

EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 432/CGSC 432/PHIL 632

YALE UNIVERSITY

FALL 2013

I. BASIC INFORMATION

Instructor: Joshua Knobe

Office: Connecticut Hall 102

Office Hours: Wednesdays 1:30-3:00 and by appointment

Telephone: 201-921-8604

E-mail: joshua.knobe@yale.edu

Course time: Tuesdays 3:30-5:20

II. OVERVIEW

Experimental philosophy is a new movement within philosophy. The basic idea behind this movement is that we might be able to make philosophical progress by actually going out and conducting systematic experimental studies of the sort that one typically finds in cognitive and social psychology. Thus, experimental philosophy is an interdisciplinary approach that uses the methods usually associated with psychology to go after the questions usually associated with philosophy.

Experimental philosophy has been highly controversial. There is a great deal of disagreement about whether experimental methods can actually prove helpful in addressing philosophical questions, and even among philosophers who do make use of these methods, there is controversy about what conclusions to draw from existing studies. The aim of this course is not to present a particular answer to any of these controversial issues but rather to explore the various plausible opinions and the arguments for and against each.

More importantly, the aim of the course is not merely to give students an opportunity to learn about existing work in the field; it is to give them the tools they need to make a contribution of their own. Hence, we will be discussing existing experimental work in a wide variety of different areas (ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, etc.), but my main goal is not for you to memorize all the details of this existing work. Rather, the goal is to give you a sense of what people have already done in this field so that you will be able to do some original work, whether empirical or purely philosophical, in whichever area most interests you.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The main assignment will be a paper due at the end of the semester. To give you as much flexibility as possible to pursue your unique interests, I will not be introducing any specific requirements. The assignment will simply be to *make a contribution to experimental philosophy*. This contribution could take any of a variety of different forms. It could be an original experiment (or experiment proposal), a literature review, a discussion of the philosophical implications of existing findings, or even an argument for the view that experimental work is irrelevant to philosophical questions.

To better enable students to make a genuine contribution here, I will be introducing a few somewhat unusual forms of flexibility in the requirements for this assignment:

1. You should feel free to write about any topic in experimental philosophy. Although an obvious approach would be to engage in some way with the specific material assigned in the course, it is not required that you discuss the course material at all.

2. You are, of course, not required to conduct actual experimental research for the assignment. However, those of you who do choose to conduct original experiments will be permitted to work in pairs. (The two members of the pair would then receive the same grade.) For those of you who are not already familiar with experimental methods, I will be happy to help out in any way I can with statistics, experimental design, and so forth.

3. The notion of 'making a contribution to experimental philosophy' should be construed in an especially broad sense. Papers looking at purely philosophical questions about the implications of empirical research are always welcome. So are papers suggesting that particular types of empirical research are entirely irrelevant to key philosophical questions and that these questions should therefore be resolved using armchair methods alone.

In addition to this final paper, students will be asked to email me brief comments or questions about the reading by midnight on the day before each class session. Please do not spend more than 10 minutes on these emails. They will be graded only on a pass/fail basis, and will serve to help give me a good sense of the topics that should be discussed in the coming day.

Finally, there will be two opportunities for oral presentations. On 12/3, students will be asked to give a very brief oral explanation of the project they are thinking of pursuing. This presentation will not be anything like a formal talk and will not be graded in any way. The goal is simply to enable students to get a chance to solicit suggestions from each other about their respective projects. Then, throughout the course, students will have a chance to give more detailed presentations on the work they have been doing on their own projects. These presentations are entirely voluntary. (Ideally, there would be approximately three presentations over the course of the semester, and I will select presenters on a first come, first served basis.)

IV. APPLYING FOR ADMISSION TO THIS COURSE

Unfortunately, there are not quite enough spaces in this course for all of the students who wish to enroll. If you decide to apply for admission to the course, please send me an email at jknope+CGSC426@gmail.com with the following information:

1. Your name
2. Your official status (e.g., 'graduate student in psychology,' 'junior majoring in philosophy')
3. Whether you contacted me ahead of time about this course
4. Why you are interested in enrolling (specific questions you would like to investigate, requirements that the course would fulfill)
5. Any background you might have that would prove relevant (research you have conducted, courses you have taken, etc.)

Please email by Wednesday at noon. I will have a final answer back to you by Saturday.

V. READINGS

Included below is a tentative list of readings. However, if students are interested in exploring topics that are not included in the present reading list, I will be more than happy to consider modifying it to fit the actual research interests of the people in the course.

9/3	Introduction
9/10	<p>Cross Cultural Differences</p> <p><i>A series of experimental studies suggest that people's intuitions about key philosophical questions might differ from one culture to another. These findings are sometimes thought to undermine certain presuppositions of more traditional philosophical methodology.</i></p> <p>Weinberg, J. M., Nichols, S. & Stich, S. Normativity and epistemic intuitions. <i>Philosophical Topics</i>, 29, 429-460.</p> <p>Seyedsayamdost, H. On normativity and epistemic intuitions: Failure of replication.</p> <p>Machery, E., Mallon, R., Nichols, S. & Stich, S. Semantics, cross-cultural style. <i>Cognition</i>, 92, B1-B12.</p> <p>Recommended:</p> <p>Sytsma, J. & Livengood, J. A new perspective concerning experiments on semantic intuitions. <i>Australasian Journal of Philosophy</i>, 89, 315-332.</p>
9/17	<p>Consciousness</p> <p><i>Some entities are seen as having consciousness, others are not. Experimental research in this area looks at people's ordinary way of distinguishing between the two and then asks whether these intuitive judgments are to be trusted.</i></p> <p>Gray, H. M., Gray, K., & Wegner, D. M. (2007). Dimensions of mind perception. <i>Science</i>, 315, 619-619.</p> <p>Sytsma, J., & Machery, E. (2010). Two conceptions of subjective experience. <i>Philosophical Studies</i>, 151(2), 299-327.</p> <p>Arico, A., Fiala, B., Goldberg, R. F., & Nichols, S. (2011). The folk psychology of consciousness. <i>Mind & Language</i>, 26, 327-352.</p>
9/24	<p>Knowledge Attributions: Context and Practical Interests</p> <p><i>People ordinarily distinguish between things that a person 'knows' and things that a person merely 'believes.' It has sometimes been suggested that people's intuitive way of making this distinction depends to some degree on what is at stake. These papers put that claim to an empirical test.</i></p> <p>Sripada, C. S. & Stanley, J. (2012). Empirical tests of interest-relative invariantism. <i>Episteme</i>, 9, 3-26.</p> <p>Buckwalter, W. & Schaffer, J. (2013). Knowledge, stakes, and mistakes. <i>Noûs</i> 47.</p>

	DeRose, K. (2011). Contextualism, contrastivism, and x-phi surveys. <i>Philosophical studies</i> , 156(1), 81-110.
10/1	<p>Metaethics</p> <p><i>Can moral claims be objectively true, or is morality always merely relative or subjective? These papers examine people's ordinary intuitions on the topic and use those intuitions to address unresolved issues in metaethics.</i></p> <p>Goodwin, G. P., & Darley, J. M. (2010). The perceived objectivity of ethical beliefs: psychological findings and implications for public policy. <i>Review of Philosophy and Psychology</i>, 1, 161-188.</p> <p>Wright, J. C. & Sarkissian, H. Folk meta-ethical commitments.</p>
10/8	<p>Introduction to Statistics and Experimental Design</p> <p><i>This session will provide a brief lesson in statistics and experimental design, which may be useful both for students who are conducting original experiments and for those who simply want to have a better understanding of the experiments discussed in the course. (Students who are already familiar with experimental methods may want to skip this session.)</i></p>
10/15	<p>The Impact of Moral Judgment</p> <p><i>One might think that people make sense of each other's actions by first applying certain purely descriptive concepts (causation, intention, etc.) and then making a moral judgment. A series of studies suggest, however, that the situation may be more complex – perhaps people's moral judgments affect their application even of these seemingly descriptive concepts.</i></p> <p>Knobe, J. (2010). Person as scientist, person as moralist. <i>Behavioral and Brain Sciences</i>, 33, 315.</p> <p>Alicke, M. D., Rose, D., & Bloom, D. (2011). Causation, norm violation, and culpable control. <i>Journal of Philosophy</i>, 108, 670.</p> <p>Sripada, C. S., & Konrath, S. (2011). Telling more than we can know about intentional action. <i>Mind & Language</i>, 26, 353-380.</p>
10/22	<p>Free Will</p> <p><i>If everything in our universe is determined, can human beings truly have free will? People appear to be conflicted about this question, with something in their minds drawing them toward the answer 'yes' and something drawing them toward the answer 'no.' Experimental work in this area seeks to understand what might be pulling us in each of these directions and to get a better sense of which intuitions here are actually warranted.</i></p> <p>Nahmias, E., & Murray, D. (2010). Experimental philosophy on free will: An</p>

	<p>error theory for incompatibilist intuitions. <i>New waves in philosophy of action</i>, 189-215.</p> <p>Björnsson, G. Incompatibilism and “bypassed” agency</p> <p>Sommers, T. (2010). Experimental philosophy and free will. <i>Philosophy Compass</i>, 199-212.</p>
10/29	<p>Belief</p> <p>Myers-Schulz, B., & Schwitzgebel, E. (2013). Knowing that P without believing that P. <i>Noûs</i>, 47(2), 371-384.</p> <p>Buckwalter, W., Rose, D. & Turri, J. (forthcoming). Belief through thick and thin. <i>Noûs</i>.</p> <p>Strandberg, C. & Björklund, F. (2013) Is moral internalism supported by folk intuitions?, <i>Philosophical Psychology</i>, 26, 319-335.</p>
11/5	<p>Consequentialism and Deontology</p> <p><i>Philosophers have long wondered whether (a) morality is simply a matter of bringing about the best possible outcome or (b) certain acts can be morally wrong even when they lead, on the whole, to the outcome that is best. We will be looking at a series of studies on the cognitive processes that lead people to favor (a) or (b) and at the implications of these studies for moral philosophy.</i></p> <p>Greene, J. D. (2007). The secret joke of Kant’s soul, in edited by Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (ed.), <i>Moral Psychology, Vol. 3: The Neuroscience of Morality: Emotion, Disease, and Development</i>.</p> <p>Woodward, J., & Allman, J. (2007). Moral intuition: Its neural substrates and normative significance. <i>Journal of Physiology-Paris</i>, 101(4), 179-202.</p>
11/12	<p>Metaphysics</p> <p><i>Just in the past few months, experimental philosophers have begun turning their attention in a serious way to questions in metaphysics. Here we examine recent experimental studies on intuitions about the nature of objects and intuitions about personal identity.</i></p> <p>Rose, D., & Schaffer, J. Folk mereology is teleological.</p> <p>Scholl, B. J. (2007). Object persistence in philosophy and psychology. <i>Mind & Language</i>, 22(5), 563-591.</p> <p>Tierney, H., Howard, C., Kumar, V., Kvaran, T., & Nichols, S. (forthcoming). How many of us are there. In J. Sytsma (ed.) <i>Advances in Experimental Philosophy of Mind</i>. Continuum Press.</p>

11/19	<p>Critiques of Experimental Philosophy</p> <p><i>Although experimental philosophy has been criticized from a number of different perspectives, perhaps the two most prominent critiques are (a) that experimental philosophers are not looking at the right type of intuitions and (b) that intuitions quite generally are not relevant to philosophy. Here we examine one representative example of each critique.</i></p> <p>Kauppinen, A. (2007). The rise and fall of experimental philosophy. <i>Philosophical explorations</i>, 10(2), 95-118.</p> <p>Cappelen, H. (forthcoming). X-phi without intuitions? In D. Rowbottom & A. Booth (eds.). <i>Intuitions</i>. New York: Oxford University Press.</p>
12/3	<p>Student Presentations</p> <p><i>On this final day, we will give each student a chance to briefly present the basic idea behind his or her final paper and get some feedback from other students in the course. (In past years, this student feedback has proven extremely helpful in developing final projects.)</i></p>