

**PHIL5593 Topics in Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Studies:  
Science and Rational Thinking**

**Course Outline**

**Mode of Teaching: Face-to-face Teaching**

**Term: 2021-22 Term 1**

**Time : Wednesday 18:30 – 21:30**

**Location : WMY-301**

**Course overview (as shown on CUSIS)**

This course addresses philosophical problems and issues from an interdisciplinary approach. Topics may vary from year to year and may include such themes as "Science, Technology and Philosophy", "Philosophy and the Social Sciences", "Myth, Religion and Philosophy", etc. This course can be taken twice.

**Course Outline / Topics**

Science has dramatically changed the world around us. It revolutionized not only the way we understand the world, but also the way we live our lives. Although science has such an enormous impact, it is often poorly understood and sometimes even rejected by the public, which creates room for pseudoscience and superstition.

This course aims to help students gain a better understanding of the world through scientific and rational thinking and to stimulate them to reflect critically on their own beliefs. It will discuss theories of knowledge and the nature of science, and explain why pseudoscientific and superstitious beliefs are so popular, despite their lack of evidence. The controversy between evolution and creationism will be taken as a major example to illustrate the dynamic struggle between science and pseudoscience. Other examples will also be included based on the interests of students. The course will also discuss media literacy and explore rational methods to deal with pseudoscience and irrational beliefs.

Students are required to undertake a group project and present their results at the end of the course. Students can select a topic of interest related to the course. Possible topics include astrology, feng shui, fortune telling, extrasensory perception, alternative medicine, new age, faith healing and anti-vaccine movement. Students are encouraged to explore other interesting topics.

1. Introduction
2. Naturalistic Worldview
  - a. Natural History and Evolution
  - b. Creation-Evolution Controversy
3. Knowledge and Science
  - a. Truth, Knowledge and Relativism
  - b. Nature of Scientific Knowledge and Progress
4. Sources of Error
  - a. Informal Fallacies
  - b. Cognitive Bias
5. Media Literacy
6. Ethics of Belief
7. Enlightenment and Progress?

**Learning outcomes (as shown on CUSIS)**

1. Acquire knowledge of the selected topic of the course from the inter-disciplinary perspective.
2. Have a solid grasp of the philosophical issues of the selected topic of the course.
3. Demonstrate familiarity with the primary/secondary source texts.
4. Be able to articulate and defend a philosophical thesis of their own.

**Learning activities**

<b>W.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>W.</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>
1	Sept 8	Introduction	7	Oct 27	Human Mind*
2	Sept 15	Evolution	8	Nov 3	Cognitive Bias*
3	Sept 29	Creationism	9	Nov 10	Media Literacy*
4	Oct 6	Knowledge*	10	Nov 17	Ethics of Belief*
5	Oct 13	Science*	11	Nov 24	Progress*
6	Oct 20	Informal Fallacy*	12	Dec 1	Enlightenment*

### Assessment scheme

Task nature	Description	Weight
Take-Home Exam		40%
Group Project		30%
Project Essay		15%
Class Performance		10%

### Remarks on Assessment Scheme (if any)

### Grade Descriptor

Please refer to: [http://phil.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~phidept/UG/Grade\\_descriptors.pdf](http://phil.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/~phidept/UG/Grade_descriptors.pdf)

### Details of course website

Relevant announcements and course documents will be posted on Blackboard.

### Recommended learning resources

1. Barbour, I. G., Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues, San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997.
2. Dawkins, R., The God Delusion, London: Bantam Press, 2006.
3. Feldman, R., Epistemology, Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003.
4. Godfrey-Smith, P., Theory and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science, University of Chicago Press, 2003.
5. Kahneman, D., Thinking, Fast and Slow. New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011
6. Kitcher, P., Living with Darwin, Oxford UP, 2007.
7. Monton, B., Seeking God in Science: An Atheist defends Intelligent Design, Broadview Press, 2009.
8. Pinker, S., Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress. New York: Viking, 2018.
9. Pinker, S., The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined. New York: Penguin, 2011.
10. Potter, W. J., Media Literacy, 8th ed. SAGE Publications, 2016.
11. Ruse, M., The Evolution-Creation Struggle, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2005.
12. Schick, T. Jr./L. Vaughn, How to Think about Weird Things: Critical Thinking for a New Age, 4th ed., New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005. (Basic Reference)
13. Sober, E., Evidence and Evolution: The Logic Behind the Science, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008.

### Course schedule

<i>Week</i>	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Required reading and Assignments</i>

### Contact details for teacher(s) or TA(s)

<b>Teacher</b>	
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### Academic honesty and plagiarism

Attention is drawn to University policy and regulations on honesty in academic work, and to the disciplinary guidelines and procedures applicable to breaches of such policy and regulations. Details may be found at [http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academic\\_honesty/](http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academic_honesty/)

For assignments in the form of a computer-generated document that is principally text-based and submitted via VeriGuide, the statement, in the form of a receipt, will be issued by the system upon students' uploading of the soft copy of the assignment. Assignments without the receipt will not be graded by teachers. Only the final version of the assignment should be submitted via VeriGuide.