

## THE METHODOLOGY OF PHILOSOPHY

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What is the proper methodology – or epistemology -- of philosophy? Is there a single such methodology? Or do different branches of philosophy, and perhaps different philosophical problems, require different methodologies? In recent times, a popular candidate for a *general* methodology of philosophy is the method of reflective equilibrium. Here we ask: what is the best version of this approach, and is it ultimately satisfactory? Each component of the reflective equilibrium method must be examined. The theory includes a strong dose of coherentism, but coherentism encounters familiar problems. The theory also appeals to intuitions. What are intuitions, what is their evidential status, and what confers this status? Are some people better at intuiting than others, or is everyone necessarily equally good? Process reliabilism is another global epistemology that could be a candidate for a general methodology of philosophy. However, it too faces serious potential challenges (see below). Turning to a different issue, what weight should be accorded to the sciences in the methodology of philosophy? Does cognitive science, for example, have a role to play in philosophical method? Can it weigh in not only on matters pertaining to mental states, but also on metaphysical issues such as the flow of time? Could temporal flow turn out to be a mere psychological artifact? What about natural kinds and moral categories? Turning to experimental philosophy, exactly what kinds of questions is this method well-suited to address? To what extent should philosophy be constrained by common sense, or by what people regard as “platitudes” that deserve special a priori status that can’t be debunked or outweighed by other epistemic sources? In other words, to what extent can philosophy be “revisionary” and to what extent “conservative”? The prospects for philosophical revisionism are negatively intertwined with the prospects for process reliabilism. Heavy doses of revisionism will tend to imply that some of our most common belief-forming processes are less reliable than we customarily take them to be. If so, however, the link between justification and reliability won’t permit the belief outputs of those processes to qualify as justified. This threatens to raise the specter of skepticism.

Readings for the course will be drawn primarily from recent or contemporary writings, spanning epistemological theory as well as problems distinctive to metaphysics, ethics, mind, modality, and mathematics. Sample Readings include the following:

T. Kelly and S. McGrath, “Is Reflective Equilibrium Enough?” (2010)

T. Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (2007)

S.J. Leslie, “Essence and Natural Kinds” (2013)

A. Goldman, “Philosophical Naturalism and Intuitional Methodology” (2010)

D. Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (1986), selections