SCHOOL OF DIVINITY, HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

ACADEMIC SESSION 2016-2017

PH2538: Metaphysics, Epistemology, and Language

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 CO-ORDINATOR/COURSE TEAM
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TIMETABLE
Time and place of classes (or refer students to the portal/MyTimetable)

Students can view their university 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

LECTURE/SEMINAR PROGRAMME
1 one-hour lecture, and 1 one-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.

PART I, EPISTEMOLOGY
Lecture/Tutorial 1: Introduction to Epistemology & Gettier Problem
Lecture/Tutorial 2: Foundationalism
Lecture/Tutorial 3: Coherentism
Lecture/Tutorial 4: Naturalised Epistemology & Reliabilism
Lecture/Tutorial 5: Scepticism

PART II, METAPHYSICS
Lecture/Tutorial 6: Laws of Nature 1
Lecture/Tutorial 7: Laws of Nature 2
Lecture/Tutorial 8: Natural Kinds
Lecture/Tutorial 9: Supervenience
Lecture/Tutorial 10: Mental Causation

Lecture 11: General review
READING LIST

PART I, EPISTEMOLOGY

(Note: All reading material will be available electronically through MyAberdeen before and after the relevant lecture/tutorial.)

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


Lecture 2: Handout-2 “Foundationalism”.


Lecture 3: Handout-3 (“Coherentism”)


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


Lecture 5: Handout-5 (“Introduction to scepticism”)

Tutorial 5: Reading: TBA

PART II, METAPHYSICS

Laws of Nature 1

Background:

Pages 3-12 [key issues]


[more detailed overview of metaphysics of laws of nature]


*Philosophy of Science: The Central Issues*. New York: Norton. [a classic, difficult]

**Laws of Nature 2**

* Helen Beebee 2000 ‘The Non-Governing Conception of Laws of Nature’


**Background:**

Stathis Psillos 2002: *Causation and Explanation*. Chesham: Acumen. Pages 139-143 and 145-147 [on the regularity view]

Nancy Cartwright 1998: ‘Do the laws of physics state the facts?’ Reprinted in:


**Natural Kinds**

* Katherine Hawley & Alexander Bird 2011 ‘What are natural kinds?’

*Philosophical Perspectives*, 25: 205-221

**Background:**


**Supervenience**


**Background:**


**Mental Causation**

*Jaegwon Kim 2005 ‘The supervenience argument motivated, clarified, and defended’. [Only pp. 50-69; on p. 50 start with “A more direct way of ruling out overdetermination ...”]*

**Background:**

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

First attempt
1000 word essay on a topic from a list of several options (50%) and one take-home exam (50%)

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.

ESSAYS

Formal requirements: The word count includes quotations and footnotes, but not the bibliography; students should note that they will be penalised for work which is either too long or too short (± 5%)

General: The main goal of the essay is to explore and master a topic in some depth and articulate your own, considered view about it. The focus is on carefully thinking through some (perhaps only one or two!) of the issues raised in the lectures, tutorials and readings, rather than on surveying existing literature. Advice on writing philosophical essays is in the “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper”, available on the course website.
ASSESSMENT DEADLINES
Essay due date: 2nd March 2017

Take Home Exam due date: 1st May 2017 (The take-home exam will be made available at 3pm on Monday 24th April on MyAberdeen.

SUBMISSION ARRANGEMENTS
Please submit by the deadline ONE paper copy (cover sheet required) PLUS, ONE official electronic copy (no cover sheet required) as follows:

Hard Copy: One hard copy typed and double spaced, together with an Assessment cover sheet, – this should have your ID number CLEARLY written on the cover sheet, with NO name and NO signature but EVERYTHING ELSE filled in – and should be delivered to the Drop-off boxes located in CB008, 50-52 College Bounds.

Electronic Copy: One copy submitted through Turnitin via MyAberdeen. (for instructions please see http://www.abdn.ac.uk/eLearning/turnitinuk/students/ ) Students are asked to retain the Turnitin receipt so they are able to provide proof of submission at a later date if required.

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

Both copies to be submitted by 3.00pm on the due date

Failure to submit both an electronic copy to Turnitin and a hard copy to the school office, by the stated deadline, will result in a zero mark.
N.B Turnitin doesn’t accept Mac documents in Pages. If using a Mac please go to File and export work as a Word document.
EXAMINATION

Information on the take-home exam will be provided in the first seminar.

General exam guidance will be given in the Student Handbook.

Past exam papers can be viewed at http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/learning-and-teaching/for-students/exam-papers/.