

Special Topics: Philosophical Methodology

Fall 2011

Course Instructor: Jennifer Nado

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Office Hours: W/F 11:30-12:30 and 13:30-14:30

Course Number: PHIL 399H

Time: W 14:30-15:59/F 10:00-11:30

Location: W BU123/F ARG05

Course Description:

This course will consist in a critical examination of various aspects of philosophical methodology. We will begin by looking at various theories of the nature of *a priori* knowledge – often considered central to philosophical inquiry. We will then discuss the rise of methodological naturalism, with a focus on illuminating the relationship between philosophical methodology and the methodologies of the sciences. Finally, we will examine recent debates over the use of intuition in philosophical theorizing, as well as the rise of a movement known as ‘experimental philosophy’.

Required Readings:

All required readings will be posted on the course’s Moodle website. The readings are listed below in the course schedule section. A warning: some of the readings for this class are *difficult*. I have tried to keep the total reading per session to around 10 pages or less, and I have also tried to assign only the most important sections of difficult papers. Nonetheless, you will almost certainly have trouble understanding everything in the readings on the first try. Don’t get too caught up on deciphering every detail – your goal for this class is to get the broad ideas. It may help to skim through the paper once quickly, and then read the paper more thoroughly once you understand the overall position the author is trying to express.

Learning Outcomes:

Students will learn to:

- 1) Distinguish between major theories of the nature of the *a priori*
- 2) Understand the difficulties inherent in explaining the nature of philosophical knowledge and its relationship with the sciences
- 3) Gain familiarity with recent attempts to explain the role of intuition in philosophy
- 4) Gain awareness of the recent ‘experimental philosophy’ movement and the controversies surrounding it.

Apply ideas and concepts from the course in their future philosophical reasoning

Measurement of Learning Outcomes:

Students will be assessed on the basis of a mid-term and a final paper, as well as on course attendance and participation, including contribution to online discussions outside of class.

Assessment:

Your grade will be based on the number of points you receive during the semester, with 100 points being the maximum (excepting extra credit).

Mid-term paper: 30 points

Final paper: 50 points

Participation and attendance: 20 points

Papers:

You will write two papers during the semester – one midterm paper, and one final paper. The midterm paper will be 3-4 pages, and will focus on summarizing the ideas of one of the authors we read in class. The final paper will be 5-7 pages, and will focus on one of the broad topics we cover during class. In the final paper, you will be expected to present more than one viewpoint on your chosen topic, and to present your own view as to which view is correct.

I will provide suggested paper topics several weeks before the papers are due, but you may also choose your own topic – provided you email me for approval first.

For both papers, you may turn in a rough draft 7 days or more before the final due date. You will receive corrections/suggestions and a temporary grade within 3 days – if you like that grade, you can keep it, or you can turn in a final draft on the normal due date and receive a new grade.

Plagiarism:

Citing the materials you've used in your papers is extremely important. If you're quoting from *anywhere*, make sure you've listed the source (author, text, *and* page number) in a bibliography at the end, and make sure you've put the quoted material in quotation marks followed by the author's last name and the page number in parentheses (e.g., (Nado 106)). If I discover that you have plagiarized any portion of a paper, you will automatically receive a failing grade.

Attendance/Participation:

Philosophy is a discussion-heavy discipline. The readings for this course provide a starting-point for understanding the topics we will cover during class; however, good class discussion will help everyone learn the material much more thoroughly. The best philosophers always spend lots of time discussing their thoughts with others. For these reason, a substantial portion of your grade will be based on attendance and participation.

Attendance and participation are worth 20 points total. The points you earn will be based on your attendance and on your contribution to discussion in-class or on the course message board (found on Moodle). Though I would love for everyone to speak in class, I understand that some are too shy – for those, the online message board is a great way to show me that you are participating. If you miss no more than 2-3 classes, and if you contribute to discussion in one way or another once every few classes, you will earn full points. Particularly active students may even earn a few points of extra credit!

Schedule:

Section I – The <i>a priori</i>	
1. Friday, 2 September - General course introduction	No readings
2. Wednesday, 7 September - What is the <i>a priori</i> ?	Sections I and II of SEP article “A priori justification and knowledge”
3. Friday, 9 September – The <i>a priori</i> as rational insight – Part I	Rules I-III of Descartes, “Rules for the Direction of the Mind”
4. Wednesday, 14 September - The <i>a priori</i> as rational insight – Part II	Bonjour, “Précis of In Defense of Pure Reason”
5. Friday, 16 September – The <i>a priori</i> as analytic – Part I	Chapter 4 of Ayer, <i>Language, Truth, and Logic</i> .
6. Wednesday, 21 September – The <i>a priori</i> as analytic – Part II	Sections I-IV of Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”
7. Friday, 23 September - Skepticism about the <i>a priori</i>	Devitt, “There is no <i>a priori</i> ”
Section II – Methodological naturalism	
8. Wednesday, 28 September - What is methodological naturalism?	Introduction and Section II of the SEP article “Naturalism”
9. Friday, 30 September - Methodological naturalism in epistemology	Kornblith, "In defense of a naturalized epistemology"
10. Wednesday, 5 October - HOLIDAY	NO CLASS
11. Friday, 7 October - Methodological naturalism in the philosophy of mind	Sections I and II of Churchland, “Eliminative materialism and the propositional attitudes”
12. Wednesday, 12 October - Methodological naturalism in ethics	Chapter 1 of Harman, <i>The Nature of Morality</i>
13. Friday, 14 October - Objections to methodological naturalism – Part I	Chapter 1 of Moore, <i>Principia Ethica</i>
14. Wednesday, 19 October - Objections to methodological naturalism – Part II	Pgs 1-12 of Kim, “What is naturalized epistemology?”
Section III - Intuition	
15. Friday, 21 October - What is the role of intuition?	Pages 1-9 of Gutting, “Historical and Metaphilosophical Introduction” MIDTERM PAPER DUE

16. Wednesday, 26 October - The problem of cognitive diversity	Stich, "Reflective equilibrium and cognitive diversity"
17. Friday, 28 October - Reflective equilibrium and its problems	Cummins, "Reflection on Reflective Equilibrium"
18. Wednesday, 2 November - The value of counterexamples	Pages 1-8 of Weatherson, "What good are counterexamples?"
19. Friday, 4 November - Arguments for intuition – self-defeat	Section I of Bealer, "A theory of the a priori"
20. Wednesday, 9 November - Arguments for intuition – comparisons with perception	Sosa, "Minimal Intuition"
21. Friday, 11 November - Arguments for intuition – psychological approaches	Sections 6 and 7 of Goldman, "Philosophical Intuitions: their target, their source, and their epistemic status"
Section IV – Experimental Philosophy	
22. Wednesday, 16 November - What is experimental philosophy?	Section II of Alexander and Weinberg, "Analytic epistemology and experimental philosophy"
23. Friday, 18 November - Experimental philosophy on knowledge	Sections I and II of Weinberg, Stich, and Nichols, "Normativity and epistemic intuitions"
24. Wednesday, 23 November - Experimental philosophy on language	Machery, Mallon, Nichols, and Stich, "Semantics, cross-cultural style"
25. Friday, 25 November - Experimental philosophy on intentional action	Knobe, "Intentional Action and Side Effects in Ordinary Language"
26. Wednesday, 30 November - Objections to experimental philosophy – Part I	Pages 17-24 of Ludwig, "The Epistemology of Thought Experiments: First Person versus Third Person Approaches"
27. Friday, 2 December - Objections to experimental philosophy – Part II	Pages 9-19 of Sosa, "A defense of the use of intuitions in philosophy"
28. Wednesday, 7 December – Review/Summary	No readings FINAL PAPER DUE

IMPORTANT NOTE

“Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations.”