

# PH3A5-15 The History of Scepticism

**22/23**

**Department**

Philosophy

**Level**

Undergraduate Level 3

**Module leader**

Johannes Roessler

**Credit value**

15

**Module duration**

10 weeks

**Assessment**

100% coursework

**Study location**

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

---

## Description

### Introductory description

Is scepticism a route to tranquillity and happiness? Is it a tolerant, moderate outlook promoted by any serious reflection on the human condition? Or is it part of a scientific world-view? Or a spring-board for religious faith? Or a problem in epistemology that needs to be solved if we are to uphold our right to the sorts of knowledge-claims that come naturally to us? The module will explore the rich variety of forms, functions, and arguments associated with philosophical scepticism from its inception in antiquity to the present. Philosophers to be studied include Cicero, Sextus Empiricus, Montaigne, Descartes, Gassendi, Pascal, Bayle, Hume, Jacobi, Wittgenstein, Austin, Clarke, Fogelin, Zagzebski, Stroud.

### Module aims

The module aims to introduce students to some of the major traditions in the history of philosophical scepticism, and to enable them to think in a well-informed and critical manner about some of the philosophical and historical questions they raise.

### Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Topics to be covered include: Academic and Pyrrhonian scepticism and their interpretation; the comparison between ancient scepticism and Descartes' use of scepticism; the role of scepticism in religious toleration; the fideist interpretation of scepticism; the history of 'mitigated scepticism' from Gassendi to Hume; Jacobi's response to Humean scepticism; 20th century debates about the relation between sceptical arguments and everyday epistemic practices.

## **Learning outcomes**

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

- To allow students to develop an in-depth understanding of forms of argument invoked in the history of scepticism
- To develop a detailed understanding of the variety of uses to which sceptical arguments have been put over the history of scepticism
- To relate specific traditions of sceptical thinking to their historical context
- To engage critically with sceptical (and anti-sceptical) arguments

## **Indicative reading list**

M. Burnyeat (ed. ), The Skeptical Tradition  
R. Bett (ed.), The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism  
M. Burnyeat & M. Frede (eds.), The Original Sceptics: A Controversy  
K. M. Vogt, ' Why ancient sceptics don't doubt the existence of the external world', in G Williams & K. Volk (eds.) Roman Reflections: Studies in Latin Philosophy  
P. Smith & S. Charles (eds.), Academic Scepticism in the Development of Early Modern Philosophy  
R. Popkin, The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle  
J.L. Austin, Sense and Sensibilia  
J. Broughton, Descartes' Method of Doubt  
B. Stroud, The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism  
B. Stroud, Understanding Human Knowledge  
R. Fogelin, Pyrrhonian Reflections on Knowledge and Justification  
J. Greco (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Skepticism  
R. Pasnau, After Certainty: A History of Our Epistemic Ideals and Illusions

## **Subject specific skills**

At the end of this course students will be able to understand and adjudicate debates about a range of central issues in epistemology and the history of philosophy.

## **Transferable skills**

At the end of this course students will be able to

- interpret complex texts in the light of their cultural/historical contexts
  - think carefully about varieties of arguments for philosophical scepticism and their significance
-

## Study

### Study time

| Type          | Required                    |
|---------------|-----------------------------|
| Lectures      | 18 sessions of 1 hour (12%) |
| Seminars      | 8 sessions of 1 hour (5%)   |
| Private study | 124 hours (83%)             |
| Total         | 150 hours                   |

### Private study description

No private study requirements defined for this module.

### Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

---

## Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

### Assessment group A1

|                 | Weighting | Study time |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| 1000 word essay | 20%       |            |
| 2500 word essay | 80%       |            |

### Feedback on assessment

Individual written feedback will be provided on each of the two assessed essays.

---

## Availability

### Courses

This module is Optional for:

- UHIA-V1V8 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
  - Year 3 of V1V8 History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
  - Year 4 of V1V8 History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V7 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)
- UPHA-V700 Undergraduate Philosophy
  - Year 2 of V700 Philosophy
  - Year 2 of V700 Philosophy
  - Year 3 of V700 Philosophy
  - Year 3 of V700 Philosophy
- Year 4 of UPHA-V701 Undergraduate Philosophy (with Intercalated year)
- Year 4 of UPHA-V702 Undergraduate Philosophy (with Work Placement)

This module is Core option list A for:

- Year 3 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Core option list B for:

- UMAA-GV17 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy
  - Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
  - Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
  - Year 2 of GV17 Mathematics and Philosophy
- Year 2 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Core option list C for:

- Year 4 of UMAA-GV19 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Specialism in Logic and Foundations

This module is Core option list F for:

- UMAA-GV18 Undergraduate Mathematics and Philosophy with Intercalated Year
  - Year 4 of GV18 Mathematics and Philosophy with Intercalated Year
  - Year 4 of GV18 Mathematics and Philosophy with Intercalated Year

This module is Option list A for:

- UPHA-VL78 BA in Philosophy with Psychology
  - Year 2 of VL78 Philosophy with Psychology
  - Year 3 of VL78 Philosophy with Psychology
- Year 4 of UPHA-VL79 BA in Philosophy with Psychology (with Intercalated year)

This module is Option list B for:

- UPHA-VQ72 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature
  - Year 2 of VQ72 Philosophy and Literature
  - Year 3 of VQ72 Philosophy and Literature

- Year 4 of UPHA-VQ73 Undergraduate Philosophy and Literature with Intercalated Year

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V6 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad)

This module is Option list D for:

- UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
  - Year 2 of V1V5 History and Philosophy
  - Year 3 of V1V5 History and Philosophy
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V8 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
- Year 4 of UHIA-V1V6 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with Year Abroad)
- UHIA-V1V7 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)
  - Year 2 of V1V7 History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)
  - Year 3 of V1V7 History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)