

PH4532 Scepticism

Course Leaflet 2009-2010

Credits: 15

Please note carefully:

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

Dr. Luca Moretti, Old Brewery G011, tel: 01224 272385, mail: l.moretti@abdn.ac.uk

Office hours: Monday 13-15

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.

The course takes the form of a RESEACH 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.

TIMETABLE

This course is held in weekly sessions, which are either lectures (60 min) or seminars (90 minutes). Time and Place: Thursdays at 12pm in room NK2 (New King's).

SCHEDULE

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

Week 3 Seminar: Peter Unger, *A Defence of Skepticism*

Week 4 Seminar: Hilary Putnam, *Brains in a Vat*

Week 5 Seminar: Fred Dretske, *Epistemic Operators*

Week 6 Seminar: Stewart Cohen, *Contextualism and Scepticism*

Week 7 Seminar: Moore, *Proof of an External World* (esp. 137-150)

Week 8 Seminar: Sosa, *How to Defeat Opposition to Moore*

Week 9 Seminar: Wright, *(Anti)-Sceptics Simple and Subtle*

Week 10 Seminar: Wright, *Warrant for Nothing (and Foundations for Free?)*

Week 11 Seminar: Peter Kung, *On the Possibility of Skeptical Scenarios*

Week 12 Lecture: Luca Moretti, *Scepticism, Metaphysical Possibilities and Fuzzy Probabilities*

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

Essential Readings

Week 1 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/>).

- Week 2 *Descartes, René (1998). *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Indianapolis, Hackett. (Many other editions available) To be read: Meditation I, II (first 3 paragraphs).
- Week 3 Unger, Peter (1971). 'A Defense of Skepticism'. *Philosophical Review* 80, pp. 198-219. (Hard copy of this journal issue available in QML). (jstor)
- Week 4 *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 5 Dretske, Fred (1970). 'Epistemic Operators'. *The Journal of Philosophy* 67, pp. 1007-1022. (jstor; also in DeRose / Warfield).
- Week 6 Cohen, Stewart (2000). 'Contextualism and Skepticism'. *Philosophical Issues* 10, pp. 94-107. (Hard copy of this journal issue available in QML).
- Week 7 *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 8 Sosa, Ernest (1999). 'How To Defeat Opposition to Moore'. *Philosophical Perspectives* 13, pp. 141-154. (jstor).
- Week 9 Wright, Crispin (2002). '(Anti)-Sceptics Simple and Subtle: Moore and McDowell'. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65, pp. 330-348. (jstor).
- Week 10 Wright, Crispin (2004). 'Warrant for Nothing (and Foundations for Free?)'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume 78, pp. 167-212. (jstor).
- Week 11 Kung, Peter. (2010). *On the Possibility of Skeptical Scenarios*. Forthcoming in the *European Journal of Philosophy* (PLEASE ASK THE LECTURER).
- Week 12 Moretti, Luca (2010). 'Scepticism, Metaphysical Possibility and Fuzzy Probabilities'. (PLEASE ASK THE LECTURER).

Introductory and additional readings

- *Austin, John Langshaw (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.
- *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 / Warfield, Ted A (eds.) (1999). *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- *Nozick, Robert, *Philosophical Explanations*, Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press 1981, 167-247. (Extracts also in DeRose / Warfield)
- *Barry, Stroud (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.

ESSAYS

Due Date: **Thursday, 6 May 2010**

2500-3000 words (2 copies). 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.

One paper copy of your essay, with signed coversheet, should be submitted to KCG11c by the due date. The other must be submitted to Turnitin (ID: **161081** and **case-sensitive** password: **PH4532**). Essays will not be accepted until you have submitted both copies.

You are encouraged to choose your own topics. Please consult with the course-coordinator.

ASSESSMENT

50% examination (2 hours), 50% essay.

AIMS

1. To introduce students to some of the central ideas of contemporary theory of knowledge.
2. To increase student's abilities in philosophical analysis and improve their capacity to deal with philosophical problems and think about answers on their own.
3. To enhance student's understanding of contemporary issues in contemporary philosophical discussions of scepticism and in epistemology more generally.

OBJECTIVES

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

1. 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
2. present and critically discuss/assess key problems and arguments in these fields.
3. demonstrate, in spoken and written form, an enhanced understanding of key issues in the theory of knowledge (esp. on scepticism).
4. 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.

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.

Appendix - TurnitinUK

Information for Students

What is Turnitin® UK (A JISC Service)?

The service helps academic staff address a number of common but difficult to identify issues related to citation and collaboration in coursework assessments. It enables tutors to identify the original source of material included within student work by searching a database of several billion pages of reference material gathered from professional publications, student essay websites and other student works. It is used by academics as a tool to help them provide better information and feedback to students about the work they have submitted. The tool does not make decisions about the intention of unoriginal work, nor does it determine if unoriginal content is incorrectly cited or indeed plagiarised. It simply highlights sections of text that have been found in other sources to help academic staff members make these decisions. In many cases this will lead the academic member of staff to provide feedback to students on how to improve their coursework submissions and citations. All assessment decisions will continue to be made by the course tutor who will review the entire work.

What is the benefit of using the service?

Your institution wishes to encourage students to behave with honesty and integrity at all times. The correct citation of work and the authenticity of submitted work is a cornerstone, not just of our education system, but of the trust and value held in each of our education institutions by employers and the public at large. The use of this service along with other methods of maintaining the integrity of the academic process will help your institution maintain academic standards and assessment fairness.

How will my data be used?

In order for this service to work you will be required to submit your assignments to the service where they will be stored together with your name, email address, course details and institution. You may also opt to enter your address and phone number but this is *not* compulsory. Once your material has been uploaded it will be stored electronically in a database and compared against work submitted from this or any other department(s) within this institution or from other UK institutions using the service.

Your tutor will receive an Originality Report from the service. In most cases this feedback will be used by the tutor to instruct you about the process of citation and the importance of maintaining academic standards. In some cases, dependent on extent, level and context, the institution *may* decide to undertake further investigation which

could ultimately lead to disciplinary actions, should instances of plagiarism be detected. Such decisions are entirely at the discretion of your institution and in no way involve HEFCE (the Higher Education Funding Council for England) nor the service. In this circumstance it is possible that your personal data may need to be disclosed to academic staff within the other institution(s) from where matching content has been submitted.

HEFCE has overall responsibility for the processing of personal data carried out by Turnitin® UK (A JISC Service). HEFCE and each institution signing up to use the service will together act as Joint Data Controllers for the personal data submitted with students' work.

In order for your institution to make use of the service it will be necessary for personal data relating to you to be transferred to countries not governed by EU Data Protection legislation. However, it should be noted that *iParadigms*, the company processing your data are bound by terms of contract to at all times abide by the Data Protection Act 1998.

How long will the service keep my work?

The service will seek to retain content submitted to it and associated personal data until the termination of this service or its successor, thus helping to accumulate as large a corpus of knowledge as possible against which to compare submitted content.

Who owns the copyright to the work I have submitted?

HEFCE has no interest in acquiring the intellectual property rights for the content submitted by you. The copyright for such content will continue to reside with either yourself or your institution; whichever is currently the case.

The service will help to protect your work from future plagiarism and thereby help maintain the integrity of any qualification you receive.

What are my rights under the Data Protection Act?

As the data subject you do have the right to see what personal information is held about you in relation to this or any other service that stores your personal information and have limited rights to object to your data being used. Please refer to the Plagiarism Advisory Service web site (www.jiscpas.ac.uk) for further information regarding these rights.

If your personal data has been integrated into the service via your institution's student information system your request may require the institution to withdraw your personal information from student information system as well. Your institution will be able to inform you of the implications of exercising this right under these conditions. Please note: your tutor can submit your work to the service without the use of personal data should you decide to exercise this right. The right to objection relates to the storage of your personal data and does not extend as a right to object to your tutor making use of technology aimed at improving academic standards when assessing your work

Student Instructions for TurnitinUK

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. The assignment which has been submitted to TurnitinUK and an **Originality Report**¹ (the report which identifies the text matches found) are displayed for the member of staff to view. The member of staff can see whether resources have been appropriately referenced and hence whether plagiarism has occurred. You will be able to view your own Originality Report **only** if the member of staff enables this.*

The following instructions will enable you to register to use Turnitin, enrol in a class and to submit an assignment. A comprehensive Student User Guide can be found at https://submit.ac.uk/usage_jisc/tiuk_student_guide.pdf.

If you are a new user please begin at Step 1. If you have already used TurnitinUK, please go straight to Step 2.

¹ For further information about the Originality Report see Section 2 of the Student User Guide https://submit.ac.uk/usage_jisc/tiuk_student_guide.pdf.

Step 1: Create a User Profile

First, set up a unique user profile which consists of an email address, user password, personal user information and user preferences. *You will need a class id and enrolment password to enable you to create a user profile. If you do not have this information, please contact your tutor.*

- Go to http://submit.ac.uk/newuser_type.asp (Note: underscore _ between 'newuser' and 'type')
- Follow the on-screen instructions to create your user profile. Use your University email address and choose your own password (Note: choose one you will remember)
- Click **end wizard and login**. This takes you to Step 4 on this sheet. The next time you log in to TurnitinUK start from Step 2.

Step 2: Login to TurnitinUK (once you have created a User Profile)

- Go to www.submit.ac.uk - click on **user login**
- At the login page enter email address (*your University of Aberdeen one as before*) and user password (*which you chose yourself at Step 1*)
- Click **login** to open your TurnitinUK homepage

Step 3: Enrol in a Class

Note: You will have enrolled in one class when you created your User Profile. When you need to enrol in another, follow these instructions:

- Starting from your TurnitinUK homepage, click **enrol in a class**
- Enter the **class id number** which you will be given by the relevant tutor
- Enter **enrolment password** – which again you will be given by the relevant tutor
- Click **submit** to enrol in a class and add it to your homepage

Step 4: Submit Coursework

- Click on the **class name** on your homepage
- Click the **submit button** next to assignment name in your class
- Select **file upload** from the pull-down menu entitled 'Submit a paper by' (at the top of the submission box)
- Enter the **submission title** (title of assignment)

- Click the **browse** button and locate the file for submission
- Click **submit** (top right-hand corner)
- Click **yes, submit** (*Note: you can only submit a piece of work once unless you are submitting a Revision Assignment – see below*)
- You will receive a **digital receipt** which will also be emailed to you

Revision Assignments

*Your Tutor or Course Co-ordinator may have made the **Revision Assignment** facility available to you. If this is the case you will be allowed to submit a draft copy of your paper and have the opportunity to see your Originality Report and revise your work before submitting it for assessment. Your Course Co-ordinator or tutor has access to all Revision Assignments and can see how these have been changed or “fine-tuned” before submission. You need to submit your final paper to the main assignment when you are satisfied with your work - it is not automatically forwarded from the Revision Assignment to the actual assignment.*

Submitting a revision assignment

- *See Step 4: Submit Coursework*

If you have any problems using TurnitinUK that your tutor can't help with please contact philosophy@abdn.ac.uk