



PHL 256

Knowledge and its Limits

S1 Day 2019

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 via "Dialogues" in iLearn

Level 2, Australian Hearing Hub

By arrangement

Credit points

3

Prerequisites

(12cp at 100 level or above) 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? 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:

Demonstrate an ability to explain some important problems and arguments in

Epistemology (the theory of knowledge)

Demonstrate an ability to close-read and critically evaluate philosophical texts

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.

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.

Assessments are to be submitted through Turnitin, and will be marked and returned via Grademark. For information about these tools, see:

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

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.

Academic Honesty

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.

Assessment Tasks

Name	Weighting	Hurdle	Due
Homework exercises	25%	No	Sundays, Wks 2-7 and 8-12
Text analysis	20%	No	Sunday 21st April
Essay	35%	No	Sunday 9th of June
Participation	20%	No	Weeks 2-10 and 12

Homework exercises

Due: **Sundays, Wks 2-7 and 8-12**

Weighting: **25%**

Homework exercises will be made available after the lectures on Mondays in weeks 2-7, and 8-12. Each exercise will be due by 11.59pm on the Sunday of the same week, and needs to be submitted through Turnitin in iLearn.

Over the course of the unit, **you will need to complete at least three of these exercises**, including at least one from weeks 2-7 and one from weeks 8-12. 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 2-7 and one from weeks 8-12) 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. Assessment will be based on the quality of exposition, clarity and engagement. A rubric will be available through Turnitin.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Demonstrate an ability to explain some important problems and arguments in Epistemology (the theory of knowledge)
- Demonstrate an ability to close-read and critically evaluate philosophical texts
- 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.

Text analysis

Due: **Sunday 21st 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 Sunday the 21st of April (at the end of the first week of the mid-semester break). It is to be submitted through iLearn.

Assessment will be based on the quality of exposition, clarity, engagement, structure and focus. A rubric will be available through Turnitin.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Demonstrate an ability to explain some important problems and arguments in Epistemology (the theory of knowledge)
- Demonstrate an ability to close-read and critically evaluate philosophical texts
- 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.

Essay

Due: **Sunday 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. A guide to writing Philosophy essays will be available through the website. The essay is to be submitted through Turnitin by 11.59pm on Sunday 9th of June.

Assessment will be based on the quality of understanding, clarity, engagement and argumentation. A rubric will be available through Turnitin.

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Demonstrate an ability to explain some important problems and arguments in Epistemology (the theory of knowledge)
- Demonstrate an ability to close-read and critically evaluate philosophical texts
- 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.

Participation

Due: **Weeks 2-10 and 12**

Weighting: **20%**

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

15% for tutorial attendance and engagement, based on attendance, preparation and willingness to engage constructively. Note that preparedness includes having attended the lecture or, if that is not possible in a given week, having caught up on the lecture in iLearn prior to the tutorial. If you are in the Monday tutorial you will need to attend the lecture, as you won't have time to watch the recording before your tutorial.

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. Satisfactory completion of this task will earn a mark of 5/5. Further information will be given about this task in week 1.

There will be no tutorials in week 1 or week 11

On successful completion you will be able to:

- Demonstrate an ability to explain some important problems and arguments 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.
- 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 10, and 12).

At time of publication, the lecture is on:

- Monday 12-2, in 25A Wally's Walk 114

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

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

- Monday 2-3, in 9 Wally's Walk 131, or
- Wednesday 2-3 in 11 Wally's Walk 160

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 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 Wednesday 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

Week	Topic (for lectures and tutorials)
Week 1 25/2	Introduction to Epistemology <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 4/3	Scepticism about knowledge of the external world <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>

<p>Week 3 11/3</p>	<p>Classical Foundationalism</p> <p><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></p>
<p>Week 4 18/3</p>	<p>Contemporary Foundationalism</p> <p><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></p>
<p>Week 5 25/3</p>	<p>Coherentism</p> <p><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></p>
<p>Week 6 1/4</p>	<p>Responses to scepticism: Moore and Wittgenstein</p> <p><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></p>
<p>Week 7 8/4</p>	<p>The Gettier problem and the Externalist response</p> <p><i>This week, we will further examine the idea of justification. We will look at Gettier's challenge to the traditional conception of knowledge, and an important kind of response to it.</i></p> <p><i>What does it mean to say 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></p>
<p>Week 8 29/4</p>	<p>Externalism, Internalism and the Normativity of Belief</p> <p><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></p>
<p>Week 9 6/5</p>	<p>Epistemic Luck</p> <p><i>This week we'll look at some interesting recent arguments arising out of last week's considerations about Epistemic Responsibility. Is Epistemic Luck incompatible with knowledge? If not, 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?</i></p>
<p>Week 10 13/5</p>	<p>Virtue epistemology</p> <p><i>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?</i></p>

<p>Week 11</p> <p>20/5</p> <p>No tutorials this week</p>	<p>Conspiracy theories 1</p> <p><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></p> <p><i>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 could actually be used to support or justify beliefs in certain kinds of conspiracy theory.</i></p>
<p>Week 12</p> <p>27/5</p>	<p>Conspiracy theories 2</p> <p><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></p>
<p>Week 13</p> <p>3/6</p>	<p><i>Essay writing week - No lectures or tutorials.</i></p>

Policies and Procedures

Macquarie University policies and procedures are accessible from [Policy Central \(https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central\)](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.*)

Undergraduate students seeking more policy resources can visit the [Student Policy Gateway \(https://students.mq.edu.au/support/study/student-policy-gateway\)](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 \(http://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central\)](http://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 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

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.

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.
- 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

- Demonstrate an ability to explain some important problems and arguments in Epistemology (the theory of knowledge)
- Demonstrate an ability to close-read and critically evaluate philosophical texts
- 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
- 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

- Demonstrate an ability to close-read and critically evaluate philosophical texts
- 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

- Demonstrate an ability to close-read and critically evaluate philosophical texts
- 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

- Demonstrate an ability to explain some important problems and arguments in Epistemology (the theory of knowledge)
- Demonstrate an ability to close-read and critically evaluate philosophical texts
- 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
- Text analysis
- Essay
- Participation

Changes from Previous Offering

Some changes to topics and readings.

Changes since First Published

Date	Description
20/02/2019	Change of final essay due date.