct definition of knowledge? (25 marks)

1. Perception as a source of knowledge

Explain the direct realist view of perception. (5 marks)

Explain the argument from illusion against direct realism. (5 marks)

Explain the argument from perceptual variation against direct realism. (5 marks)

Explain the argument from hallucination against direct realism. (5 marks)

Explain the time-lag argument against direct realism. (5 marks)

Explain the indirect realist view of perception. (5 marks)

Explain Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities. (5 marks)

Explain why indirect realism might lead to scepticism about the existence of mind-independent objects. (5 marks)

Explain Locke’s argument from the involuntary nature of our experience for the existence of mind-independent objects. (5 marks)

Explain the argument from the coherence of various kinds of experience for the existence of mind-independent objects. (5 marks)

Explain Russell’s argument that the existence of mind-independent objects is the ‘best hypothesis’. (5 marks)

Explain Berkeley’s argument that we cannot know the nature of mind-independent objects because mind-dependent ideas cannot be like mind-independent objects. (5 marks)

Explain Berkeley’s attack on the primary/secondary quality distinction (5 marks)

Explain Berkeley’s Master argument. (5 marks)

Explain why illusions might cause a problem for Berkeley’s idealism. (5 marks)

Explain why hallucinations might cause a problem for Berkeley’s idealism. (5 marks)

Explain why idealism might lead to solipsism. (5 marks)

Explain the role played by God in Berkeley’s idealism. (5 marks)

Explain the argument from illusion against direct realism and how indirect realism attempts to solve this problem. (12 marks)

Explain the argument from perceptual variation against direct realism. and how indirect realism attempts to solve this problem. (12 marks)

Explain the argument from hallucination against direct realism and how indirect realism attempts to solve this problem. (12 marks)

Explain the time-lag argument against direct realism and how indirect realism attempts to solve this problem. (12 marks)

Explain why indirect realism might lead to scepticism about the existence of mind-independent objects and Locke’s response from the involuntary nature of our experience. (12 marks)

Explain why indirect realism might lead to scepticism about the existence of mind-independent objects and the response from the coherence of various kinds of experience. (12 marks)

Explain why indirect realism might lead to scepticism about the existence of mind-independent objects and Russell’s response that the existence of mind-independent objects is the ‘best hypothesis’. (12 marks)

Explain why indirect realism might lead to scepticism about the existence of mind-independent objects and Berkeley’s response that we cannot know the nature of mind-independent objects because mind-dependent ideas cannot be like mind-independent objects. (12 marks)

Explain why illusions/hallucinations might cause a problem for Berkeley’s idealism and how he might respond. (12 marks)

Explain why idealism might lead to solipsism and Berkeley’s response to this issue. (12 marks)

How convincing is direct realism? (25 marks)

How convincing is indirect realism? (25 marks)

How convincing is idealism? (25 marks)

Is perception a good source of knowledge about the world? (25 marks)

1. Reason as a source of knowledge

Explain Plato’s ‘slave boy’ argument for innatism. (5 marks)

Explain Leibniz’s argument for innatism based on necessary truths. (5 marks)

Explain Locke’s argument against innatism. (5 marks)

Explain Locke’s concept of the mind as a ‘tabula rasa’ and how we acquire our concepts. (5 marks)

Explain Descartes’ notion of ‘clear and distinct ideas’. (5 marks)

Explain Descartes’ cogito as an example of a priori intuition. (5 marks)

Explain Descartes’ Trademark argument [as an example of a priori deduction]. (5 marks)

Explain Descartes’ cosmological argument [as an example of a priori deduction]. (5 marks)

Explain Descartes’ ontological argument [as an example of a priori deduction]. (5 marks)

Explain Descartes’ proof of the external world [as an example of a priori deduction]. (5 marks)

Explain Descartes’ Trademark argument and how Hume’s fork can be used as a response. (12 marks)

Explain Descartes’ cosmological argument and how Hume’s fork can be used as a response. (12 marks)

Explain Descartes’ ontological argument and how Hume’s fork can be used as a response. (12 marks)

Do we have innate knowledge? (25 marks)

Can we have a priori knowledge of the world? (25 marks)

Can intuition and deduction tell us anything about the world? (25 marks)

1. The limits of knowledge

Explain the challenge of philosophical scepticism within epistemology. (5 marks)

Explain Descartes’ three waves of doubt. (5 marks)

Explain Descartes’ response to the challenge of scepticism. (5 marks)

Explain how Berkeley responds to the challenge of scepticism. (5 marks)

Explain how Locke responds to the challenge of scepticism. (5 marks)

Explain how Russell responds to the challenge of scepticism. (5 marks)

Explain how reliabilism responds to the challenge of scepticism. (5 marks)

Explain the challenge of philosophical scepticism within epistemology and how Descartes/Berkeley/Locke/Russell/ reliabilism can respond. (12 marks)