



# PHIL 5850: M.A. Proseminar

## Philosophical Naturalism

0.5 credit. Students in this seminar will engage with contemporary philosophical research by exploring relations and interactions between two broad fields: philosophy of mind, language, and knowledge; and moral, social, and political philosophy. Specific topics will vary from year to year.

Fall Term 2025  
Thursdays 2:35–5:25 p.m.

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Office hours:  
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:00–1:00 p.m.

### Overview & Objectives

As a philosophical movement, naturalism eschews the nonphysical and emphasizes scientifically respectable methods of inquiry. The objective of this seminar is to familiarize you with the roots and guises of contemporary naturalism and with its presence in three main areas of philosophy—the philosophy of mind, epistemology, and ethics.

Particular topics to be discussed include the historical origins of contemporary naturalism, its ontological and methodological commitments, the causal closure of the physical domain, varieties of physicalism about the mental, whether a naturalized epistemology vitiates traditional epistemology's reliance on intuition and the *a priori*, naturalist challenges to metaethical realism, and the implications of naturalism for the perennial question of life's meaning.

### Readings

There is no central text that you need to buy for this seminar. The seminar readings will consist of the articles listed below. You will get those not marked by an asterisk on your own; they are available from our library's online holdings. I will make those marked by an asterisk available to you in Brightspace.

Armstrong, D. (1978). Naturalism, materialism, and first philosophy. *Philosophia: Philosophical Quarterly of Israel*, 8, 261–76.

Bealer, G. (1992). The incoherence of empiricism. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, 66, 99–143.

\*Boyd, R. (1988). How to be a moral realist. In G. Sayre-McCord (Ed.), *Essays on moral realism*, pp. 181–228. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

- Churchland, P. (1981). Eliminative materialism and the propositional attitudes. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 78, 67–90.
- \*Davidson, D. (1970). Mental events. In L. Forester & J. Swanson (Eds.), *Experience and theory*, pp. 79–110. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press. (Reprinted in Davison (1980), *Essays on actions and events*, pp. 207–27. Oxford: Clarendon Press.)
- \*Hampton, J. (1998). Naturalism and moral reasons [Chapter 1]. In Hampton, *The authority of reason*, pp. 19–43. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- \*Harman, G. (1977). Ethics and observation [Chapter 1]. In Harman, *The nature of morality*, pp. 3–10. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- \*Kim, J. (2003). The American origins of philosophical naturalism. *The Journal of Philosophical Research*, 28 (Issue supplement: *Philosophy in America at the turn of the century*), 83–98.
- \*Kim, J. (2001). Lonely souls: Causality and substance dualism. In K. Corcoran (Ed.), *Soul, body, and survival*, pp. 30–43. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Lewis, D. (1966). An argument for the identity theory. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 63, 17–25.
- \*Mackie, J.L. (1977). The subjectivity of values [Chapter 1]. In Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing right and wrong*, pp. 15–49. London: Penguin Books.
- \*Matheson, D. (2024). A naturalist's defence of meaning in religious pursuits. Forthcoming in *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*, First View Online (2024), pp. 1–20.
- \*Nagel, J. (2007). Epistemic intuitions. *Philosophy Compass*, 2, 792–819.
- Nagel, T. (1974). What is it like to be a bat? *The Philosophical Review*, 83, 435–50.
- Ney, A. (2008). Physicalism as an attitude. *Philosophical Studies*, 138, 1–15.
- \*Papineau, D. (2001). The rise of physicalism. In C. Gillett & B. Loewer (Eds.), *Physicalism and its discontents*, pp. 1–36. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- \*Quine, W.V.O. (1969). Epistemology naturalized. In Quine, *Ontological relativity and other essays*, pp. 69–90. New York: Columbia University Press. \*Weinberg, J., S. Nichols, & S. Stich. (2001). Normativity and epistemic intuitions. *Philosophical Topics*, 29, 429–60.

## Evaluation

*Participation.* In order to get a passing grade in the seminar, you must make a substantial contribution to all but two of the weekly seminar meetings. Aside from your own presentations (see below), you are expected to contribute questions and comments to the meetings, and these questions and comments should give me reason to believe that you have done the readings and paid attention to others' presentations.

*Presentations* (20%+30%=50% of overall grade): For each of two seminar meetings, you are expected to provide an opening commentary on (one of) the assigned reading(s) for that meeting, and then lead the subsequent discussion in the remainder of that half of the meeting. Your opening commentary will be based on a 3–4 page (900–1,200 word) paper, which you will submit to me on the day of the meeting.

*Final paper* (50% of overall grade): Ideally (but not necessarily) based on one of your presentations, your final paper for the seminar should be approximately 12–15 pages (3,600–4,500 words) in length. It is due on the final day of the fall term's examination period, December 20. Because your final paper is not due until the very end of the term, I won't be able to accept it after this deadline unless you obtain an official deferral, or make informal arrangements with me in advance.

## Schedule

Sept 4	<i>The roots &amp; guises of contemporary naturalism</i>	Armstrong (1978) Kim (2003)
Sept 11		Ney (2008)
Sept 18		Papineau (2001)
Sept 25	<i>Naturalism in the philosophy of mind</i>	Lewis (1966) Kim (2001)
Oct 2		Davidson (1970)
Oct 9		Nagel (1974)
Oct 16		Churchland (1981)
Oct 20-24	<b>Fall Break</b>	
Oct 30	<i>Epistemological naturalism</i>	Quine (1969) Bealer (1992)
Nov 6		Weinberg, Nichols & Stich (2001) Nagel 2007)
Nov 13	<i>Ethical naturalism</i>	Mackie (1977)
Nov 20		Harman (1977) Hampton (1998)
Nov 27		Boyd (1988)
Dec 4		Matheson (2024)
Dec 21	<b>Final paper due (11:59 p.m.)</b>	

## Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2025-26)

### Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. We no longer allow hard copies placed in the department's essay box.

### Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

### Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

### Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further information.

### Plagiarism:

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the meaning of 'plagiarism' as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

### Academic Accommodation:

You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term:

- *Pregnancy or religious obligation:* write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the [EIC](#) website.
- *Academic accommodations for students with disabilities:* The [Paul Menton Centre](#) for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or [pmc@carleton.ca](mailto:pmc@carleton.ca) for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).
- *Accommodation for Student Activities:* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.



**Important Dates:**

Sept. 3	Classes start.
Sept. 16	Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.
Sept. 30	Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Oct. 13	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Oct. 20-24	Fall Break – no classes.
Nov. 21	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.
Dec. 5	Last day of fall term classes. <i>Classes follow a Monday schedule.</i> Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course.
Dec. 6-7	No classes or examinations take place.
Dec. 8-20	Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Dec. 20	All take-home examinations are due.
Jan. 5	Classes begin.
Jan. 16	Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.
Jan. 31	Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.
Feb. 16	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Feb. 16-20	Winter Break – no classes.
Mar. 15	Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses.
Mar. 25	Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.
Apr. 3	Statutory holiday. University closed.
Apr. 8	Last day of two-term and winter term classes. <i>Classes follow a Friday schedule.</i> Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.
Apr. 9-10	No classes or examinations take place.
Apr. 11-23	Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.
Apr. 23	All take-home examinations are due.

**Addresses:**

Department of Philosophy:  
[www.carleton.ca/philosophy](http://www.carleton.ca/philosophy)  
 520-2110

Registrar's Office:  
[www.carleton.ca/registrar](http://www.carleton.ca/registrar)  
 520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:  
[www.carleton.ca/academicadvising](http://www.carleton.ca/academicadvising)  
 520-7850

Writing Services:  
<https://carleton.ca/csas/support/>  
 520-3822

MacOdrum Library  
<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>  
 520-2735