

EXPERIMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

Introduction

Module Leader's introduction

This module (course) in experimental philosophy will teach you about the latest, cutting-edge research in experimental philosophy. Experimental philosophy is the use of empirical methods to solve philosophical questions. In the late 20th – early 21st century, experimental philosophy has become a systematic way of testing philosophical intuitions, settling philosophical disputes, and also criticizing philosophers' reliance on intuitions that would be allegedly universal. In this respect, experimental philosophy has the potential of radically transforming our understanding of traditional philosophical issues. In this module, students will examine the role of empirical evidence in philosophy and how it is used in experimental philosophy. You will learn to interpret and conduct (at an elementary level – no advanced mathematical background is required) statistical tests to examine philosophical hypotheses. This module will provide both theoretical background and hands-on practical experience to learn how to conduct experimental philosophy. Through this module, students will learn how survey and experiment based quantitative studies can shed light on philosophical questions.

Given that this course is hands-on, it is absolutely essential that students come to the lectures, so be aware that if you decide to take this module, you would commit to coming to all the lectures (except for illness and other exceptional conditions). The lectures will take part in a computer room and you will do the statistical exercises guided by me. You don't need to have significant mathematical skills - I will make this as math-free as possible. All the statistical tests will be done with SPSS, a statistics software programme. Even so, it's important you get to do guided practice, as it is tricky to manage this on your own, especially as a beginner.

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Week 1 – What is experimental philosophy?

Learning outcomes

Be able to critically reflect on the role of experimental data in philosophical practice.

Session overview

This session is a first familiarization of the practice of experimental philosophy. We look at the 17th century roots of experimental philosophy (as a precursor to science) and at the so-called new experimental philosophy as it emerged in the end of the 20th century.

Seminar tasks

Class discussions and unassessed exercises

Reading/activity

- Introduction and Chapters 1-2 of The theory and practice of experimental philosophy (Sytsma and Livengood)
- Chapter 1 (An experimental philosophy manifesto) of Experimental philosophy,
- Experimental philosophy - Joshua Alexander

Deadlines

None

Week 2 – Research design, conducting experimental research and collecting data

Learning outcomes

Be able to understand simple psychological quantitative experiments. Understand how experimental design works; be able to understand the challenges of gathering and storing empirical data. Understand the importance of acquiring informed consent, and the complexities of recruiting participants for an experiment.

Session overview

We will look at how to design an experiment, the difference between within-subject and between-subject design, the importance of ethical clearance and gathering data from participants, as well as the ethics of data storage.

Seminar tasks

Come up with simple experimental designs based on prompts provided in the class (unassessed but required). Get information on homework and ability to ask questions about homework

Reading/activity

- Intentional action and side effects in ordinary language - Joshua Knobe 07/2003
- Chapters 5-7 of *The theory and practice of experimental philosophy* - Justin Sytsma, Jonathan Livengood 2015

Deadlines

Homework 1: Conduct survey on the side-effect effect. Survey needs to be completed before start of class in week 4, spss file and narrative ready by week 5.

Week 3 – Basics of statistical inference, levels of measurement and types of variables

Learning outcomes

Understand and correctly interpret statistical concepts such as statistical significance and confidence intervals.

Session overview

This is a first intro on basics of statistics. We will learn the difference between nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio data, what the standard deviation is, the normal distribution, and be able to calculate with SPSS the mode, median, and mean. If there's still time, we'll also learn to check through SPSS if our variable is normally distributed.

Seminar tasks

Exercises on the spss file "guardian.sav", including testing for normality. While this is not assessed, it is really crucial that you follow this class to understand how SPSS works (computers)

Reading/activity

Chapters 1 and 3 of *Statistics in a nutshell* - Sarah Boslaugh 2012, c2013

Deadlines

None

Week 4 – Intuitions of ordinary people, and why they matter

Learning outcomes

Understand how empirical approaches can inform philosophical questions, including the negative and positive programmes.

Session overview

We will examine the intuitional programme in experimental philosophy and briefly review some important studies in this field.

Seminar tasks

In-class discussions of the intuitional programme, survey of the class.

Reading/activity

- Kauppinen, A. (2007). The rise and fall of experimental philosophy. *Philosophical explorations*, 10(2), 95-118.

- Nagel, J. (2012). Intuitions and experiments: A defense of the case method in epistemology. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 85(3), 495-527. (see Moodle)

- Chapter 3 of The theory and practice of experimental philosophy - Justin Sytsma, Jonathan Livengood 2015

Deadlines

None

Week 5 – significance testing, The paired sample and independent sample t-tests

Learning outcomes

Understand and correctly interpret statistical concepts such as statistical significance, confidence intervals, and effect sizes.

Session overview

Learning about the t-test, including the paired and independent samples versions of this test. Learn to perform the test correctly and to write down the result.

Seminar tasks

Computer exercises, including one assessed homework which will be started in the class.

Reading/activity

Chapter 6 of Boslaugh's Statistics in a Nutshell (electronic resource)

Deadlines

Independent t-test homework due by end of week 6.

Week 6 – Are philosophers experts? Are philosophers special?

Learning outcomes

Understand how empirical approaches can inform philosophical questions

Session overview

An overview of the “expertise defense” in experimental philosophy

Seminar tasks

In-class discussion of results in experimental philosophy

Reading/activity

De Cruz, H. (2015). Where philosophical intuitions come from. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 93, 233–249.

Schwitzgebel, E., & Cushman, F. (2015). Philosophers' biased judgments persist despite training, expertise and reflection. *Cognition*, 141, 127-137.

Rini, R. A. (2015). How not to test for philosophical expertise. *Synthese*, 192(2), 431-452.

Deadlines

None

Week 7 – Categorical data analysis, chi-square

Learning outcomes

Understand and correctly interpret statistical concepts such as statistical significance, confidence intervals, and effect sizes.

Session overview

We will look at statistical techniques pertaining to categorical data, in particular chi square and Fisher's exact.

Seminar tasks

Assessed exercise on chi-square test. We start in the classroom, can be completed at home.

Reading/activity

Chapter 5 of Boslaugh's Statistics in a nutshell (electronic resource)

Deadlines

Correlations and chi-square homework due end of week 8

Week 8 – The experimental philosophy of morality

Learning outcomes

Understand how empirical approaches can inform philosophical questions, critical appraisal of interpretations of experimental results.

Session overview

An overview of experimental moral philosophy, looking at trolley scenarios and their interpretation in terms of utilitarianism/deontology

Seminar tasks

In-class discussion of x-phi of morality experiments

Reading/activity

Greene, J. D., Sommerville, R. B., Nystrom, L. E., Darley, J. M., & Cohen, J. D. (2001). An fMRI investigation of emotional engagement in moral judgment. *Science*, 293(5537), 2105-2108.

Strohming, N., & Nichols, S. (2014). The essential moral self. *Cognition*, 131(1), 159-171.

Buckwalter, W., & Turri, J. (2015). Inability and obligation in moral judgment. *PloS one*, 10(8), e0136589.

Deadlines

none

Week 9 – Correlations and scatter plots

Learning outcomes

Understand and correctly interpret statistical concepts such as statistical significance, confidence intervals, and effect sizes.

Session overview

An overview of how to calculate Pearson's r (aka Pearson's correlation coefficient) and how to generate scatter plots

Seminar tasks

In-class computer exercises (assessed, to be completed at home)

Reading/activity

Chapters 7 of Boslaugh

Deadlines

Due end of week 10.

Week 10 – Writing your research paper

Learning outcomes

Understanding the structure of an experimental philosophy (and by extension, cognitive psychology) paper. Development of academic writing skills, especially economy and clarity of expression, and integrating empirical data in a philosophical argument.

Session overview

We will look at how an experimental philosophy paper is structured, using several examples, and go over the different elements of such a paper, including “Abstract”, “Introduction”, “Method”, “Results”, and “Discussion”.

Seminar tasks

Analyse experimental philosophy papers, look at large paper assignment

Reading/activity

none

Deadlines

First draft of your paper due in week 11.

Week 11 – Feedback on research paper

Coursework

Learning outcomes assessed

- Acquire a basic grasp of statistical techniques and their proper application
- Development of academic writing skills, especially economy and clarity of expression, and integrating empirical data in a philosophical argument.
- Acquire an understanding of how quantitative research works, how to conduct an experiment
- Understand the challenges of gathering and storing empirical data.
- Understand the importance of acquiring informed consent, and the complexities of recruiting participants for an experiment
- Be able to critically reflect on the role of experimental data in philosophical practice

Assignment task

Exercises will be started during the class. If you need more time, or if we run out of time during the class, have a week to complete it at home (or on a computer that has SPSS). Each exercise is 10% of the marks.

- Exercise 1 (homework): Conduct a survey with at least 10 participants (5 participants per condition, if you do more then you need to make sure the numbers are balanced, e.g., 16 participants – 8 for each condition. This is for 5% of marks. Complete this task and you get the maximal marks. For the remaining 5%, explain in a small narrative of 300-500 words how you went about finding participants for this study.
- Exercise 2: the independent t-test: Run statistical analysis on a dataset that will be provided in class, and write up your result using the APA (American Psychological Association) style of reporting the statistics.
- Exercise 3: chi-square: Run the appropriate statistical test on a dataset which will be provided in class. Report using APA style. Make a rxc table.
- Exercise 4: correlations: Run the appropriate statistical test on a dataset which will be provided in class. Report using APA style. Make a scatter plot.

Large essay is on 60% of the marks. This is a replication of a paper (Nichols 2002). You will need to recruit two coders (two adults who don't know what the study's purposes are, but who are careful readers), input the data in SPSS and run the appropriate statistical tests, and write up your paper. Detailed instructions will be provided on Moodle.

Assessment criteria

- For the small exercises, since this module uses quantitative methods, it is possible you have a very high score, especially if accompanied with an appropriate and clear narrative
- Use of the appropriate statistical techniques, as explained in the classroom
- Correct use of the APA style of reporting statistical results (small and large essays)
- Harvard style referencing for the citations in the large essay
- Clarity and economy of expression (for the large essay and narratives)
- Contextualisation in the literature (for the large essay)
- Correct use of the different sections of an experimental philosophy paper, as we learned in week 10