Introduction to Philosophical Methods

PHIL11132/PHIL11008

MSc/PGDipl/PGCert

**Course Organiser:**
Prof. Jesper Kallestrup

**Course Lecturers:**
Dr Alistair Isaac
Prof. Jesper Kallestrup
Dr Suilin Lavelle
Dr Debbie Roberts

**Course Secretary:**
Ms. Lynsey Buchanan

**Learning Technologist:**
Dr Simon Fokt
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 behavior 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.

Intended learning outcomes

By the end 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

People

Course organiser: Prof Jesper Kallestrup jesper.kallestrup@ed.ac.uk
Course secretary: Ms. Lynsey Buchanan lynsey.buchanan@ed.ac.uk
Course librarian: Mrs. Anne Donnelly Anne.donnelly@ed.ac.uk
Teaching assistant: Ms. Fiona Doherty
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 readings

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<tr>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Monday 19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Sept.</th>
<th>Kallestrup</th>
<th>Introduction to Conceptual Analysis and Thought Experiments</th>
<th>Asynchronous forum seminar</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Monday 26&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Sept.</td>
<td>Lavelle</td>
<td>Functionalism, Inverted Qualia and Blockhead</td>
<td>Asynchronous forum seminar</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Monday 3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt; Sept.</td>
<td>Lavelle</td>
<td>Physicalism and Zombies</td>
<td>Synchronous seminar; on-campus students meet in room 1.07 in the Main Library.</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Monday 10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Oct.</td>
<td>Kallestrup</td>
<td>JTB Analysis of Knowledge and Gettier Cases</td>
<td>Asynchronous forum seminar</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Monday 17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Oct.</td>
<td>Kallestrup</td>
<td>Reliabilism, Clairvoyance and the New Evil Demon</td>
<td>Synchronous seminar; on-campus students meet in room 1.07 in the Main Library.</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Monday 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Oct.</td>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>Galileo’s Falling Bodies, Newton’s Bucket, and Einstein’s Elevator</td>
<td>Asynchronous forum seminar</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Monday 31&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; October</td>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>Artificial Intelligence and the Chinese Room Argument</td>
<td>Synchronous seminar; on-campus students meet in room 1.07 in the Main Library.</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Monday 7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Nov.</td>
<td>Roberts</td>
<td>The Open Question Argument and the Paradox of Analysis</td>
<td>Asynchronous forum seminar</td>
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<td>Week 9</td>
<td>Monday 14&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Nov.</td>
<td>Roberts</td>
<td>Moral Twin earth</td>
<td>Synchronous seminar; on-campus students meet in room 1.07 in the Main Library.</td>
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<td>Week 10</td>
<td>Monday 21&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; Nov.</td>
<td>Kallestrup</td>
<td>Descriptivism about Proper Names</td>
<td>Asynchronous forum seminar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 11</td>
<td>Monday 28&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; Nov.</td>
<td>Kallestrup</td>
<td>Kripke’s Epistemic, Modal and Semantic Arguments &amp; Revision</td>
<td>Synchronous seminar; on-campus students meet in room 1.07 in the Main Library.</td>
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Secondary readings


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

Week 2: Functionalism, Inverted Qualia and Blockhead
In weeks two and three 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, and Lycan’s response to this. We will also look at Shoemaker’s ‘inverted qualia’ thought experiment, and discuss its strength as an ‘intuition pump’ for the claim that qualia cannot be functionally reduced.

Class reading

Secondary readings
David Chalmers. (date) ‘Absent Qualia, Fading Qualia, Dancing Qualia’ in O’Connor and Robb (eds.) 234-254


David Lewis (date) ‘Reduction of Mind’, in O’Connor and Robb (eds.)197 – 209

Hilary Putnam (date) ‘The Nature of Mental states’ in O’Connor and Robb (eds.) 210 – 221


Sydney Shoemaker (1975) ‘Functionalism and Qualia’ *Philosophical Studies*, 27, 291 – 315


Week 3: Physicalism and zombies
Chalmers is well known for his defence of the use of conceivability arguments to argue against materialism, and for the possibility of zombie worlds. (“Philosophical zombies” are creatures that are physically identical to us but completely unconscious). In this session we will take a close look at the relationship between conceivability and possibility, and Chalmers’ argument that we can infer possibility from conceivability. Such an argumentative move has played a key role in the history of philosophy in arguments for dualism.
Class readings
Todd Moody (1994) 'Conversations with zombies' *Journal of Consciousness Studies, 1*, 196 – 200 (read this first)


Secondary readings
Any of the papers in *Journal of Consciousness, 2:4* (1995)


Week 4: JTB Analysis of Knowledge and Gettier Cases
The first of the two epistemology sessions concerns the traditional attempts to provide a theory of knowledge and a very influential objection to it – the so-called Gettier cases. For illustrative purposes, we begin by considering a toy theory according to which knowledge simply is true belief. We observe that the true belief theory is prone to counterexamples having to do with epistemic luck. On this basis, we consider a more serious justified true belief theory of knowledge and Gettier’s original counterexamples to it. We then briefly consider a theory of knowledge designed to evade Gettier-style counterexamples to it. This is Goldman’s causal theory of knowledge. Since the causal theory is an externalist theory, it sets the stage for the next lecture. However, the causal theory was also prone to an important Gettier-style case: The so-called “fake barn county” scenario. We conclude on a contemporary note by examining a recent line of argument for rejecting that the fake barn cases are genuine Gettier-style cases. Thus, the overall aim of the lecture is to introduce some basic but very important concepts in theory of knowledge along by way of some seminal literature.

Class reading

Secondary readings

Pritchard, Duncan (2014). *What is this thing called knowledge?* Routledge: Chap. 4.

Week 5: Reliabilism, Clairvoyance and the New Evil Demon
The theme if this session is externalist theories of epistemic rationality. It begins where the previous lecture ended: We note that although Gettier’s cases compromised Goldman’s causal theory of knowledge, the theory might be taken to represent an epistemological insight nevertheless. This is externalism – roughly, the idea that certain relationships between the individual and the broader environment may partly determine an individual’s epistemic status even though the individual has no reflective access to them. On this basis, we consider Goldman’s theory of epistemic rationality – process reliabilism – in the guise of a contemporary version due to Graham. Graham’s brand of reliabilism is examined by considering how it fares vis-à-vis two important objections raised against process reliabilism: These are the clairvoyant case and the New Evil Demon case. In this manner, the lecture aims to present a continuously influential externalist theory of epistemic rationality by way of a contemporary treatment that is cutting-edge but also takes into account some prominent objections.

Class Reading

Secondary Readings


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 readings

Secondary readings
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](http://galileo.phys.virginia.edu/classes/109N/tns61.htm)


Online Resource:

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 readings

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


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


[http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/block/papers/msb.html](http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/block/papers/msb.html)

Online Resource
Epistemology, Ethics and Mind
Online MSc/PGDipl/PGCert

SCHOOL of PHILOSOPHY, PSYCHOLOGY
and LANGUAGE SCIENCES

Week 8: 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
corcepts 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
University Press.

Skorupski (ed.), Oxford: Routledge

Secondary Reading


- 98.

and Ingmar Persson (eds.), Oxford: Blackwell

Week 9: 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

Philosophical Research 16

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/
Resources

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, in the first instance.

Office Hours

The office hours of each lecturer are available on the Philosophy hub page. Office hours are a good time for you to come and discuss ideas for your essays. 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.

Assessment

This course has three components of assessment:

1. **Participation in the discussion forum** in terms of writing discussion notes and commenting on others’ notes. While the content as such is not assessed, actively contributing posts throughout the entire semester counts 5% of your mark for the course.

2. **500 word essay plan** due Monday 14th November by 12 noon GMT. This is 10% of your mark for this course (see below for more details; see also separately uploaded essay outline form).

3. **2,500 word final essay** due Monday 19th December by 12 noon GMT. This is 85% of your mark for this course (see uploaded video for more details about the final essay).

You will also have the opportunity to submit a formative essay, prior to your assessed paper. For more details regarding the formative essay and general advice for writing please see the 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**

There are discussion forums for each week of the course. This is your space to post any questions or comments you had about the week’s topic. The teaching assistant will monitor the forum and join in with the discussion. Participation in the discussion forums is assessed for this course, and we encourage you to take part as discussion is a crucial aspect of doing philosophy!

**Penalties for failure to participate**

A student may miss one week’s participation in the discussion forum during the semester without penalty. However, if a student fails to participate in two or more weeks, then they will be deducted 5% from their grade. If a student has a good reason why they have been unable to post to the forum (e.g. serious illness), they can contact their Personal Tutor to apply for Special Circumstances.