

ACADEMIC SESSION 2010-2011

PH5550 CONTEMPORARY SCEPTICISM

Credits: 15; number of weeks: 12

PLEASE NOTE CAREFULLY:

The full set of school regulations and procedures is contained in the Postgraduate Student Handbook which is available online at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/pgradstudenthandbook/>. 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

Dr Luca Moretti

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Discipline Secretary:

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TIMETABLE

Time and Place: 12-2pm on Thursdays in room C28 (Taylor).

Students can view the University Calendar at

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/documents/weeknumbers2010-11.pdf>.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Philosophical sceptics deny or doubt that we do have or can have knowledge about the world. Scepticism is of particular interest when it is based on arguments ("sceptical arguments"). Traditionally, most philosophers have seen scepticism as a serious threat to our scientific and ordinary knowledge claims and have therefore tried to refute sceptical arguments. This course will deal with both sceptical arguments and anti-sceptical strategies. We will mostly focus on ordinary knowledge. Classical as well as contemporary approaches will be discussed, though the emphasis will be on the latter.

COURSE AIMS

To introduce students to some of the central ideas of contemporary theory of knowledge.

To increase student's abilities in philosophical analysis and improve their capacity to deal with philosophical problems and think about answers on their own.

To enhance student's understanding of contemporary issues in contemporary philosophical discussions of scepticism and in epistemology more generally.

INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate, in spoken and written form, a detailed knowledge of the nature and content of key elements in contemporary discussions of philosophical scepticism and epistemology;

- Present and critically discuss/assess key problems and arguments in these fields;

Demonstrate, in spoken and written form, an enhanced understanding of key issues in the theory of knowledge (esp. on scepticism);

- Demonstrate, in spoken and written form, improved abilities in philosophical analysis and enhanced capacity to make up their own minds about key problems in these fields.

LECTURE/SEMINAR PROGRAMME

The following is a *provisional* schedule of topics and essential readings for the course, from which we might want to deviate as the course progresses.

Further readings for each topic may be indicated before the relevant seminar.

Week Class type Topic

Week 1 Lecture: Introduction and overview.

Week 2 Lecture: Introduction and overview.

Week 3 Seminar: René Descartes, *Meditation I, II (first 3 paragraphs)*

Week 4 Seminar: Peter Unger, *A Defence of Skepticism*

Week 5 Seminar: Hilary Putnam, *Brains in a Vat*

Week 6 Seminar: Fred Dretske, *Epistemic Operators*

Week 7 Seminar: Stewart Cohen, *Contextualism and Scepticism*

Week 8 Seminar: George E. Moore, *Proof of an External World* (esp. 137-150)

Week 9 Seminar: Ernst Sosa, *How to Defeat Opposition to Moore*

Week 11 Seminar: Crispin Wright, *(Anti)-Sceptics Simple and Subtle*

Week 11 Seminar: James Pryor, *The Sceptic and the Dogmatist*

Week 12 Seminar: Peter Kung, *On the Possibility of Skeptical Scenarios*

READING LIST

(* = *in the Heavy Demand section of QML*)

All these readings are required.

Weeks 1&2 Pritchard, Duncan, 'Contemporary Skepticism', in: James Fieser and Bradley Dowden (eds.), *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (URL: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>)

Klein, Peter. 'Skepticism', in: Edward N. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/>).

Moretti, Luca, "Scepticism" (download from WebCT).

- Week 3 *Descartes, René (1998). *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Indianapolis, Hackett. (Many other editions available). To be read: Meditation I, II (first 3 paragraphs)
- Week 4 Unger, Peter (1971). 'A Defense of Skepticism'. *Philosophical Review* 80, pp. 198-219. (Hard copy of this journal issue available in QML). (jstor)
- Week 5 *Putnam, Hilary, 'Brains in a Vat', in: Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981, pp. 1-22. (Also in: DeRose / Warfield)
- Week 6 Dretske, Fred (1970). 'Epistemic Operators'. *The Journal of Philosophy* 67, pp. 1007-1022. (jstor; also in DeRose / Warfield).
- Week 7 Cohen, Stewart (2000). 'Contextualism and Skepticism'. *Philosophical Issues* 10, pp. 94-107. (Hard copy of this journal issue available in QML)
- Week 8 *Moore, George Edward, 'Proof of an External World', in: George Edward Moore, *Philosophical Papers*, London/ New York: Allen & Unwin/ Macmillan 1959, pp. 127-150. (READ ESPECIALLY pp 137-150)
- Week 9 Sosa, Ernest (1999). 'How To Defeat Opposition to Moore'. *Philosophical Perspectives* 13, pp. 141-154. (jstor)
- Week 10 Wright, Crispin (2002). '(Anti)-Sceptics Simple and Subtle: Moore and McDowell'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65, pp. 330-348. (jstor)
- Week 11 Pryor, James (2000), 'The Skeptic and the Dogmatist'. *Nous* 34, pp. 117-149 (jstor)
- Week 12 Kung, Peter. (2010). 'On the Possibility of Skeptical Scenarios'. Forthcoming in the *European Journal of Philosophy* (PLEASE ASK THE COURSE COORDINATOR)

SECONDARY READING

- * DeRose, Keith (1999). 'Introduction: Responding to Skepticism' in: Keith DeRose & Ted A. Warfield (eds.), *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-24

- *DeRose, Keith and Warfield, Ted A (eds.) (1999). *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- *Langshaw, J. Austin (1979). 'Other Minds', in John Langshaw Austin, *Philosophical Papers* (3. ed.; ed.: James O. Urmson/ Geoffrey J. Warnock). Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 76-116
- *Nozick, Robert, *Philosophical Explanations*, Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press 1981, 167-247. (Extracts also in DeRose / Warfield)
- *Steup, Matthias and Sosa Ernest (eds) (2005). *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 1-85.
- *Stroud, Barry (1984). *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Thorsrud, Harold. 'Ancient Greek Skepticism' in James Fieser and Bradley Dowden (eds.), *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (URL: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>)
- *Williams, Michael (1996). *Unnatural Doubts. Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press

TEACHING ARRANGEMENTS

The course takes the form of a RESEARCH SEMINAR. This means that the vast majority of classroom time will be given over to student-led discussion of one paper. All students will be expected to prepare in full for each session by reading the paper and preparing comments and questions to be asked in class. Furthermore, EVERY student will be expected to lead *at least* one of the weekly seminars, beginning with a 20-30 minute presentation, followed by student-led discussion. The course is cross-listed with PH4532 Scepticism.

REGULARITY OF ATTENDANCE

Attendance of all seminars and active participation are mandatory.

Absence from Classes on Medical Grounds

Candidates who wish to establish that their academic performance has been adversely affected by their health are required to secure medical certificates relating to the relevant periods of ill health (see General Regulation 17.3).

The University's policy on requiring certification for absence on medical grounds or other good cause can be accessed at:

www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/quality/appendix7x5.pdf

You are strongly advised to make yourself fully aware of your responsibilities if you are absent due to illness or other good cause. In particular, you are asked to note that self-certification of absence for periods of absence up to and including eleven weekdays is permissible. However, where absence has prevented attendance at an examination or where it may have affected your performance in an element of assessment or where you have been unable to attend a specified teaching session, you are strongly advised to provide medical certification (see section 3 of the Policy on Certification of Absence for Medical Reasons or Other Good Cause).

CLASS CERTIFICATE

Failure to attend classes or failure to submit a piece of continuous assessment may result in your class certificate being refused.

Students who are refused a class certificate are withdrawn from the course and cannot take the prescribed degree assessment in the current session, nor are eligible to be re-assessed next session, unless and until they qualify for the award of a class certificate by taking the course again in the next session.

Students who attend and complete the work required for a course are considered to have been awarded a 'Class Certificate'. Being in possession of a valid Class Certificate for a course entitles a student to sit degree examinations for that course. From 2010/11 class certificates will be valid for two years and permit a total of three attempts at the required assessment within that two year period i.e. the first attempt plus up to two resits.

ASSESSMENT

One 4,000-5,000 word essay (90%) plus seminar participation (10%).

Information about progression can be found [here](#).

ESSAYS

Each student will be expected to produce one long essay (4000-5000 words) on a topic of her/his choice. You can choose any topic covered in the course (Please consult with the course-co-ordinator). Essays should be in 12 point font with line spacing of at least 1½. The word limit is confined to plus or minus 10% and essays deviating in length from the norm will be subject to penalty. Provide a word count at the end of your essay.

ASSESSMENT DEADLINES

The essays are due by 3pm on Wednesday, 4 May 2011

SUBMISSION ARRANGEMENTS

Students must submit **one printed copy** to the School Office (KCG 11c), together with a completed [essay cover sheet](#) for the School of Divinity, History and Philosophy attached. **One further copy** must be submitted to TurnitinUK.

CLASS ID:

PASSWORD:

Please note: Failure to submit coursework to TurnitinUK will result in a mark of zero for the coursework.

TURNITIN USER INSTRUCTIONS

TurnitinUK is an online service which compares student assignments with online sources including web pages, databases of reference material, and content previously submitted by other users across the UK. **The software makes no decision as to whether plagiarism has occurred;** it is simply a

tool which highlights sections of text that have been found in other sources thereby helping academic staff decide whether plagiarism has occurred.

Further information on TurnitinUK and instructions on how to submit an assignment to TurnitinUK can be obtained from the following area of the Student Learning Service website: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sls/plagiarism/>. These pages provide information and advice on avoiding plagiarism including the University's Definition of Plagiarism, a Checklist for Students, Referencing and Citing as well as information on TurnitinUK.

If students are having difficulty setting up a Turnitin account, please contact the Helpdesk at helpdesk@abdn.ac.uk, or by going to the Helpdesk in Block A, Edward Wright Building, Ground Floor.

LATE SUBMISSION

ASSESSMENT FEEDBACK

The University recognises that the provision of timely and appropriate feedback on assessment plays a key part in students learning and teaching. The guiding principles for the provision of feedback within the University are detailed in the Institutional Framework for the Provision of Feedback on Assessment available at: www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/quality/appendix7x8.pdf.

PLAGIARISM

'Plagiarism is the use, without adequate acknowledgement, of the intellectual work of another person in work submitted for assessment. A student cannot be found to have committed plagiarism where it can be shown that the student has taken all reasonable care to avoid representing the work of others as his/her own.'

Plagiarism is a serious offence everywhere, both within and outwith the academic community. All cases of suspected plagiarism will be reported to the

Head of School in the first instance and cannot be discussed with or determined by a Tutor or Course Co-ordinator.

Please note that students MUST refer to the School's Undergraduate Student Handbook for more detailed information on what constitutes plagiarism, how to avoid it, and what the University's procedure is should plagiarism be suspected.

EXAMINATION

There will be no examination.

Past exam papers can be viewed at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/library/examdb/>.

Resit Eligibility: Candidates are only eligible to resit an exam provided that each element of coursework assessment is CAS 6 or above. New coursework can be submitted in agreement with the course coordinator. It is the student's responsibility to contact the coordinator if the student has failed a course.

STUDENT SUPPORT

It is important that students check their university e-mail account regularly as this is the first method of contact by university staff members.

Additional information regarding student support can be found throughout the [Student Handbook](#). Students can also contact [Student Support Services](#) or the [discipline secretary](#) if additional information is needed.