PHIL2056

Knowledge and its Limits

Session 1, Weekday attendance, North Ryde 2020

Department of Philosophy

Contents

Disclaimer

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General Information

Unit convenor and teaching staff
Convenor/lecturer/tutor
Jennifer Duke-Yonge
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Contact via Email, or via "Dialogues" in iLearn
By arrangement

Credit points
10

Prerequisites
40cp at 1000 level or above

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? We will consider how to respond to such sceptical challenges. We will also examine how some of these traditional problems are being reconceived in recent work in epistemology. We will end by applying some of the theories and ideas we have examined to a challenging contemporary problem: How should we respond to conspiracy theories?

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:

ULO1: apply understanding developed through course material and readings to explain

key problems in Epistemology and responses to them.

ULO2: apply skills in critical analysis and reflection to respond to the problems and theories introduced in the unit.

ULO3: clearly communicate your own perspective on the views and arguments presented in the unit.

ULO4: contribute to the learning of the group by engaging constructively in philosophical discussion and activities.

Assessment Tasks

Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update

Assessment details are no longer provided here as a result of changes due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Students should consult iLearn for revised unit information.

Find out more about the Coronavirus (COVID-19) and potential impacts on staff and students

General Assessment Information

Detailed assessment information and rubrics

Detailed information about each of the assessments, including rubrics, will be available in iLearn. Please make sure you read the assessment information carefully, and contact the convenor if you have any questions.

Submission and return of assessments

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. For information about Turnitin and Grademark, see:

https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/tools-and-resources/ilearn/ilearn-quick-guides-for-students/assignments-and-grades

Special Consideration

Requests for extensions should be submitted via a Special Consideration request, which is available in the http://ask.mq.edu.au portal. Your request should be submitted no later than five days after the due date and should be accompanied by appropriate documentation. Please see the Special Consideration policy in the list of policies at the end of this document for further details.

Read the policy closely as your request may be turned down if you have not followed procedure, or if you have not submitted a request in a timely manner.

Late Submission Penalty

Unless a Special Consideration request has been submitted and approved, (a) a penalty for lateness will apply – two (2) marks out of 100 will be deducted per day for assignments submitted after the due date – and (b) no assignment will be accepted more than seven (7) days (incl. weekends) after the original submission deadline. No late submissions will be accepted for timed assessments – e.g. quizzes, online tests.

Late homework exercises will not be accepted without a good reason, since they do not all need to be submitted. (Only your best three homework exercises, including at least one from each half of the unit, will count towards your final mark).

Academic Integrity

In Philosophy, academic honesty is taken very seriously, and a range of methods, including but not restricted to the use of Turnitin, are used to detect plagiarism. Misrepresenting someone else's work as your own may be grounds for referral to the Faculty Disciplinary Committee. If you have questions about how to properly cite work or how to credit sources, please ask the convenor for help and see also the Academic Integrity Policy https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policies/academic-integrity

Please note that the policy also prohibits resubmitting work you have already submitted in another unit or unit offering. This counts as **self-plagiarism**. To avoid self-plagiarism, if you have done this unit previously, you should write on another topic this time. If this presents you with any problems, please contact the unit convenor as soon as possible.

A helpful resource if you would like to know more about referencing and avoiding plagiarism is Macquarie's Academic Integrity Module, available here: https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/skills-development.

For information about policies related to Assessment, see *Policies and Procedures* section below.

Delivery and Resources

> **Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update**
>
> Any references to on-campus delivery below may no longer be relevant due to COVID-19.
>
> Please check here for updated delivery information: https://ask.mq.edu.au/account/pub/display/unit_status

CLASSES

Internal students will attend one two-hour lecture each week (week 1 to week 12), and one tutorial each week (weeks 2-6 and 8-12).

At time of publication, the lecture is on:

- Thursday 12-2, in 11 Wally's Walk 120

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

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

- Thursday 2-3, in 25a Wally's Walk 114, or
- Friday 10-11 in 4 Western Rd 312

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 Thursday lecture will be the subject of the tutorials, so if you have to miss the lecture for any reason you should watch the recording before attending the tutorial. If you do not expect to be able to attend lectures regularly, you should make sure you're enrolled in the Friday tutorial, so you will have time to catch up on the recording before your tutorial.

READING

All the essential readings and some supplementary readings for the course will be available electronically through the library, with links from iLearn.

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

You should do the essential weekly reading before the tutorial.

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.

Unit Schedule

> **Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update**
>
> The unit schedule/topics and any references to on-campus delivery below may no longer be relevant due to COVID-19. Please consult iLearn for latest details, and check here for updated delivery information: https://ask.mq.edu.au/account/pub/display/unit_status

Week	Topic (for lectures and tutorials)
Week 1 **(Week beginning 24/2)**	**Introduction to Epistemology** *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?)* ***No tutorials this week.***

Week 2	**Scepticism about knowledge of the external world**
(w/b 2/3)	*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 important ways that philosophers have tried to respond to the sceptical challenge.*
Week 3	**Classical Foundationalism**
(w/b 9/3)	*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.*
Week 4	**Contemporary Foundationalism**
(w/b 16/3)	*This week, we'll continue our study of Foundationalism by considering some problems with classical views, and some contemporary developments of Foundationalism. Can any version of Foundationalism provide an answer to the sceptic?*
Week 5	**Coherentism**
(w/b 23/3)	*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?*
Week 6	**Responses to scepticism: Moore and Wittgenstein**
(w/b 30/3)	*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.*
Week 7	**The Gettier problem (and the 'Gettier problem problem')**
(w/b 6/4)	*This week, we will further examine the idea of justification. We will look at Gettier's challenge to the traditional conception of knowledge.*
	We'll also be doing a bit of metaphilosophy. Although Gettier's challenge has been extremely influential, its influence is taken by some as a sign of what's wrong with analytic philosophy, so we'll look at why that is, and look at the use of conceptual analysis in this debate.
	No tutorials this week.

Week 8	**Internalism vs Externalism**
(w/b 27/4)	*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, rather than on whether or not I have good reasons for them. We'll look at some advantages and disadvantages of Externalism, with a particular focus on the question of whether Externalists can give an adequate account of the normativity of belief.*

Week 9 (w/b 4/5)	**Epistemic Responsibility and Epistemic Luck** *This week we'll look at some interesting recent arguments arising out of last week's considerations about normativity and Epistemic Responsibility. Is Epistemic Luck incompatible with knowledge? If so, how much of our purported knowledge does that undermine? Last week we looked at some thought experiments focussing on agents who (in some quite unusual circumstances) seemed to lack the right kind of responsibility for their beliefs, but is this actually more common than those thought experiments might suggest? Does this lead us back to scepticism?*
Week 10 (w/b 11/5)	**Virtue epistemology** *Virtue epistemology 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?*
Week 11 (w/b 18/5)	**Conspiracy theories 1** *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.* *What makes conspiracy theorists interesting from an epistemological point of view is that whatever we may think of their conclusions (Were the Obamas really reptilian aliens? How much that the media tells us is really "fake news"?), 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 might actually be used to support or justify beliefs in certain kinds of conspiracy theory.*
Week 12 (w/b 25/5)	**Conspiracy theories 2** *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.*
Week 13 (w/b 1/6)	*Essay writing week - No lectures or tutorials.*

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from Policy Central (https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central). Students should be aware of the following policies in particular with regard to Learning and Teaching:

- Academic Appeals Policy
- Academic Integrity Policy
- Academic Progression Policy
- Assessment Policy

- Fitness to Practice Procedure
- Grade Appeal Policy
- Complaint Management Procedure for Students and Members of the Public
- Special Consideration Policy *(**Note:** The Special Consideration Policy is effective from 4 December 2017 and replaces the Disruption to Studies Policy.)*

Students seeking more policy resources can visit the Student Policy Gateway (https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/student-policy-gateway). It is your one-stop-shop for the key policies you need to know about throughout your undergraduate student journey.

If you would like to see all the policies relevant to Learning and Teaching visit Policy Central (https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/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/study/getting-started/student-conduct

Results

Results published on platform other than eStudent, (eg. iLearn, Coursera etc.) 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 or if you are a Global MBA student contact globalmba.support@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 help you improve your marks and take control of your study.

- Getting help with your assignment
- Workshops
- StudyWise
- Academic Integrity Module

The Library provides online and face to face support to help you find and use relevant information resources.

- Subject and Research Guides
- Ask a Librarian

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

If you are a Global MBA student contact globalmba.support@mq.edu.au

IT Help

For help with University computer systems and technology, visit http://www.mq.edu.au/about_us/offices_and_units/information_technology/help/.

When using the University's IT, you must adhere to the Acceptable Use of IT Resources Policy. The policy applies to all who connect to the MQ network including students.

Changes from Previous Offering

Minor changes to topics, readings and assessment.