

## **ACADEMIC SESSION 2010-2011**

### **PH4532 SCEPTICISM**

**Credits: 15; number of weeks: 12**

#### **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/COURSE TEAM**

Dr Luca Moretti

Office: OBG11 (Old Brewery)

Office hours: Mon 13:00-15:00

Tel.: 01224 272385

Email: [l.moretti@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:l.moretti@abdn.ac.uk)

#### **Discipline Secretary:**

Tracy Noden

KCG11b, King's Quad

01224 273986

[t.noden@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:t.noden@abdn.ac.uk)

#### **TIMETABLE**

This course is held in weekly sessions, which are either lectures (60 min) or seminars (90 minutes).

Time and Place: from 12pm in room 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 Skeptic 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 James Pryor (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 PH5550 Contemporary 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](http://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).

*Additional information regarding medical absences, extenuating circumstances and exam absences can be found in the Student Handbook, pg 6-8.*

### **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.

Full information on Class Certificates can be found in the Student Handbook, pg 6-7.

## **ASSESSMENT**

1 essay (2500-3000 words) (50%) and 1 two-hour written examination (50%)

Students can view the Common Assessment Scale (CAS) at

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sdhp/ugrad-degrees.php>.

## **ESSAYS**

2500-3000 words. 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.

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

Students can also find advice on essay writing in the Student Handbook, pg 15-19.

## **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 with a Turnitin account, please contact the discipline secretary at [t.noden@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:t.noden@abdn.ac.uk), or by going to KCG11b, King's Quad.

## **LATE SUBMISSION**

*Further information regarding late submission and extensions can be found in the Student Handbook, pg 8-10.*

## **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](http://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**

A 2-hour exam, in which the student will give written answers to 2 out of 7-8 questions, will take place at the end of the half session. The questions may cover any part of the course.

*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.

*Further information regarding exams can be found in the Student Handbook, pg 20-23.*

## **CLASS REPRESENTATIVES**

We value students' opinions in regard to enhancing the quality of teaching and its delivery; therefore in conjunction with the Students' Association we support the operation of a Class Representative system.

The students within each course, year, or programme elect representatives by the end of the fourth week of teaching within each half-session. In the Philosophy discipline we operate a system of course representatives for Levels 1 & 2, and year representatives for Levels 3 & 4. Any student registered within a course or year that wishes to represent a given group of students can stand for election as a class representative. You will be informed when the elections for class representative will take place.

### What will it involve?

It will involve speaking to your fellow students about the year you represent. This can include any comments that they may have. You will attend a Staff-Student Liaison Committee and you should represent the views and concerns of the students within this meeting. As a representative you will also be able to contribute to the agenda. You will then feedback to the students after this meeting with any actions that are being taken.

### Training

Training for class representatives will be run by the Students Association. Training will take place in the fourth or fifth week of teaching each half-session. For more information about the Class representative system visit [www.ausa.org.uk](http://www.ausa.org.uk) or email the VP Education & Employability [vped@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:vped@abdn.ac.uk). Class representatives are also eligible to undertake the STAR (Students Taking Active Roles) Award, further information about the co-curricular award is available at: [www.abdn.ac.uk/careers](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/careers).

## **THE CO-CURRICULUM**

The co-curriculum enhances a student's employability and provides opportunities to develop and achieve Aberdeen Graduate Attributes. Co-curricular activities complement a student's degree programme and include: work placements, study abroad, enterprise and entrepreneurship activities, the BP Student Tutoring Scheme and the STAR (Students Taking Active

Roles) Award initiative. Below are examples of credit-bearing co-curricular activities.

**ERASMUS** is an exchange programme funded by the European Commission which enables students to study or work in another European country as part of their degree programme. Eligible students will receive a grant to help with extra costs while abroad and a number of our partner institutions teach through English. For more information, visit [www.abdn.ac.uk/erasmus/](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/erasmus/).

The University also has opportunities for students to study in a non-European country as part of their degree through the **International Exchange Programme** ([www.abdn.ac.uk/undergraduate/international-exchange.php](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/undergraduate/international-exchange.php)). International partners include universities and colleges in North America, Hong Kong and Japan. The University aims to ensure full academic recognition for study periods abroad, therefore the credits gained from study abroad will count towards the Aberdeen degree programme for students participating in both ERASMUS and the International Exchange Programme.

**Work placements** can also form an integral part of a degree programme and attract academic credit. Placements are available locally, nationally and internationally, lasting from a few weeks to a full year and are generally paid. Visit the Careers Service website for further placement information and to find available work placements.

*Further information about the co-curriculum is available at: [www.abdn.ac.uk/careers](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/careers).*

## **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.*

For information regarding *appeals*, students can refer to the Student Handbook, pg 25.

For information regarding *complaints or feedback*, students can refer to the Student Handbook, pg 11-12.

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.