Epistemology: Understanding in Science and the Arts. Discussing Catherine Elgin's Book **True Enough**

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Module: WM IIIa; WM IIa
MA CogSci: C1 Social Cognition and Metascience; AM 1 Theory formation and Conceptual Analysis

Thursdays 10:00 -12:00 c.t.
GA BF 04/358

Much of the epistemological tradition has valorized truth and knowledge. While truth and knowledge have an undeniable epistemic value, recently philosophers have started raising doubts that a knowledge-centered epistemology can hope to capture the epistemic standing of contemporary science. Science aims to increase our *understanding* of how the natural world works. But what does it mean to understand something? Can understanding be reduced to knowledge? Many philosophers today believe that understanding and knowledge represent two distinct kinds of epistemic achievement. For instance, while knowledge is factual, it is matter of debate whether understanding is factual as well.

A major recent contribution to the debate is provided by Catherine Z. Elgin's latest book *True Enough* (MIT Press, 2017). In this work, Elgin defends a non-veritist account of understanding that sheds light on the nature of understanding in both science and the arts. On this account, not only science, but the arts as well, contribute to enhance our understanding of the world.

Part of the reading material will be made available through Moodle, but I recommend that students buy the book. Access to the Moodle seminar requires a password, which will be disclosed on the first meeting, or alternatively, by email.

The seminar should take place in person, but we will shift online in case new distancing rules are enforced.

As a way of introduction, I recommend reading the following papers:

Catherine Z. Elgin (2004), "True Enough" *Philosophical issues* 14, pp. 113-131.
Michael Hannon (forth.), "Recent Work in the Epistemology of Understanding" *American Philosophical Quarterly*.

WEBINAR: At the end of the seminar, there will be a 2 hours webinar with Catherine Z. Elgin (Harvard University) on her book. Active participation in the webinar will be part of the examination. Further details will be disclosed on the first meeting day.

Syllabus

TAG	THEMA	TEXT
29.10.2020	**Introduction** **The Epistemology of Understanding: An Overview**	Chapter 1 "Reconfiguring the realm" M. Hannon (forth). "Recent Work in the Epistemology of Understanding" *American Philosophical Quarterly*
5.11.2020	**Is truth the ultimate epistemic good?**	Chapter 2 "Distancing from Truth"
12.11.2020	**Knowledge and Understanding**	Ch. 3 "From Knowledge to Understanding"
19.11.2020	**Understanding and Reflective Equilibrium**	Ch. 4 "The Fabric of Understanding"
26.11.2020	**Epistemic Normativity**	Ch. 5 "Epistemic Normativity"
3.12.2020	**Intellectual Integrity and Ethics of Scientific Conduct**	Ch. 6 "Intellectual Integrity"
10.12.2020	**Scientific Objectivity, Perspectivity and Impartiality**	Ch. 7 "Objectivity: A Bulwark Against Bias"
17.12.2020	**Reasons in Aesthetics and Consensus in the Arts**	Ch. 8 "Irreconcilable Differences"
7.01.2021	**Exemplification and Understanding in Science and Arts**	Ch. 9 "Exemplification in Understanding"
14.01.2021	**Exemplification and Understanding in Dance**	Ch 10 "Embodied Understanding"
21.01.2021	**Fictions, Thought Experiments, and how Falsehoods enhance understanding**	Ch. 11 "Casting in Bold Relief"
28.01.2021	**Exemplification, Epistemic Access, and Scientific Models**	Ch. 12 "Chekhov's Gun"
04.02.2021	**Narrative and Non-narrative Understanding, and Cross-disciplinary understanding**	Ch. 13 "Borders and Crossings"
11.02.2021	**Fallibilism, Understanding, and Error as Mark of Success**	Ch. 14 "Fallibility's Payoff"