

TOPICS IN PHILOSOPHY: EPISTEMOLOGY OF MEDICINE

General Information

Course code: PHIL 481

Number of credits: 3

Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this course.

Term: Winter, 2020

Course schedule: Mondays & Wednesdays 04:05–05:25 PM

Course location: Sherbrooke 688 (SH688) room 355

The land on which this class takes place is traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka (Mohawk), a place which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst nations.

Instructor information

Name: Sarah Clairmont (she/her)

Email: sarah.clairmont@mcgill.ca

Office hours: Wednesdays 2-3:30 PM

Office location: LEA 914

Course description

As a subfield in the philosophy of science, philosophy of medicine is rife with epistemological concerns: medical knowledge often relies on causal hypotheses, supported by inductive inferences, and medical research is conducted in complex economic and political systems. This course examines some of the epistemological limitations of Western medicine from medical research and practice to public health and policy. The course is divided into three sections. Module 1 uncovers certain theoretical assumptions in medicine by addressing basic metaphysical questions. What is 'health,' for example? Does being 'healthy' involve more than just the absence of disease? What is disease? Module 2 examines current epistemological issues in medicine. Evidence-Based Medicine, for example, is a movement in Western medicine that classifies research evidence by its epistemological strength. But why are some types of evidence (e.g., results from randomized controlled trials) taken to be epistemologically superior to other types (e.g., results from cohort studies)? Does the epistemic value of research evidence translate into the clinical context, where diagnosis and treatment take place? Module 3 considers some implications of these epistemological limitations for public health and policy as well as the concept of medical dissidence.

Required text

Stengena J (2018) *Care and cure: An introduction to philosophy of medicine* (available for purchase at Paragraph Bookstore). Additional readings will be available on MyCourses.

Assignments and grades

Participation	10%	Ongoing
In-class presentation	15%	TBD
Presentation write-up	20%	2 weeks after the presentation
Term paper outline	20%	March 16 th
Term paper	35%	April 13 th

Participation (10%): Students are expected to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussion.

In-class presentation (15%): This is a 15-minute presentation on the required text(s) for the week. The presentation should not only explain the key points of the text but also generate class discussion. Detailed instructions for the in-class presentation will be provided in class.

Presentation write-up (20%): Two weeks after the in-class presentation, students will submit a ‘presentation write-up.’ The presentation write-up should both (i) explain the main claim(s) of the text(s) you presented on and (ii) connect the course material to recent medical research. The presentation write-up should *not* exceed 5-pages, double-spaced, 12pt font. Detailed instructions for the presentation write-up will be provided in class.

Term paper outline (20%): The term paper outline should clearly state the proposed essay topic (including a thesis statement), provide a brief overview of the relevant literature (including the medical study the paper will engage with), and identify at least one relevant objection and reply. Detailed instructions for the term paper outline will be provided in class.

Term paper (35%): Students will submit one term paper (*no longer than* 12 pages, double-spaced) on a topic of their choice. The term paper should address some aspect of the course and engage with recent medical research. Detailed instructions for the term paper will be provided in class.

Course Policies

Email: Please include ‘PHIL 481’ in the subject line of all emails related to this course. Before emailing the Instructor, check the course syllabus to see if the answer to your question can be found there. Short emails (with clear, pointed questions) are appreciated and will be responded to more quickly. I will do my best to reply within 48 hours, excluding weekends. Questions about course content should be asked in person, during office hours or by appointment.

Technology: Please turn your phones to silent when in class. Laptops should only be used for course-related activities. Please ensure they do not distract those around you. The recording of lectures is not permitted without expressed permission from the Instructor.

Accommodations: If you are a student with a disability and think you may encounter barriers in this course, you are strongly encouraged to contact OSD (Office for Students with Disabilities) and register. Please inform the Instructor about any accommodations you require.

Submitting work: All assignments are to be submitted online, through MyCourses (not by email) and must be submitted in either .PDF or .DOCX format.

Lateness and extensions: Extensions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances, usually only for medical reasons or similar emergencies, appropriately documented. Late work will be penalized at

the rate of one-third letter grade (5%) per calendar day past the due date. For example, a paper submitted one day late that is evaluated as a B will receive a final grade of B-, if two days late, C+. Essays submitted more than seven days late will receive a mark of 0.

Language of Submission: In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Academic Integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism, and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures. (See www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

Syllabus change policy: The syllabus is intended as a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.

Schedule & Readings

Module	Week	Date	Topic	Readings
M1	1	Jan. 6 th	Introduction	[Optional] SEP Philosophy of Medicine
		Jan. 8 th	Health & Disease	(1) Stegenga, Ch. 1 & 2 ~28 pages~
	2	Jan. 13 th	Disease Causation & Classification	(1) Stegenga, Ch. 4 (pp. 51-61) ~10 pages~ (2) Broadbent (2009) ‘Causation and models of disease in epidemiology’ ~9 pages~
		Jan. 15 th	Holism & Reductionism	(1) Stegenga, Ch. 5 ~12 pages~
	3	Jan. 20 th	Phenomenology & Illness	(1) Carel (2016) ‘Why use phenomenology to study illness?’ ~22 pages~
		Jan. 22 nd	Genetic Diseases	(1) Dekeuwer (2015) ‘Conceptualization of Genetic Disease’ ~15 pages~
	4	Jan. 27 th	Psychiatric Diseases	Szasz (1960) ‘The myth of mental illness’ ~5 pages~ (2) Wakefield (2007) ‘The concept of mental disorder’ ~8 pages~
		Jan. 29 th	Disability & Well-being I	(1) Barnes (2016) <i>The Minority Body</i> , Ch. 2: ‘Bad-difference and mere-difference’ ~22 pages~

	5	Feb. 3 rd Feb. 5 th	Disability & Well-being II	(1) Barnes (2016) <i>The Minority Body</i> , Ch. 3: 'The value-neutral model ~33 pages~
	6	Feb. 10 th Feb. 12 th	Well-Being 'Health' in Population Health	(1) Alexandrova (2017) 'Is Well-Being Measurable?' ~ 17 pages ~ (1) Valles (2018) <i>Philosophy of Population Health</i> , Ch. 3: 'Health as a life course trajectory of complete well-being in social context' '~18 pages~
M2	7	Feb. 17 th Feb. 19 th	Evidence in Medicine The Evidence Hierarchy	(1) Stegenga Ch. 7 ~20 pages~ (2) Upshur (2002) 'If not evidence, then what? Or does medicine really need a base?' ~7 pages~ (1) Borgerson K (2009) 'Valuing Evidence: bias and the evidence hierarchy of evidence-based medicine' ~14 pages~
	8	Feb. 24 th Feb. 26 th	Mechanistic Evidence Objectivity & the Social Structure of Science I	(1) Illari (2011) 'Mechanistic Evidence: Disambiguating the Russo-Williamson Thesis' ~17 pages~ (1) Stegenga Ch. 8 ~14 pages~
	9	Mar. 2-6	Study week (no classes)	
	10	Mar. 9 th Mar. 11 th	Objectivity & the Social Structure of Science II Inference I	(1) de Melo-Martin I (2011) 'Feminist Resources for Biomedical Research: Lessons from the HPV Vaccines' ~18 pages~ (1) Stegenga Ch. 9 ~18 pages~
	11	Mar. 16 th	Inference II	(1) Teira (2017) 'Testing oncological treatments in the era of personalized medicine' ~ 15 pages~ Term paper outline due

		Mar. 18 th	Diagnosis & Screening	(1) Kennedy (2016) ‘Evaluating diagnostic tests.’ ~5 pages~ (2) Stegenga Ch. 11 ~11 pages~ [Optional] peer-review activity, second half of class.
M3	12	Mar. 23 rd	Health Disparities & Health Inequalities I	(1) Hausman (2007) ‘What’s wrong with health inequalities?’ ~21 pages~
		Mar. 25 th	Health Disparities and Health Inequalities II	(1) Obasogie et. al (2017) ‘Race, Law, and Health Disparities: Toward a Critical Race Intervention ~13 pages~
	13	Mar. 30 th	Health Policy & Public Health I	(1) Stegenga, Ch. 13 & 14 ~26 pages~
		Apr. 1 st	Health Policy & Public Health II	(1) Navin (2015) <i>Values and Vaccine refusal</i> , Ch. 2: ‘Bias and the ‘irrationality’ of vaccine denialism’ ~23 pages~
	14	Apr. 6 th	Health Policy & Public Health III	(1) Valles (2012) ‘Should direct-to-consumer personalized genomic medicine remain unregulated?’ ~17 pages~
		Apr. 8 th	Review and Wrap-up	(1) Broadbent (2019) ‘Alternatives and Medical Dissidence’ ~20 pages~
Term paper due April 13th				