

Philosophy 517: Seminar in Philosophy of Science

Professor Patrick Maher

Spring 2007

Description: Probability plays important roles in everyday life, science, and philosophy, yet few concepts are more mysterious and controversial. This course will examine and evaluate the main theories about what probability is. Topics covered include the philosophical methodology of explication, the informal concepts of probability used in ordinary language, and the logical, subjective, frequency, and propensity theories of probability. No specific knowledge is presupposed.

Classes: 3:00–4:50 PM Monday in 402 Gregory Hall.

Course web site: <http://patrick.maher1.net/517>. Contains the schedule of classes and lecture notes.

Textbook: None required.

Recent surveys of this subject: The following are useful for getting an overview of the subject and references to literature; just don't accept what they say uncritically.

- Donald Gillies, *Philosophical Theories of Probability*, Routledge 2000.
- Alan Hájek, "Interpretations of Probability," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, online. Article dated 2003.

Exams: There will be two in-class short answer exams. The questions will be a subset of the questions included in the lecture notes and discussed in class. The second exam contains only questions from after the first exam. See the course web site for the dates of the exams and the policy on make-up exams.

Essay: A substantial essay on some philosophical issue involving probability is due Friday May 11 at 11 AM. See the course web site for more details.

Grading: The exams count for 25% of the grade each and the essay counts for 50%. The grading scale is:

A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
95–100	90–94	85–89	80–84	75–79	70–74	65–69	60–64	55–59	50–54	45–49	40–44	0–39

Contact the professor: E-mail patrick@maher1.net, phone 333–0253, office 219A Gregory Hall, office hours Monday and Wednesday 11–12 or by appointment.