

Mainstream and Formal Epistemology

Mainstream and Formal Epistemology provides the first easily accessible yet erudite and original analysis of the meeting point between mainstream and formal theories of knowledge. These two strands of thinking have traditionally proceeded in isolation from one another, but in this book, Vincent F. Hendricks brings them together for a systematic comparative treatment. He demonstrates how mainstream epistemology and formal epistemology may significantly benefit from one another, paving the way for a new unifying program of ‘plethoric’ epistemology. His book both defines and furthers the debate between philosophers from two very different sides of the epistemological spectrum.

Vincent F. Hendricks is Professor of Formal Philosophy at Roskilde University, Denmark. He is the author of many books, including *The Convergence of Scientific Knowledge*, *Thought 2 Talk* and *Formal Philosophy*. Editor in chief of *Synthese* and *Synthese Library*, he is also the founder of Φ LOG, *The Network for Philosophical Logic and Its Applications*.

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Preface

Forcing epistemology is a trendy way of defeating the skeptics who since the days of old have cited *prima facie* error possibilities as some of the most devastating arguments against claims to knowledge. The idea of *forcing* is to delimit the set of possibilities over which the inquiring agent has to succeed: If the agent can succeed over the relevant possibility set, then the agent may still be said to have knowledge even if he commits many errors, even grave ones, in other but irrelevant possibilities.

Contemporary epistemological studies are roughly either carried out: (1) in a *mainstream* or informal way, using largely conceptual analyses and concentrating on sometimes folksy and sometimes exorbitantly speculative examples or counterexamples, or (2) in a *formal* way, by applying a variety of tools and methods from logic, computability theory or probability theory to the theory of knowledge. The two traditions have unfortunately proceeded largely in isolation from one another.

Many contemporary mainstream and formal epistemologies pay homage to the forcing strategy. The aim of this book is to demonstrate *systematically* that the two traditions have much in common, both epistemologically and methodologically. If they could be brought closer together, not only might they significantly benefit from one another, the way could be paved for a new unifying program in ‘plethoric’ epistemology.

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