



PHL 256

Knowledge and its Limits

S1 Day 2015

Dept of Philosophy

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Disclaimer

Macquarie University has taken all reasonable measures to ensure the information in this publication is accurate and up-to-date. However, the information may change or become out-dated as a result of change in University policies, procedures or rules. The University reserves the right to make changes to any information in this publication without notice. Users of this publication are advised to check the website version of this publication [or the relevant faculty or department] before acting on any information in this publication.

General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff
Convenor/lecturer/tutor
Jennifer Duke-Yonge
jennifer.duke-yonge@mq.edu.au
Contact via email, or 9850 8826
W6A 722
Monday 1-2, or by arrangement

Credit points
3

Prerequisites
12cp or admission to GDipArts

Corequisites

Co-badged status

Unit description

How do we know the way the world really is? How far can we trust our own senses and our reason? What justifies our claims to knowledge? This unit introduces central philosophical problems in epistemology, or the theory of knowledge. We examine the traditional conception of knowledge as justified true belief, and focus in particular on the concept of justification: What sort of justification do our true beliefs require to count as knowledge rather than mere opinion? We also study the challenge of the sceptic who denies that our knowledge claims are justified. The sceptic asks: How do we know that we are not dreaming our experiences? How do we know that we are not living in a Matrix-like world in which we have illusory sensory experience? We consider how to respond to such sceptical challenges. We will also examine how some of these traditional problems are being reconceived in contemporary epistemology.

Important Academic Dates

Information about important academic dates including deadlines for withdrawing from units are available at <https://www.mq.edu.au/study/calendar-of-dates>

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand and analyse arguments in the relevant literature
- Demonstrate an awareness of central problems in epistemology (the theory of knowledge)

Critically evaluate arguments in the relevant literature

Develop your own view or perspective through consideration and analysis of the views and arguments presented in the unit, and present your own views with clarity and rigour.

Develop clarity of thought, clarity of verbal expression, clarity of written expression and exposition.

Contribute to the learning of the group by engaging actively in philosophical discussion with others in face-to-face and/or online environments.

General Assessment Information

Assessments (including homework, the text analysis and the essay) in this unit are to be submitted through the appropriate 'Turnitin' links in the unit website. They will be marked through 'Grademark', which will allow you to access your marked assignments directly through the website. Information on submitting through Turnitin and accessing your work through Grademark can be found at:

http://www.mq.edu.au/iLearn/student_info/assignments.htm#turnitin

Extensions will not generally be given for homework exercises, since not all of the exercises need to be submitted.

Essay extensions requests of up to one week should be directed to Jenny in writing (jennifer.duke-yonge@mq.edu.au).

You are expected to complete all assessment tasks. If you're having any difficulties, please contact Jenny sooner rather than later.

Essays that are submitted late, or later than the extension date, will lose one mark per day late.

Assessment Tasks

| Name | Weighting | Due |
|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|
| Homework exercises | 25% | Sundays, Wks 2-5 and 7-12 |
| Text analysis | 20% | Tuesday 7th of April |
| Essay | 35% | Tuesday 9th of June |
| Participation | 20% | Weeks 2-6 and 7-11 |

Homework exercises

Due: **Sundays, Wks 2-5 and 7-12**

Weighting: **25%**

Homework exercises will be made available after the lectures on Mondays in weeks 2-5, and

7-12. Each exercise will be due on the Sunday of the same week, and needs to be submitted through iLearn.

Over the course of the unit, **you will need to complete at least three of these exercises**, including at least one from weeks 2-5 and one from weeks 7-12. You are welcome to submit more, and will receive feedback on whatever you submit, but only **your best three** (including at least one from weeks 2-5 and one from weeks 7-12) will count towards your mark.

You are encouraged to do as many as possible, since these exercises will help you prepare for your essay, will allow you to get some ongoing feedback and, because the word limit will be around 300 words, will also encourage you to think about how best to present your ideas clearly and succinctly. Exercises will be given a mark out of 10, with the mark for the three to be counted converted into a mark out of 25.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Understand and analyse arguments in the relevant literature
- Demonstrate an awareness of central problems in epistemology (the theory of knowledge)
- Critically evaluate arguments in the relevant literature
- Develop your own view or perspective through consideration and analysis of the views and arguments presented in the unit, and present your own views with clarity and rigour.
- Develop clarity of thought, clarity of verbal expression, clarity of written expression and exposition.

Text analysis

Due: **Tuesday 7th of April**

Weighting: **20%**

This assessment task will require you to give a 750 word analysis of the argument of a selected text from the early weeks of the unit. Questions will be provided to help guide your analysis. This task will not require you to refer to any texts other than the one you are analysing. The topic will be made available by the beginning of week 4, and the analysis is due on Tuesday the 7th of April (in the first week of the mid-semester break). It is to be submitted through iLearn.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Understand and analyse arguments in the relevant literature
- Demonstrate an awareness of central problems in epistemology (the theory of knowledge)
- Critically evaluate arguments in the relevant literature
- Develop clarity of thought, clarity of verbal expression, clarity of written expression and exposition.

Essay

Due: **Tuesday 9th of June**

Weighting: **35%**

The essay provides you with an opportunity to research and engage with a topic in some depth. Essays require you to develop and defend a clear argument for your own position, drawing on key ideas from a range of relevant readings. Essay topics and suggested readings will be made available approximately three weeks before the due date, together with a marking rubric. A guide to writing Philosophy essays will be available through the website.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Understand and analyse arguments in the relevant literature
- Demonstrate an awareness of central problems in epistemology (the theory of knowledge)
- Critically evaluate arguments in the relevant literature
- Develop your own view or perspective through consideration and analysis of the views and arguments presented in the unit, and present your own views with clarity and rigour.
- Develop clarity of thought, clarity of verbal expression, clarity of written expression and exposition.

Participation

Due: **Weeks 2-6 and 7-11**

Weighting: **20%**

Internal students' participation mark worth 20%, made up of three components:

10% for tutorial attendance and engagement, based on attendance, preparation and willingness to engage constructively.

5% for submitting a set of tutorial questions. Once over the course of the semester, you will be required to come up with a set of tutorial questions for discussion in the week's tuts. These should be based on the weekly readings and/or material discussed in the Monday lectures, and should be emailed to me (at jennifer.duke-yonge@mq.edu.au) by Tuesday night. I will write up a set of tutorial questions for each week based on those submitted (sometimes augmented with some of my own!), and bring them along for discussion in the Wednesday tutorials.

5% for posting a tutorial report. Once over the course of the semester, you will also be required to post a brief report of what was discussed in your tutorial, partly for the benefit of the external students. In each tutorial, at least one student will volunteer or be nominated to provide the week's online report.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Understand and analyse arguments in the relevant literature

- Demonstrate an awareness of central problems in epistemology (the theory of knowledge)
- Develop your own view or perspective through consideration and analysis of the views and arguments presented in the unit, and present your own views with clarity and rigour.
- Develop clarity of thought, clarity of verbal expression, clarity of written expression and exposition.
- Contribute to the learning of the group by engaging actively in philosophical discussion with others in face-to-face and/or online environments.

Delivery and Resources

CLASSES

Internal students will attend one two-hour lecture each week (week 1 to week 12), and one tutorial each week (week 2 to week 11).

At time of publication, the lecture is on:

- Monday 10-12, in W5A 205

You are expected to attend these lectures, and participate in them.

You also need to attend one tutorial each week, on:

- Wednesday 12-1 in E7B 146, or
- Wednesday 1-2 in E4B 308

Please check the timetable at <https://timetables.mq.edu.au> just before classes begin in case there are any late changes.

Please note that each week the content from the Monday lecture will be the subject of the Wednesday tutorial, so if you miss the lecture for any reason, you will need to catch up on the iLecture before the tutorial.

READING

All the essential readings for the course will be available in the unit reader, which will be available at the Co-op Bookshop. You will need to buy a copy of the reader, and bring it along to lectures and tutorials. Some supplementary readings will be made available electronically through the library via Multisearch (multisearch.mq.edu.au).

A list of weekly readings will be available through iLearn in week 1.

WEBSITE

The unit website is available through iLearn (<http://ilearn.mq.edu.au>). It contains essential resources for the unit, and you are expected to log in on a regular basis.

CHANGES SINCE LAST OFFERING

Some changes to topics and assessments.

Unit Schedule

| Week | Topic (for Monday lecture and Wednesday tutorials) |
|---------------------------|--|
| Week 1 23/2 | Introduction; The traditional analysis of knowledge <i>An introduction to Epistemology, the theory of knowledge. What are some of the central problems in Epistemology? (eg What is knowledge? What (if anything) can we know? What should we believe?)</i> |
| Week 2 2/3 | Scepticism about knowledge <i>Sceptics claim that we cannot have knowledge, in some particular domain, or, more radically, at all. What would motivate the claim that we cannot know anything? What would be the implications of doubting, for example, that there is an external world? Might we live in a world like The Matrix? We will look at the problem of Scepticism this week, and over the coming weeks we will consider some historically important ways that philosophers have tried to respond to the sceptical challenge.</i> |
| Week 3 9/3 | Classical Foundationalism <i>Over the next few weeks, we will look at some ways to respond to the Regress argument for scepticism introduced in week 2. This week and next week, we will consider Foundationalism: the view that the regress terminates in beliefs that are basic in the sense that they do not require any other beliefs for their justification. If there are such beliefs, though, what is their source and what is it that justifies them? This week, we'll consider two important classical responses to these questions: Rationalism, according to which our basic knowledge comes through Reason; and Empiricism, which locates the source of our basic knowledge in sense experience.</i> |
| Week 4 16/3 | Contemporary Foundationalism <i>This week, we'll continue our study of Foundationalism by considering some objections to the Classical versions, and some contemporary developments of Foundationalism. Can any version of Foundationalism provide an answer to the sceptic?</i> |
| Week 5 23/3 | Coherentism <i>Coherence theorists accept that there may be no particular truths that we can know with certainty that would provide a foundation for all our other beliefs, but believe that we can reasonably claim to have knowledge of beliefs that fit together in the right way. The reason I come to believe the things I do is that they make sense in the light of things I already believe: It is the coherence of my beliefs that justifies them. Does this provide an answer to scepticism? Or could my beliefs be coherent, but false?</i> |
| Week 6 30/3 | Responses to scepticism: Moore and Wittgenstein <i>This week we will consider two important Philosophical responses to scepticism, which aim to block the sceptic's arguments for our inability to know: Moore's defence of common sense against external world scepticism, and Wittgenstein's response to Moore and to the problem of scepticism.</i> |
| Week 7 20/4 | The Gettier problem <i>The sceptic, in claiming that we could have no knowledge, claims that none of our beliefs are appropriately justified. This week, we will further examine the idea of justification. We will look at Gettier's challenge to the traditional conception of knowledge, and responses to it. What does it mean to say a belief is justified? In this section, we are moving on to consider an important contemporary debate about justification that is of independent interest, and will also consider the relevance of this debate to the problem of scepticism.</i> |

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Week 8 27/4 | Externalism <i>What does it mean to say that a belief is justified? Are my beliefs justified if I have good reasons for them? That's what we've been assuming until now, but if that assumption leads to scepticism and other problems about knowledge should we look elsewhere for the kind of justification we need for our beliefs to count as knowledge? Externalists claim that the justification of our beliefs depends on whether our beliefs are the kind of beliefs that are likely to be true, whether or not I have good reasons for them.</i> |
| Week 9 4/5 | Internalism, externalism and the normativity of belief <i>This week we'll continue our investigation of the debate between internalism and externalism, focussing in particular on the question of whether the externalist can make sense of the normativity of belief: The question of what I should believe.</i> |
| Week 10 11/5 | Virtue epistemology <i>Virtue epistemology is a developing area, which can be seen as an attempt to give an account of epistemic justification that maintains the advantages of externalism, while also accounting for the normativity of belief. Are my beliefs justified if they are the result of the exercise of intellectual virtues? What are these virtues and how are they to be identified?</i> |
| Week 11 18/5 | Conspiracy theories 1 <i>For the final two weeks of the unit, we're going to be bringing some of the theoretical background you've acquired to bear on an interesting contemporary problem: How to respond to the conspiracy theorist. This week, we will try to give an account of what counts as a conspiracy theory, and consider how it is that different people can use the same evidence to come to such radically different conclusions.</i> <i>What makes conspiracy theorists interesting from an epistemological point of view is that whatever we may think of their conclusions (Are the Obamas really reptilian aliens?), it can be hard to see what people we judge to be conspiracy theorists are doing wrong, epistemologically. This week we'll consider how the kinds of theories of knowledge and justification we've developed over the course of the unit could actually be used to support or justify beliefs in certain kinds of conspiracy theory.</i> |
| Week 12 25/5 | Conspiracy theories 2 <i>This week, we'll consider how epistemologists might respond to the kind of reasoning considered last week. How should we respond to conspiracy theorists if we don't want to accept their conclusions? This is a practical application of what you've been learning over the course of the unit. You may never meet a sceptic (or even someone who claims to be a sceptic) outside philosophy classes, but conspiracy theorists of various sorts are more common.</i> <i>There are no tutorials this week, so the lecture will finish up with some discussion of essay writing, to help you with the essays that will be due on Tuesday the 9th of June.</i> |
| Week 13 1/6 | Essay writing week - No lectures or tutorials. |

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central](#). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

Academic Honesty Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html

Assessment Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy.html>

Grading Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grading/policy.html>

Grade Appeal Policy <http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/gradeappeal/policy.html>

Grievance Management Policy http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grievance_management/policy.html

Disruption to Studies Policy http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/disruption_studies/policy.html *The Disruption to Studies Policy is effective from March 3 2014 and replaces the Special Consideration Policy.*

In addition, a number of other policies can be found in the [Learning and Teaching Category](#) of Policy Central.

Student Code of Conduct

Macquarie University students have a responsibility to be familiar with the Student Code of Conduct: https://students.mq.edu.au/support/student_conduct/

Results

Results shown in *iLearn*, or released directly by your Unit Convenor, are not confirmed as they are subject to final approval by the University. Once approved, final results will be sent to your student email address and will be made available in [eStudent](#). For more information visit ask.mq.edu.au.

Student Support

Macquarie University provides a range of support services for students. For details, visit <http://students.mq.edu.au/support/>

Learning Skills

Learning Skills (mq.edu.au/learningskills) provides academic writing resources and study strategies to improve your marks and take control of your study.

- [Workshops](#)
- [StudyWise](#)
- [Academic Integrity Module for Students](#)
- [Ask a Learning Adviser](#)

Student Services and Support

Students with a disability are encouraged to contact the [Disability Service](#) who can provide appropriate help with any issues that arise during their studies.

Student Enquiries

For all student enquiries, visit Student Connect at ask.mq.edu.au

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit <http://informatics.mq.edu.au/help/>.

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the [Acceptable Use Policy](#). The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.

Graduate Capabilities

Creative and Innovative

Our graduates will also be capable of creative thinking and of creating knowledge. They will be imaginative and open to experience and capable of innovation at work and in the community. We want them to be engaged in applying their critical, creative thinking.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Develop your own view or perspective through consideration and analysis of the views and arguments presented in the unit, and present your own views with clarity and rigour.
- Develop clarity of thought, clarity of verbal expression, clarity of written expression and exposition.
- Contribute to the learning of the group by engaging actively in philosophical discussion with others in face-to-face and/or online environments.

Assessment tasks

- Homework exercises
- Text analysis
- Essay
- Participation

Capable of Professional and Personal Judgement and Initiative

We want our graduates to have emotional intelligence and sound interpersonal skills and to demonstrate discernment and common sense in their professional and personal judgement. They will exercise initiative as needed. They will be capable of risk assessment, and be able to handle ambiguity and complexity, enabling them to be adaptable in diverse and changing environments.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcome

- Contribute to the learning of the group by engaging actively in philosophical discussion with others in face-to-face and/or online environments.

Assessment task

- Participation

Commitment to Continuous Learning

Our graduates will have enquiring minds and a literate curiosity which will lead them to pursue knowledge for its own sake. They will continue to pursue learning in their careers and as they participate in the world. They will be capable of reflecting on their experiences and relationships with others and the environment, learning from them, and growing - personally, professionally and socially.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Develop your own view or perspective through consideration and analysis of the views and arguments presented in the unit, and present your own views with clarity and rigour.
- Contribute to the learning of the group by engaging actively in philosophical discussion with others in face-to-face and/or online environments.

Assessment tasks

- Homework exercises
- Essay
- Participation

Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills

Our graduates will take with them the intellectual development, depth and breadth of knowledge, scholarly understanding, and specific subject content in their chosen fields to make them competent and confident in their subject or profession. They will be able to demonstrate, where relevant, professional technical competence and meet professional standards. They will be able to articulate the structure of knowledge of their discipline, be able to adapt discipline-specific knowledge to novel situations, and be able to contribute from their discipline to inter-disciplinary solutions to problems.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understand and analyse arguments in the relevant literature
- Demonstrate an awareness of central problems in epistemology (the theory of knowledge)
- Critically evaluate arguments in the relevant literature
- Develop your own view or perspective through consideration and analysis of the views and arguments presented in the unit, and present your own views with clarity and rigour.
- Develop clarity of thought, clarity of verbal expression, clarity of written expression and exposition.
- Contribute to the learning of the group by engaging actively in philosophical discussion

with others in face-to-face and/or online environments.

Assessment tasks

- Homework exercises
- Text analysis
- Essay
- Participation

Critical, Analytical and Integrative Thinking

We want our graduates to be capable of reasoning, questioning and analysing, and to integrate and synthesise learning and knowledge from a range of sources and environments; to be able to critique constraints, assumptions and limitations; to be able to think independently and systemically in relation to scholarly activity, in the workplace, and in the world. We want them to have a level of scientific and information technology literacy.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Understand and analyse arguments in the relevant literature
- Critically evaluate arguments in the relevant literature
- Develop your own view or perspective through consideration and analysis of the views and arguments presented in the unit, and present your own views with clarity and rigour.

Assessment tasks

- Homework exercises
- Text analysis
- Essay
- Participation

Problem Solving and Research Capability

Our graduates should be capable of researching; of analysing, and interpreting and assessing data and information in various forms; of drawing connections across fields of knowledge; and they should be able to relate their knowledge to complex situations at work or in the world, in order to diagnose and solve problems. We want them to have the confidence to take the initiative in doing so, within an awareness of their own limitations.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Critically evaluate arguments in the relevant literature
- Develop your own view or perspective through consideration and analysis of the views and arguments presented in the unit, and present your own views with clarity and rigour.

Assessment tasks

- Homework exercises
- Text analysis
- Essay
- Participation

Effective Communication

We want to develop in our students the ability to communicate and convey their views in forms effective with different audiences. We want our graduates to take with them the capability to read, listen, question, gather and evaluate information resources in a variety of formats, assess, write clearly, speak effectively, and to use visual communication and communication technologies as appropriate.

This graduate capability is supported by:

Learning outcomes

- Develop clarity of thought, clarity of verbal expression, clarity of written expression and exposition.
- Contribute to the learning of the group by engaging actively in philosophical discussion with others in face-to-face and/or online environments.

Assessment tasks

- Homework exercises
- Text analysis
- Essay
- Participation

Changes since First Published

| Date | Description |
|------------|--|
| 03/02/2015 | The topics for Weeks 3 and 4 in the Unit Schedule have been reorganised. |