

King's College London
Department of Philosophy
6AAN4043: Knowledge, Objectivity and Relativism
Syllabus 2015 to 2016

Basic Information

Credits: 30

Module tutor: Dr David Galloway

Instructors: Dr David Galloway (1st semester) and Dr Julien Dutant (2nd semester)

Contact information:

Dr. David Galloway, david.galloway@kcl.ac.uk, office hours TBC.

Dr. Julien Dutant, julien.dutant@kcl.ac.uk, office hours Tue 10-11 and Wed 11-12.

Semester: 1 and 2

Time and place: Monday 4 to 6pm, 605 Philosophy Building

Module description, with aims and objectives

6AAN4043 is an introductory, but by no means elementary course in core analytic metaphysics and epistemology. It was originally developed for the IBSC in Philosophy, and remains one of the required modules for that degree. But it is now open to students from other degree streams, subject to availability of places. *It cannot be taken by single or joint honours philosophy students.* The module aims to provide an understanding of some philosophical problems concerning our knowledge of a mind-independent reality. Special attention is given to the problematic distinction between facts and values, and the ways in which our evaluative thought may or may not be objective. A secondary objective is to provide the student with the basic elements of analytic philosophical methodology.

Students completing this module will gain:

1. Familiarity with some core problems of contemporary metaphysics and epistemology.
2. The ability to deploy the philosophical techniques and argumentative strategies that can be used to discuss those problems
3. The transferable skill of formulating and evaluating arguments both for and against various other kinds of philosophical positions.

Teaching

6AAN4043 meets for two hours each week through the first and second semesters. In general, the first hour will be a lecture, followed by an hour of discussion.

Assessment methods and deadlines

Summative assessment: one 3-hour written examination in the May/June examination period.

Formative assessment: two x 1500-word formative essays in the first semester, and two x 1500 word essays in the second semester, submission dates TBC.

Outline of module content, first semester

The core readings for the first semester come from one or other of

Duncan Pritchard, *What is This Thing Called Knowledge?*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon: Routledge 2010)

and

Earl Conee and Theodore Sider, *Riddles of Existence* (Oxford: OUP 2005)

(referred to as Conee and Sider). These shorts books are good, very cheap and readily available. Buy yourself a copy of each. Details of further reading and the topics of each lecture will appear in the syllabus on Keats, but the topics will include freedom of the will, identity over time, necessary existence and necessary truth, the nature of knowledge, knowledge and reasons, and the value of knowledge.

It is a good idea to do the prescribed reading before class, but it is an even better idea to do it again, more than once, after class. As the course progresses, I will suggest other things you might like to read. You should also get into the habit of pursuing your interests independently: both Conee and Sider and Pritchard contain many suggestions for further reading, and you should make use of them. Further readings will be suggested in the notes accompanying each lecture (posted on Keats).

Outline of module content, second semester

The second semester will focus on the metaphysics of norms and values. Our starting point will be the debate between three radically distinct views on the nature of value: Moore's realism, Ayer's expressivism and Mackie's nihilism. We will work through more refined versions of these views and others in the contemporary debate. Along the way we will take up wider metaphysical issues concerning explanation, reduction and analysis, properties and relations, truth, entailment.

Detailed topics and readings for each lecture will be made available through Keats. We will take our readings from a book and a collection:

Gilbert Harman and Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity* (Oxford: Blackwell 1995).

Russ Shafer-Landau and Terence Cuneo (editors), *Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell 2006).

The required readings for each session will be made available through Keats. The Shafer-Landau and Cuneo collection is a good source of further readings.