The topic for Epistemology II this year is scepticism. For the most part, we will be discussing recent work on the topic, but we will also spend some time investigating the sceptical tradition as it has developed since the pre-Socratic period.

Assessment

- Formative assessment: 1 x 2,000–3,000-word essay, due by end of semester or as otherwise instructed
- Summative assessment: 1 x 4,000-word essay, due Monday 30 April 2012

**NB** Please note that although the lectures will be shared with final year BA students taking 6AANA098 Scepticism, they will follow separate teaching and assessment patterns.

Principal readings

Many of the key texts can be found in one or other of


DeRose and Warfield appears to be out of print. But the library has some copies on reserve, and many of the articles it contains can be accessed free of charge on line or in journals held in the library.

An excellent introductory book on the topic is


This is introductory in the sense that it assumes no previous knowledge of the topic, but it is not elementary. Sill more philosophically substantial, and still important after twenty five years, is


Some readings on specific topics are given in the Course Outline below.
Course outline

Below I give the topics we will study, in provisional order, and an estimate of the time we will spend on each. Except for weeks 1 and 2, this is all provisional, and we may take the topics in a different order, or spend more or less time on any of them, depending on the way our discussions develop.

Week One: Introduction: the sceptical tradition, and two styles of sceptical argument

The two styles of sceptical argument are the ‘demandingness of knowledge’ argument (see for example the introduction to DeRose and Warfield), and the ancient Pyrrhonist argument variously known as Agrippa’s Dilemma, the wheel argument, of the problem of the criterion. There is a helpful introductory discussion in


Week 2: Pyrrhonism

Ancient scepticism has two strands—academic scepticism, and Pyrrhonism. We will investigate the differences between them, but our main interest is in Pyrrhonism. The classic text of Pyrrhonism is Sextus Empiricus’ Outlines of Pyrrhonism. There are many translations in print, and the text can be accessed free on line, for example at http://web.archive.org/web/20070621153548/http://www.philosophy.leeds.ac.uk/GMR/hmp/modules/hdc0405/units/unit05/outlines.html. But if this topic interests you, get hold of the translation with extensive notes and commentary by Benson Mates:


Weeks 3 and 4: Moore and the sceptic (Weeks 3 and 4)

All of Moore’s published articles on scepticism appear in


The most important of them are also in the first section of Sosa and Kim.

Weeks 5 and 6: Nozick

Nozick’s thoughts on scepticism appear in Part 3—‘Epistemology’—of his book Philosophical Explanations. Excerpts are anthologized in various places, but do try to get hold of the original if you possibly can.

Robert Nozick, Philosophical Explanations (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 1984)

For one thing, none of the anthologized excerpts known to me include all of Nozick’s extensive footnotes, which are essential.
Weeks 7 and 8: Contextualism

Contextualism dominates contemporary discussions of scepticism. One variety is prefigured in Nozick, and receives its classic exposition in Keith DeRose’s article ‘Solving the sceptical problem’, which is in Sosa and Kim (and DeRose and Warfield as well). Another, more shadowy version finds inspiration in Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*. For a version of this approach, you might try Michael Williams, *Unnatural Doubts* (Princeton: Princeton UP 1995)

Weeks 9 and 10: Externalism and scepticism

Does the externalist perspective trivialize the sceptical problem? And if it does, is that a bad thing? For the claim that it does, see Richard Fumerton’s article ‘Externalism and scepticism’, in Sosa and Kim.