

Naturalism in Epistemology

Instructor: Bob Beddor

Email: phibrs@nus.edu.sg

Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-2pm, Wednesdays 3-4pm, and by appointment

Course Overview

Many philosophers have been attracted to *naturalism* – roughly, the idea that everything that exists can be explained using the vocabulary and/or methods of the natural sciences. While many thinkers have found naturalism appealing, many others have expressed serious doubts about the naturalistic project.

Historically, debates over naturalism have waged most fiercely in philosophy of mind and metaethics. But epistemology raises equally pressing questions for naturalists. This course will aim to get clear on these questions. In particular, we will examine what it means to develop a naturalistic epistemology, and we will consider whether the project of developing such an epistemology is well-motivated. We will also explore in depth some specific examples of naturalistically oriented accounts of knowledge and justification, with particular emphasis on reliabilist theories. Other topics include the role of the experimental methods in epistemology, epistemic expressivism as a form of naturalism, and the viability of the naturalistic program in philosophy more generally.

Learning Outcomes

By end of the module, student should be able to:

- (1) Distinguish between different forms of naturalism
- (2) Reconstruct arguments for or against specific naturalistic programs in epistemology
- (3) Develop original responses to the arguments in (2), either in the form of novel criticisms of specific arguments, or novel defenses of positions that others have criticized.
- (4) Defend the original responses developed in (3) from potential objections.

Format and Reading Availability

Since this is a small class, it will be largely discussion-based. Each week we will focus on a particular topic. You will be expected to have read the assigned texts in advance. All readings will be made available through the course website on LumiNUS.

Grading

The grade will consist of four components, summarized below.

Attendance/Participation (15%)

Participation is vital for a small honors level seminar – I certainly don't want to have to lecture for three hours every meeting! In order to encourage participation, part of the participation grade is to post one short comment/question on the LumiNUS forum at least

one hour before class. The comment/question does not need to be long or detailed, but it should show familiarity with the reading.

Two Short Written Responses (20% total, 10% each)

You will also be expected to write two short responses to a specific aspect of one of the readings. The response should be focused on a particular argument in one of the papers – you should briefly summarize the argument, and then engage with it critically, by either offering an original criticism of it, or extending the argument in some way. These responses should only be 500 words (750 words max). More detailed guidelines and rubrics will be distributed in class.

Presentation (20%)

You will also be expected to pick a topic from the syllabus to present on. Presentations can be devoted to a single reading on the topic, or they can be devoted to multiple readings relating to a topic. You should aim to present for about 10-15 minutes, and then field questions from the class for another 5-10 minutes. *You are expected to prepare a short handout to accompany your presentation, and you should email the handout to me at least three days (72 hours) before the presentation.* (Completing the handout and sending it in advance is part of the presentation grade.) You are encouraged to think of the presentations as warm up for the final paper: they're an opportunity to read papers on a topic with particular care, and develop original questions and objections in response to those papers.

Final Paper (45%)

The largest component of the grade is the final paper. Your final paper gives you the opportunity to research a particular topic in depth, culminating in a paper that develops a sustained argument and demonstrates a mastery of the relevant literature. I will distribute detailed guidelines for the final paper – together with a grading rubric – closer to the deadline.

Expectations for Discussions

We want to create an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual respect. This course emphasizes discussion and debate: I firmly believe that the best way to learn philosophy is to practice doing philosophy, which involves formulating hypotheses, raising questions, and considering objections.

In the course of our discussions, disagreements will naturally arise. That is fine; disagreement is an integral part of philosophical activity. That said, it is important to pay attention to the way you voice your disagreement with others; we want to ensure everyone feels respected even in the midst of disagreement. Here are some general guidelines to achieve this goal:

- Please listen to your classmates, and avoid interrupting them.
- When you disagree, please take care to challenge the idea being discussed, rather than the person.
- Please try to articulate your grounds for disagreement (backing up your position with reasons is itself an essential part of learning to do philosophy).

Schedule

Unit 1: Preliminaries

Week 1 - Introduction: What is Naturalism?

Week 2 - Is Naturalized Epistemology a Branch of Psychology?

Required Reading:

- Quine, "Epistemology Naturalized"
- Kim, "What is Naturalized Epistemology?"

Unit 2. Metaphysical Naturalism in Epistemology

Week 3 - Reliabilism as Naturalized Epistemology

Required Reading:

- Goldman, "What is Justified Belief?"

Recommended Reading:

- Comesaña, "Reliabilism"
- Goldman and Beddor, "Reliabilist Epistemology" (SEP)

Week 4 – Challenges to Reliabilism

Required Reading:

- Cohen, "Justification and Truth"
- Conee and Feldman, "The Generality Problem for Reliabilism"

Recommended Reading:

- Comesaña, "The Diagonal and the Demon"

Week 5 – Further Challenges to Reliabilism

First short response due (⊗)

Required Reading:

- Weisberg, "The Bootstrapping Problem"

Recommended Reading:

- Beddor, "Process Reliabilism's Troubles with Defeat"

Week 6 – Is Knowledge a Natural Kind?

Required Reading:

- Millikan, "Naturalistic Reflections on Knowledge"
- Kornblith, *Knowledge and its Place in Nature* (selections)

Unit 3: Epistemic Expressivism as a Naturalistic Project

Week 7 Normative Expressivism Introduced

Required Reading:

-Schroeder, *Noncognitivism in Ethics*, Chapters 1 & 4.

Recommended Readings:

- Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, Chp. 6.

Week 8 - Expressivism and the Frege-Geach Problem

Required Readings:

-Schroeder, *Noncognitivism in Ethics*, Chps. 3 & 6

Recommend Readings:

- Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, Chapter 5 (“Normative Logic”)

Week 9 – Epistemic Expressivism Second Short Response Due

Required Reading:

- Chrisman, “From Epistemic Contextualism to Epistemic Expressivism”

-Greco, “Epistemological Open Questions”

Recommended Reading:

-Field, “Epistemology without Metaphysics” (difficult)

Week 10 – Is Epistemic Expressivism Incompatible With Inquiry?

Required Readings:

- Lynch, “Truth, Value, and Epistemic Expressivism”

Recommended Reading:

- Carter and Chrisman, “Is Epistemic Expressivism Incompatible with Inquiry?”

- Cuneo, *The Normative Web* (selections)

Unit 4. Methodological Naturalism in Epistemology: The Experimental Method

Week 11 – Exploring Variations in Epistemic Intuitions

Required Reading:

-Weinberg et al., “Normativity and Intuitions”

-J. Nagel et al., “Lay Denial of Knowledge for Justified True Beliefs”

Recommended Reading:

-Machery et al., “Gettier Across Cultures”

Week 12 – What Good are Intuitions?

Required Reading:

-Nado, “Why Intuition?”

-Goldman, “Philosophical Naturalism and Intuitional Methodology”

Recommended Reading:

-J. Nagel, “Epistemic Intuitions”

-Sosa, “Experimental Philosophy and Philosophical Intuition”

Week 13 –What Good are Intuitions? (Continued)

Required Reading:

-J. Nagel, “Intuitions and Experiments: A Defense of the Case Method in Epistemology”

- Brown, “Intuitions, Evidence, and Hopefulness”

FINAL PAPER DUE

Have a fantastic vacation!