

EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY, THEORY AND METHOD (SYLLABUS)

MARK ALFANO

COURSE DESCRIPTION: In the last five years, a small group of philosophers has initiated a revolution in philosophical methodology. Instead of or in addition to analyzing concepts like *intentionality*, *knowledge*, and *responsibility* “from the armchair” by introspecting one’s own views, these philosophers conduct experiments to see how real people really employ the concepts. The results are surprising.

This course begins with an investigation of the side-effect effect, a phenomenon discovered by experimental philosopher Joshua Knobe. It turns out that people are more willing to say that someone brought about a side-effect intentionally when that side-effect is bad than when it is good. Many explanations have been offered for this phenomenon, most of which we will canvass.

The side-effect effect will then serve as a case study for the theory and methodology of experimental philosophy. How is scientific methodology best characterized? How is armchair philosophy’s method best characterized? Is the methodology of experimental philosophy fundamentally distinct from that of social science? Is its method fundamentally distinct from that of armchair philosophy and empirically-informed philosophy? We will consider some of the many objections to experimental philosophy. It is argued that philosophical problems do not admit of experimental or empirical solutions, that the only way to address them is via intuitions. It is also argued that while experimental philosophy is respectable as such, most of the extant work in the field is unsound. We will follow some of the primary elements of the dialectic between experimental philosophers and their opponents.

SCHEDULE

PART 1: THE SIDE-EFFECT EFFECT

WEEK 1: INTRODUCING THE SIDE-EFFECT EFFECT

- Knobe, J. (2003). Intentional action and side-effects in ordinary language
- Knobe, J., & Mendlow, G. (2004). The good, the bad and the blameworthy: Understanding the role of evaluative reasoning in folk psychology

WEEK 2: THE PRAGMATIC RESPONSE

- Adams, F., & Steadman, A. (2004a). Intentional action in ordinary language: Core concept or pragmatic understanding?
- Adams, F., & Steadman, A. (2004b). Intentional action and moral considerations: Still pragmatic
- Knobe, J. (2004a). Folk psychology and folk morality: Response to critics
- Knobe, J. (2004b). Intention, intentional action and moral considerations
- McCann, H. (2005). Intentional action and intending: Recent empirical studies

WEEK 3: THE DISTORTION RESPONSE

- Malle, B. F. (2006). Intentionality, morality, and their relationship in human judgment
- Nadelhoffer, T. (2006). Bad acts, blameworthy agents, and intentional actions: Some problems for jury impartiality

WEEK 4: ONE LAST LOOK AT THE SIDE-EFFECT EFFECT

Beebe, J. & Buckwalter, W. (forthcoming). The epistemic side-effect effect
Holton, R. (2009). Norms and the Knobe effect
Alfano, M., Robinson, B., & Beebe, J. (forthcoming). The centrality of belief and reflection in Knobe effect cases

PART 2: THEORY AND METHODOLOGY OF EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

WEEK 5: POPPER'S THEORY OF SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Popper, K. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*

WEEK 6: THE KUHNIAN REVOLUTION

Kuhn, T. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*

WEEK 7: THE LAKATOSIAN COMPROMISE

Lakatos, Falsification and the methodology of scientific research programmes
<http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/lakatos/scienceAndPseudoscienceTranscript.htm>
Feyerabend, P. How to be a good empiricist

PART 3: EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY, REDUX

WEEK 8: A FRESH LOOK AT EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

Prinz, J. (2008). Empirical philosophy and experimental philosophy
Sosa, E. (2008). Experimental philosophy and philosophical intuition

WEEK 9: A FRESH LOOK AT EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY, CONTINUED

Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (2008). Abstract + concrete = paradox

WEEK 10: TBA