

ACADEMIC SESSION 2018-2019

PH2038: Metaphysics and Epistemology

15 credits, 11 weeks

PLEASE NOTE CAREFULLY:

The full set of school regulations and procedures is contained in the Undergraduate Student Handbook which is available online at your MyAberdeen Organisation page. Students are expected to familiarise themselves not only with the contents of this leaflet but also with the contents of the Handbook. Therefore, ignorance of the contents of the Handbook will not excuse the breach of any School regulation or procedure.

You must familiarise yourself with this important information at the earliest opportunity.

COURSE TEAM

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Students are asked to make themselves familiar with the information on key institutional policies which have been made available within MyAberdeen (<https://abdn.blackboard.com/bbcswebdav/institution/Policies>). These policies are relevant to all students and will be useful to you throughout your studies. They contain important information and address issues such as what to do if you are absent, how to raise an appeal or a complaint and how seriously the University takes your feedback.

These institutional policies should be read in conjunction with this course guide, in which School specific policies are detailed. Further information can be found on the [University's Infohub webpage](#) or by visiting the Infohub.

You can also view your timetable at

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/infohub/study/timetables-550.php>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides students with an introduction to central issues in metaphysics and epistemology. The emphasis is on introducing some of the central issues in these areas; issues that have shaped the contemporary debate. In addition to introducing a number of central issues in metaphysics and epistemology, this course also teaches and further develops a number of essential skills including extracting and evaluating philosophical arguments, critical writing, and the application of logical concepts to philosophical problems.

INTENDED AIMS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The course aims at giving students an organized and updated overview of problems and issues of metaphysics and epistemology, and increasing students' abilities to deal with philosophical problems in these areas.

The course's main learning outcomes are the following:

- Knowledge and understanding of key arguments in metaphysics and epistemology;
- Intellectual skills such as: ability to articulate philosophical arguments, clarity and rigour of thought and expression in oral and written form, understanding of and ability to criticise issues and arguments presented by others, ability to use technical philosophical terminology accurately;
- Practical skills such as: ability to engage in disciplined discussion with others, ability to marshal complex information, engaging in autonomous and self-motivated learning, thinking creatively, self-critically and independently, ability to use the library and relevant C&IT software/hardware;
- Transferable skills such as: ability to identify and understand issues and arguments, ability to articulate and develop arguments, engaging in respectful participation in group discussion, ability to offer critical expositions of positions proposed by others, acquisition of the discipline of learning, ability to write well-structured and reasoned essays

TEACHING PROGRAMME

The teaching format comprises one 1-hour lecture and one 1-hour tutorial per week. Tutorials start in week 2. Lectures 1-5 and the first five tutorials will be devoted to epistemology, whereas lectures 6-10 and the last five tutorials will focus on metaphysics.

Tutorials are a central part of this course. Their aim is to explore the topic of the lecture in greater depth with the help of an assigned text. You are expected to have read and thought about the readings in advance of tutorials. A series of quizzes will help you with tutorial preparation. The quizzes are accessible online (MyAberdeen course website) and must be completed prior to the week in which the tutorials take place.

How to complete quizzes. Prior to the week in which a tutorial takes place, read the required text carefully at your own pace. Then open the quiz and

have the text at hand. It is strongly recommended to use a university computer for the quiz. Follow the online instructions and answer the (usually 5) questions in one sitting. Do not interrupt your session, close the window, use the 'back' button of your browser, or perform any other activity that will terminate the session prematurely. Quizzes cannot be restarted or repeated. Computer errors are only an excuse if you can provide proof from the IT helpdesk that an error has occurred on a university computer.

Weekly programme

Week 1

Lecture 1: Introduction to Epistemology & Gettier Problem

Week 2

Lecture 2: Foundationalism

Tutorial 1: The Gettier Problem

Week 3

Lecture 3: Coherentism

Tutorial 2: Foundationalism

Week 4

Lecture 4: Naturalised Epistemology & Reliabilism

Tutorial 3: Coherentism

Week 5

Lecture 5: Scepticism

Tutorial 4: Naturalised Epistemology & Reliabilism

Week 6

Lecture 6: Laws of Nature I

Tutorial 5: Scepticism

Week 7

Lecture 7: Laws of Nature II

Tutorial 6: Laws of Nature as Regularities

Week 8:

Lecture 8: Natural Kinds

Tutorial 7: Laws of Nature as Necessities

Week 9

Lecture 9: Physicalism and Supervenience

Tutorial 8: Natural Kinds

Week 10

Lecture 10: Mental Causation

Tutorial 9: Physicalism and Supervenience

Week 11

Lecture 11: General Review

Tutorial 10: Mental Causation

READING LIST

PART I, EPISTEMOLOGY

Lecture 1: Handout-1 “Introduction & Gettier problem”.

Tutorial 1: N. Lemos (2007). *An introduction to theory of knowledge* (CUP).
Ch. 2, “The traditional analysis and the Gettier problem”, pp. 22-41.

Lecture 2: Handout-2 “Foundationalism”.

Tutorial 2: Lemos, N. (2007). *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*
(CUP). Ch. 3 “Foundationalism”, pp. 66-84.

Lecture 3: Handout-3 “Coherentism”

Tutorial 3: Lemos, N. (2007). *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (CUP). Ch. 4 “The coherence theory of justification”, pp. 66-84.

Lecture 4: Handout-4 “Naturalized epistemology & reliabilism”

Tutorial 4: Lemos, N. (2007). *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (CUP). Ch. 5 “Reliabilism and virtue epistemology”, pp. 85-107 and Ch. 10 “Naturalized epistemology”, pp. 201-218.

Lecture 5: Handout-5 “Scepticism”

Tutorial 5: Lemos, N. (2007). *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (CUP), Chapter 7, “Skepticism” pp. 131-159.

PART II, METAPHYSICS

Tutorial 6: Alexander Bird 1998: *Philosophy of Science*. Routledge. Pages 25-34 (in ch. 1)

Tutorial 7: Alexander Bird 1998: *Philosophy of Science*. Routledge. Pages 49-54 (in ch. 1)

Tutorial 8: Alexander Bird 1998: *Philosophy of Science*. Routledge. Pages 95-105 (ch. 3)

Tutorial 9: Ian Ravenscroft 2005 *Philosophy of Mind: A Beginner’s Guide*, Oxford University Press. Pages 117-124 (ch. 8)

Tutorial 10: Ian Ravenscroft 2005 *Philosophy of Mind: A Beginner’s Guide*, Oxford University Press. Pages 144-150 (in ch. 10).

Optional background reading

Basic epistemological notions

Lemos, N. (2007). *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (CUP).

Chapter 1, “Knowledge, truth and justification” pp. 1-21.

Truncellito, D. A. (2018) “Epistemology”. *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy*.

<https://www.iep.utm.edu/epistemo/>

Gettier problem

Dancy, J. (1996). *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, (Blackwell).

Ch. 2 “Knowledge”, pp. 23-36.

Hetherington, S. (2018) “Gettier problems”. *Internet encyclopedia of*

philosophy. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/gettier/>

Foundationalism

Steup, M. (1996). *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, (Prentice

Hall). Ch. 5 “Foundationalism”, pp. 44-62.

Poston, T. (2018). “Foundationalism”. *Internet encyclopedia of philosophy*.

<https://www.iep.utm.edu/found-ep/>

Coherentism

J. Dancy, (1996). *Introduction to contemporary epistemology* (Blackwell). Chs.

8 & 9.

Murphy, P. (2018). “Coherentism in epistemology”. *Internet encyclopedia of*

philosophy. <https://www.iep.utm.edu/coherent/>

Naturalized epistemology and reliabilism

Feldman, R. (2003). *Epistemology*. (Beauchamp), Ch. 5, “Nonevidentialist

Theories of Knowledge and Justification”, pp. 81-100.

Steup, M. (1996). *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, (Prentice

Hall). Ch. 8.

Becker, K. (2018). “Reliabilism”. *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

<http://www.iep.utm.edu/reliabil/>

Scepticism

J. Dancy, (1996). *Introduction to contemporary epistemology* (Blackwell). Ch.

1.

Klein, P. (2015). “Skepticism”. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skepticism/>

Laws of nature

Marc Lange 2009: *Laws and Lawmakers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pages 3-12 [introduces key issues]

Stathis Psillos 2002: *Causation and Explanation*. Chesham: Acumen. Chs. 5-7
[detailed overview]

Fred Dretske 1977: 'Laws of Nature' Reprinted in: M Curd & J A Cover
Philosophy of Science: The Central Issues. New York: Norton.

Natural kinds

Curd, M. and J.A. Cover, (ed.) 1998. *Philosophy of Science*, New York: W. W.
Norton. Section 3.1, Pages 892-896. [accessible survey of natural kinds,
esp. Kripke and Putnam]

Kripke, S. (1972). *Naming and Necessity*, Blackwell (2002 paperback edition),
especially Lecture 3, pp. 118-129. [a classic argument for natural kinds and
microstructuralism]

Robin Hendry (2006). Elements, Compounds and Other Chemical Kinds,
Philosophy of Science, 73: 864–875. [defends natural kinds in chemistry]

Physicalism and Supervenience

Jaegwon Kim 2005 *Philosophy of Mind*, Westview Press, chapter 9 [on
supervenience and physicalism]

Jaegwon Kim 2005 'The supervenience argument motivated, clarified, and
defended'. In J Kim: *Physicalism, or Something Close Enough*, Princeton
University Press. Originally published as 'Blocking causal drainage and
other maintenance chores with mental causation', *Philosophy and
Phenomenological Research*, 2003. Pages 32-50 [advanced]

Mental causation

Jaegwon Kim 2005 *Philosophy of Mind*, Westview Press, chapter 8

Jaegwon Kim 2005 'The supervenience argument motivated, clarified, and
defended' (see above for bibliographic details). Pages 50-69 [advanced]

ASSESSMENT

First attempt

Participation 20%; Quizzes 40%; 1500-word essay 40%

Resit

2500 word essay on an assigned topic and to be completed within a set time period (100%)

To view the CGS Descriptors please go to **MyAberdeen- Organisations- Divinity, History, & Philosophy Student Information for Undergraduates**.

The link to the CGS Descriptors is on the left hand menu.

PLEASE NOTE: In order to pass a course on the first attempt, a student must attain a Common Grading Scale (CGS) mark of at least E3 on each element of course assessment. Failure to do so will result in a grade of no greater than CGS E1 for the course as a whole.

If you submit your work on time, you can expect that feedback will **normally be provided within three working weeks** (excluding vacation periods) of the submission deadline.

ESSAYS

Formal requirements: You are discouraged from using quotations and footnotes because they count towards the word limit (the bibliography does not). Work which is either too long or too short ($\pm 5\%$) will be penalised.

General: The main goal of the essay is to think about some (perhaps only one or two) of the issues raised in the course and then articulate your considered view about it. This includes defending a clearly stated thesis. Advice on writing philosophical essays is in the "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper", available on the course website.

LIST OF ESSAY TOPICS

Choose one topic:

1. Is knowledge justified true belief?

2. Is coherentism preferable to foundationalism?
3. Can we defeat scepticism about the external world?
4. Should we naturalize epistemology?
5. Are laws of nature simple regularities?
6. Do natural kinds have essences?
7. Can physicalism be defined in terms of supervenience?
8. Describe the problem of causal exclusion and evaluate two responses to it.

ASSESSMENT DEADLINES

Essay due date: 7 December 2018, 3 pm

SUBMISSION ARRANGEMENTS

Submit a .doc or .docx file and include the word count.

Submit by the due date through [MyAberdeen](#). No hard copy is required.

In advance of uploading, please save the assignment with your student id number listed in the filename, i.e. 59999999 PHxxxx Essay 1.

When asked to enter a title for the assignment, please enter a title identical to the name of your saved assignment, i.e. 59999999 PHxxxx Essay 1. To help us comply with our anonymous marking policy, please remove any immediately identifying information (e.g. your name) from your work.

Please note: failure to submit by the due date (unless a prior arrangement has been made) will result in a deduction of marks. Where no submission is received, this will result in a mark of zero.

Please note: *Safeassign* text matching software will be used, however the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy reserves the right to also submit material to *TurnitinUK* when deemed necessary.