MSc/PGDipl/PGCert

Philosophical Methods I

PHIL11177
Course Guide 2019-20

People

Course Organiser:
Name: Dr. James Openshaw
Email: James.Openshaw@ed.ac.uk

Course Secretary:
Name: Becky Verdon
Email: Rebecca.Verdon@ed.ac.uk

Learning Technologist:
Name: Bill Farquharson
Email: Bill.Farquharson@ed.ac.uk

Course Librarian:
Name: Anne Donnelly
Email: anne.donnelly@ed.ac.uk

Office hours:
Please email James Openshaw to make an appointment if you need to discuss material covered in the course or essay topics.
Course aims and objectives

This course offers an introduction to philosophical methodology, with a particular focus on thought experiments, conceptual analysis and the role of rational intuitions. Conceptual analysis was once considered to be of primary concern to philosophers: to understand what a particular property is, such as being morally good, being conscious, being caused, or being known, one must produce necessary and sufficient conditions for something to fall under the concept of that property. Moreover, such conditions must be spelled out in a way that is independent of the concept in question. For instance, to say that someone falls under the concept of pain if and only if they are in pain is uninformative. Next to all such analyses have been confronted with counterexamples that rely on rational intuitions about how to describe possible cases. For instance, to say that someone falls under the concept of pain if and only if they exhibit withdrawal behaviour when prompted by tissue damage is informative, but also possibly false. Imagine a perfect actor pretending to suffer pain. In response, some philosophers have given up on conceptual analysis altogether, some have adopted various weaker kinds of conceptual entailments, and some have argued that such intuitions are defeasible if the conceptual analysis in question leads to an otherwise explanatorily powerful philosophical theory about the property in question.

These are some of the central issues in contemporary philosophical methodology, which we will be addressing in this course. We will examine the rational intuitions that particular thought experiments are meant to elicit, and we will assess the role of these intuitions in supporting or criticising a philosophical theory, or even in adjudicating between rival philosophical theories.

Note on pre-recorded and on-campus lectures

This course is delivered through a blend of either pre-recorded lectures and on-campus seminars or pre-recorded lectures, live online seminars, and online discussion forums. Pre-recorded lectures will be delivered by a range of faculty. All on-campus and live online seminars will be delivered by Dr. James Openshaw. Please direct any queries regarding any segment of the course to James Openshaw (james.openshaw@ed.ac.uk). (For instance, please note that Professor Kallestrup is no longer affiliated with the University of Edinburgh.)

On-campus seminars will be held every week, 11:10–13:00. These will take place in Room 2.3 of the Lister Learning and Teaching Centre except for Weeks 4 and 6, when they will be held in Room 2.2 of this same building.

Synchronous online seminars will be held fortnightly from Week 3 at a time to be announced. In asynchronous forum weeks, Dr. Openshaw will monitor forum discussions (see ‘Discussion forums’ below).
Intended learning outcomes

On completion of this course, students should:

- Have a grasp of fundamental issues in philosophical methodology, e.g. the nature of thought experiments, the role of rational intuitions, conceptual analysis.
- Be able to critically analyse and engage with literature by key philosophers in this field.
- Be able to present arguments clearly and concisely both within a classroom context and in a 2,500 word essay.
- Gain transferable skills in research, analysis and argumentation.

Learning, teaching and assessment

Syllabus: Schedule of lectures, seminars, tutorials and assessments

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Lecturer</th>
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<td>Induction</td>
<td>9 September</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>16 September</td>
<td>Introduction to Conceptual Analysis and Thought Experiments</td>
<td>Jesper Kallestrup (Recorded Lecture)</td>
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<td>Asynchronous forum seminar.</td>
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<td>On-campus seminar: Friday 20th September.</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>23 September</td>
<td>Hume on Miracles: The Great Original</td>
<td>Alasdair Richmond (Recorded Lecture)</td>
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<td>On-campus seminar: Friday 27th September.</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>30 September</td>
<td>Hume on Miracles: Bayesian Approaches</td>
<td>Alasdair Richmond (Recorded Lecture)</td>
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<td>Synchronous online seminar: date TBA.</td>
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<td>On-campus seminar: Friday 4th October.</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>07 October</td>
<td>The Open Question Argument and the Paradox of Analysis</td>
<td>Debbie Roberts (Recorded Lecture)</td>
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<td>Asynchronous forum seminar.</td>
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<td>On-campus seminar: Friday 11th October.</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>14 October</td>
<td>Moral Twin Earth</td>
<td>Debbie Roberts (Recorded Lecture)</td>
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<td>Synchronous online seminar: date TBA.</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>21 October</td>
<td>Galileo’s Falling Bodies, Newton’s Bucket, and Einstein’s Elevator</td>
<td>Alistair Isaac (Recorded Lecture)</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>28 October</td>
<td>Artificial Intelligence and the Chinese Room Argument</td>
<td>Alistair Isaac (Recorded Lecture)</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
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<td>Functionalism, Inverted Qualia, and Blockhead</td>
<td>Suilin Lavelle (Recorded Lecture)</td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>11 November</td>
<td>Physicalism and Zombies</td>
<td>Suilin Lavelle (Recorded Lecture)</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>18 November</td>
<td>Descriptivism about Proper Names</td>
<td>Jesper Kallestrup (Recorded Lecture)</td>
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<td>Week 11</td>
<td>25 November</td>
<td>Kripke’s Epistemic, Modal and Semantic Arguments Revision</td>
<td>Jesper Kallestrup (Recorded Lecture)</td>
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**Topics and reading**

N.B. All the readings below should be available online via the University Main Library, using your MyEd login. If you encounter problems, contact the library or IT for support, or the course instructor (james.openshaw@ed.ac.uk).
**Week 1 – Introduction to Conceptual Analysis and Thought Experiments**

We look at different conceptions of conceptual analysis, and what role such an analysis can play in the course of advancing a philosophical argument. Traditionally, many philosophers have aimed to come up with reductive analyses of key philosophical concepts. Problem is that any such proposed analysis has been troubled by putative counterexamples. We introduce the paradox of analysis: no conceptual analysis can be both correct and informative. Lastly, we look at attempts to explicate pre-theoretical, common sense concepts as found in folk theory. Such intuitive conceptual analysis is contrasted with naturalized and pragmatic types of conceptual analysis.

**Class Reading**


**Secondary Reading**


**Online Resources:**

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/analysis/

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**Week 2 – Hume on Miracles: The Great Original**

This week, we look at a classic, if oft-misrepresented, text from David Hume - Section X of Hume's first Enquiry, the (in) famous 'Of Miracles'. Our focus is on getting clear about (textual and interpretative) details of what Hume might actually have been trying to say and also on which pitfalls we'd be well advised to avoid. We'll look at how a miracle is defined by Hume, what makes miracle testimony problematic, Hume's positive account of induction (yes, there was such a thing) and his account of when miracle-testimony could be rationally compelling. (Yes, Hume did offer a view here too.)

**Class Reading**

Week 3 – Hume on Miracles: Bayesian Approaches

Building on week 2, this week looks at Hume on miracles through the lens offered by Bayesian probability theory. In particular, we consider questions like: What is Bayesianism? How might Hume's argument be recast in Bayesian terms? Which Bayesian interpretations of Hume work best?

Class Reading


Secondary Reading


Week 4 – The Open Question Argument and the Paradox of Analysis

G. E. Moore’s Open Question Argument is supposed to show that no naturalistic reduction of ethical concepts and properties is possible. One of the ways in which naturalist moral realists have responded to this argument is to invoke the paradox of analysis. This week we aim to examine this argument and this response to in order to understand in more detail both the nature of conceptual analysis and the paradox of analysis.

Class Reading


**Secondary Reading**


**Week 5 – Moral Twin Earth**

Terence Horgan and Mark Timmons transplant Hilary Putnam’s famous twin earth thought experiment to the moral case. This thought experiment asks us to imagine a twin of our earth where everything is exactly the same except that twin earthlings use ‘good’ to refer to different things in the world than we do. The intuitions we have about this case are supposed to make problems for various views about the nature of morality. This week we examine this thought experiment and the role of intuitions in detail.

**Class Reading**


**Secondary Reading**


Week 6 – Galileo’s Falling Bodies, Newton’s Bucket, and Einstein’s Elevator

Thought experiments have played an important role in the history of science, especially in clarifying the implications of difficult concepts. But how can mere speculation about counterfactual possibilities inform us about the world as it is? We examine several historically important thought experiments through the lens of John Norton’s claim that they should be understood as arguments. Understood as arguments, thought experiments may justify theoretical conclusions, explore novel phenomena, and (crucially) expose and clarify presuppositions.

Class Reading


Secondary Reading


Primary Sources

Galileo’s falling bodies argument occurs late on the first day of his Dialogue Concerning Two New Sciences:
http://galileo.phys.virginia.edu/classes/109N/tns61.htm

Newton’s “bucket argument” occurs in the Scholium to the Definitions at the start of his Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica:
Definitions (around 81)

Online Resource: http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/thought-experiment/

Week 7 – Artificial Intelligence and the Chinese Room Argument

Philosophical thought experiments face the same epistemological challenges as scientific thought experiments; they also, however, rely heavily on intuitions and appeal to contentious concepts. Searle’s “Chinese Room” thought experiment, which has been enormously influential in philosophy of cognitive science, provides a case study for these issues. From its first statement there have been questions about how the Chinese Room should be interpreted, what tacit assumptions are required to turn it into a rigorous argument, and whether its appeal to intuition is legitimate. Responses at initial publication by commentators from philosophy, cognitive science, and computer science illustrate how these different forms of criticism may be levelled against a thought experiment in an interdisciplinary context.
**Class Reading**


*Plus these responses (also in Behavioral and Brain Sciences, vol. 3, 1980):*


**Secondary Reading**

Read the full set of responses and Searle’s reply, *BBS* 3(3): 417–57.


**Online Resource**


**Week 8 – Functionalism, Inverted Qualia and Blockhead**

In weeks 8 and 9 we will be looking at famous thought experiments which challenge the functionalist account of the mind. This week we will look at Ned Block’s challenges to functionalism along with some possible responses to them. We will also look at Sydney Shoemaker’s version of the ‘inverted qualia’ thought experiment, and discuss its strength as an ‘intuition pump’ for the claim that qualia cannot be functionally reduced.

**Class Reading**


**Secondary Reading**


**Week 9 – Physicalism and Zombies**

Philosophical or phenomenal zombies are creatures that are physically identical to us, but lack conscious experience. David Chalmers is well known for his defence of the use of conceivability arguments against materialism, and for the possibility of such ‘zombie worlds’. In this session we will take a close look Chalmers’ argument, and whether he is right to think that we can infer metaphysical possibility from conceivability. This argumentative move has played a key role in the history of philosophy in arguments for dualism.

**Class Reading**


**Secondary Reading**


Week 10 – Descriptivism about Proper Names

Descriptivism in philosophy of language is the traditional view that the meaning of a referring term is given by associated definite descriptions such that its reference is determined by satisfaction of those descriptions. For instance, the proper name ‘David Cameron’ picks out whoever is the current Prime Minister of Britain, and the natural kind term ‘water’ picks out whatever is the clear potable liquid that falls from the sky and fills the oceans. Descriptivism offers a simple, natural and intuitively plausible picture of how we can use language to represent reality.

Class Reading


Secondary Reading


Online Resources

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reference/
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/names/
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descriptions/

Week 11 – Kripke’s Epistemic, Semantic, and Modal Arguments

In Naming and Necessity Kripke presented a number of intuitively compelling arguments against descriptivism. These arguments often relied on rational intuitions about possible cases. For instance, if the name ‘Gödel’ refers to whoever proved the incompleteness of arithmetic, then ‘Gödel’ refers to Schmidt if it turns out very surprisingly that Schmidt rather than Gödel proved that theorem. And if the name ‘Aristotle’ refers to whoever taught Alexander the Great, then ‘Aristotle’ refers to Plato in a non-actual, possible world in which Plato rather than Aristotle taught Alexander the Great.
**Class Reading**


**Secondary Reading**


**Online Resources**

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reference/

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/names/

http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descriptions/

**Resources**

Reading list materials are available via the course LEARN site. Please ensure you have completed the library induction tutorial. Should you have any problems accessing any of the materials for the course please contact the course librarian, Mrs Anne Donnelly: anne.donnelly@ed.ac.uk

**Assessment**

This course has two components of assessment:

- 500-word essay plan due Tuesday 12th November 2019 by 12 noon GMT. This is 15% of your mark for this course (see below for more details; see also separately uploaded essay outline form).

- 2,500-word final essay due Tuesday 17th December 2019, 12 noon GMT. This is 85% of your mark for this course (see uploaded video for more details about the final essay).

Online students only: Participation in the discussion forum (in terms of writing discussion notes and commenting on others’ notes) is not assessed as such. However, failure to contribute posts each week during the semester will result in marks of up to 5% being deducted from your overall grade. (For more details see ‘Penalties for failure to participate’, below.)

You will also have the option of submitting a formative essay, prior to your assessed paper, which is due on Thursday 24th October 2019, 12 noon GMT.

For more details regarding formative essays, general advice for writing etc. please see your Programme Handbook.
Essay Plan

This method of assessment consists in writing a plan for the final essay. The plan should begin with a short summary, describing your essay topic, the conclusion that you will aim to establish, and the arguments you will use to support that conclusion. This summary should be approximately two paragraphs in length (maximum 500 words). The plan should also include a list of the sections and subsections of the essay and a bibliography, listing the papers and books that you will draw upon and discuss in the essay.

The essay plan will be marked out of 100. Feedback will be provided, with a particular view to making helpful suggestions and pointers for the preparation of the essay. Markers will be looking for a definite and clearly stated conclusion and for evidence of a sound and well planned argumentative structure that is feasible within the word limit. Markers will also look for a substantial and relevant bibliography that shows evidence of extensive reading into the topic.

Marking and feedback

Both your essay plan and your final essay will be marked using the grade descriptors for the Postgraduate Common Marking Scheme. The relevant lecturer will mark your essay plan and leave some brief comments and suggestions for improvements for you to reflect on and incorporate before you submit your final essay.

Both your essay plan and your final essay will be marked out of 100. Your final grade for the course will be determined on the basis of all three components of assessment.

Discussion forums

The online discussion forum on Learn is intended for use by online students (i.e. those who will not be attending on-campus seminars). The discussion forum is your space to post any questions or comments you had about the topic each week of the term. The course instructor will monitor the forum and join in with the discussion in those weeks when there is no live online seminar. Participation in the discussion forums for online students is mandatory (see ‘Penalties for failure to participate’). Discussion is part of what philosophy is all about; you will find that it's a great way to compose your thoughts, to share your ideas, and hone them with the rest of us.

Penalties for failure to participate

Participation in the weekly discussion forums is for online students. Participation each week is mandatory but not graded. You may miss one week without penalty. But you will lose marks from your overall grade for each week you miss after this.

Students will be deducted 1% for missing 2 weeks, 2% for missing 4 weeks, 3% for missing 6 weeks, and 4% for missing 8 weeks. If a student fails to participate in 10 weeks, then they will be deducted 5% from their grade.

If you have to miss participation for a good reason, please inform the Course Organiser as soon as possible.
Office hours

The office hours of each lecturer are available on the Philosophy hub page. Dr. James Openshaw’s office hour is on Thursdays in 5.01 of the Dugald Stewart Building from 12–1pm. You can drop by at this time without scheduling an appointment.

Office hours are a good time for you to come and discuss ideas for your essays or clarify your understanding of the material at any point in the course. Please don’t think you need a ‘problem’ to come to office hours; we are always willing to use this time to chat through any thoughts you may be having about topics covered in the course, or topics for your essays. If you are unable to meet with a lecturer during office hours, please send them an email to arrange an alternative time.