

General Philosophy

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Contents

| | | |
|------|--------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Overview | 3 |
| 2 | Course Website | 3 |
| 3 | Readings | 3 |
| 4 | Study Questions | 4 |
| 5 | Doing Philosophy | 4 |
| 6 | Tutorial 1 – Scepticism | 6 |
| 6.1 | Readings | 6 |
| 6.2 | Study Questions | 7 |
| 7 | Tutorial 2 – Knowledge | 8 |
| 7.1 | Readings | 8 |
| 7.2 | Study Questions | 9 |
| 8 | Tutorial 3 – Induction | 10 |
| 8.1 | Readings | 10 |
| 8.2 | Study Questions | 11 |
| 9 | Tutorial 4 – Mind and Body | 12 |
| 9.1 | Readings | 12 |
| 9.2 | Study Questions | 13 |
| 10 | Tutorial 5 – Personal Identity | 14 |
| 10.1 | Readings | 14 |
| 10.2 | Study Questions | 15 |

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| 11 Tutorial 6 – Free Will | 16 |
| 11.1 Readings | 16 |
| 11.2 Study Questions | 17 |
| 12 Revision Reading | 18 |

1 Overview

| Week | Topic |
|------|-------------------|
| 1 | Scepticism |
| 2 | Knowledge |
| 3 | Induction |
| 4 | Mind and Body |
| 5 | Personal Identity |
| 6 | Free Will |

In this course, we'll be looking at some of the central problems of analytic philosophy. The idea is to get acquainted with what these problems are about, exactly what makes them puzzling and how we might go about resolving the puzzles that arise. These will primarily be in the areas of *epistemology* (in the first three tutorials) and *metaphysics* (in the remaining three tutorials). We'll be looking at a combination of works in the contemporary literature and also through some of the great influential classics. Our topics will be the nature of knowledge and how it is that we can come to know anything at all on the epistemology side, and the philosophical problems associated with free will, the distinction between the mind and the body and personal identity on the metaphysics side.

2 Course Website

I'll post the materials for these tutorials on my website as we go along. They can be downloaded at:

www.stephenwrightphilosophy.com on the right-hand side of the page under the 'General Philosophy' link. Make sure you pick up the version of the course associated with Hilary 2015, though!

3 Readings

For each class, I have identified three types of reading. Readings that are required are exactly that – you must do them and should come to class prepared to discuss them. If you find some of them hard, though, I've identified some introductory readings to help you get a feel for what the required readings are about. The introductory readings are there to help you with the required readings. In some cases, these take the form of podcasts or televised discussions. They are *not* a substitute for the required readings. Finally, I've provided a list of some further readings. If you find a particular topic interesting and want to look into it further, then you should start your journey by looking at some of the further reasons. These are more advanced, more subtle and more taxing. But if you find the topic interesting, you'll find them rewarding.

† denotes required readings.

* denotes introductory readings.

denotes further readings.

Lastly, don't be shy about asking me if you find any of the readings hard to get hold of.

4 Study Questions

Along with the readings lists for each tutorial, there are sets of study questions associated with each tutorial. These questions have a dual role. From my perspective, they help me structure the tutorial and guide the discussion each week. From your perspective, they will help you check your understanding of the content and structure your revision, when the time comes. That said, you should absolutely *not* take these as any indication of what might be asked on the final examination. Some of the questions will be the kind of thing you can give essay-length answers to, others will be more short-answer questions.

5 Doing Philosophy

During your time doing philosophical work, you'll want to read things that aren't on the reading lists. And it's really important that what you read is good quality. It's very easy to waste a lot of time and energy in philosophy reading stuff that just isn't helpful. If you read stuff from poor sources, you're liable to wind up confused or misinformed. You want to be reading things that are written by people who have, at the very least, more philosophical experience than you. In the case of several sources, though, there's no filtering or checking to make sure that this is the case. Obviously, the reading lists provided by the faculty are a great place to look. But even they don't contain *everything*. With that in mind, here are some guidelines for you to get you started. As always, do get in touch and ask me if you find yourself in any doubt at all.

Some good places to start your reading are:

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu> is an excellent resource. It gives you an overview of some of the topics that we'll be working on and also comes with a useful bibliography, all of which is of an appropriate quality for you to be using.

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/> is another excellent online philosophy encyclopedia. Like the Stanford Encyclopedia, its entries are reviewed before they are published and also have useful suggestions for further reading.

Philpapers at <http://www.philpapers.org> is an online collection of philosophy articles that can be searched by category. There are some excellent articles on here and the site is a useful way of finding things to read. This site requires some caution, though. Unlike the above two, anyone can add their papers, regardless of whether or not they have actually been published in journals, or are ever going to be! As a rule of thumb, if you can't see publication details for a paper on this site, then proceed with caution. This notwithstanding, it is an excellent and important source.

Google Scholar at <http://scholar.google.co.uk/> is a relatively recent research tool and one that's extremely useful. The best thing that you can use Google Scholar for is finding papers that are relevant to what you've been reading. If you run a search for a paper that you've just read, Google Scholar will help throw up any papers that have cited the paper you searched for. This is extremely useful for helping you figure out where to go next. As with PhilPapers, however, there's no quality filter, so if you are in any doubt about what you've found (as with any of the above resources) feel free to ask me first. Lastly, note that this *is* an acceptable use of Google's resources, where searching for philosophers or themes and then reading what you find absolutely is *not*. Likewise, stay off looking for things on Wikipedia.

6 Tutorial 1 – Scepticism

One of the central problems of epistemology (the theory of knowledge) is how to explain how we have any knowledge at all. Before we start doing philosophy, at least, we think we know all kinds of things. When we start doing philosophy, however, we find it becomes extremely hard to explain how this can be. This goes back as far as Descartes. In this class, we'll look at arguments to the conclusion that we don't know very much, if anything. We'll think about how these arguments and why they're troubling.

6.1 Readings

- † Rene Descartes (1641). *Meditations on First Philosophy* Cambridge: Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. Meditation 1.
- † Michael Huemer (2001). *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. Chapter 2.
- † G.E. Moore (1939). 'Proof of an External World' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25:273-300.
- * Noah Lemos (2007). *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 7.
- * Duncan Pritchard (2010). *What is this Thing Called Knowledge? 2nd Edition* London: Routledge. Chapter 13.
- # Paul Faulkner (2005). 'On Dreaming and Being Lied To' *Episteme* 2:149-159.
- # James Van Cleve (1979). Foundationalism, Epistemic Principles, and the Cartesian Circle. *Philosophical Review* 88:55 - 91.
- # Barry Stroud (1989). Understanding Human Knowledge in General in Marjorie Clay & Keith Lehrer (eds.), *Knowledge and Skepticism* Westview Press.

Question: Can I know that I'm not dreaming? How does this relate to the possibility of me knowing that I have two hands?

6.2 Study Questions

- (1) How does the sceptical argument concerning dreaming work?
- (2) Is there a difference between what you know and what you're aware of?
- (3) Which is more certain: that I have two hands, or that I'm not a brain in a vat?
- (4) Is it significant that sceptics never give you any reason to think that you are a brain in a vat?
- (5) Can you know that you aren't dreaming by dousing yourself with cold water?
- (6) If I'm dreaming, does that mean that everything I believe is false?
- (7) *Could* everything you believe be false?
- (8) What, if anything, can we be certain about?
- (9) Does it matter if we don't know anything much?
- (10) How can I establish the reliability of a belief-forming process that I use?
- (11) Do I need to establish that a belief-forming process is reliable before I can form justified beliefs by using it?
- (12) My processes all seem to yield the same beliefs. Does this give me a reason for thinking that they are all true?
- (13) Could I appeal to an infinite series of processes to establish the reliability of one of my belief-forming processes?
- (14) Is it a problem if I don't have any reasons for thinking that my beliefs are true?
- (15) What might explain my knowing if it isn't just to do with the things that I'm aware of?

7 Tutorial 2 – Knowledge

Epistemology isn't just about trying to figure out how we can make sense of the idea that we know things. It's also about trying to figure out what makes the difference between the things we know and the things that we truly believe, but don't know. A natural answer is that we have some sort of good access to the things we know. This is what scepticism challenges. In this class, we'll look more closely at what makes the difference between knowledge and mere true belief.

7.1 Readings

- † Edmund Gettier (1963). 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?' *Analysis* 23:121-123.
- † Linda Zagzebski (1994). 'The Inescapability of Gettier Problems' *Philosophical Quarterly* 44:65-73.
- † A.J. Ayer (1956). 'Knowing as Having the Right to be Sure' in *The Problem of Knowledge* London: MacMillan 22-24, 28-34, 41-44. Reprinted in Sven Bernecker and Fred Dretske (2000). *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- * Michael Williams (2001). *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology* Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 4.
- * Jonathan Dancy (1986). *An Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology* Oxford: Basil Blackwell. Chapter 2.
- # Sturgeon (1993). 'The Gettier Problem' *Analysis* 53:156-164.
- # Ernest Sosa (1964). 'The Analysis of 'Knowledge That P'' *Analysis* 25:1-8.
- # Robert Shope (1983). *The Analysis of Knowing: A Decade of Research* Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Question: What are the difficulties with understanding knowledge as justified true belief?

7.2 Study Questions

- (1) What does an analysis of knowledge seek to do?
- (2) What does it mean for an analysis of knowledge to be *reductive*?
- (3) Why would we *want* an analysis of knowledge to be reductive?
- (4) What is justification?
- (5) Could one of your beliefs be justified even if you aren't aware that it is?
- (6) What is a Gettier case?
- (7) Why might there be disagreement about what a Gettier case is?
- (8) If you know something, does that mean that you're in a position to know that you know it?
- (9) How might appealing to certainty avoid the problem presented by Gettier cases?
- (10) What are the problems with appealing to certainty?
- (11) Do *externalist* theories of knowledge deal with Gettier cases any better than their *internalist* counterparts?
- (12) Why should knowing that something is the case be any better than just having a true belief?
- (13) What is epistemic luck?
- (14) Does epistemic luck threaten knowledge?
- (15) Do Gettier cases mean that we should give up trying to analyse knowledge?
- (16) How do we make sense of the idea that some true beliefs are better than others if we don't appeal to knowledge?

8 Tutorial 3 – Induction

I think I know that the sun will rise tomorrow. My only grounds for believing this, though, are my observations that it did today and yesterday and so on. I also think, however, that the fact that it rained today and rained yesterday and so on doesn't make it true that it will rain tomorrow. So why is reasoning from the past acceptable? And what makes the difference between cases in which it is and cases in which it isn't? This class considers these questions.

8.1 Readings

- † David Hume (1740). *A Treatise of Human Nature* Oxford: Clarendon Press. Book 1, Part 3, Section 6.
- † Bertrand Russell (1912). *The Problems of Philosophy* London: Thornton Butterworth. Chapter 6.
- † Nelson Goodman (1983). *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press. Chapters 3&4.
- † P.F. Strawson (1952). *Introduction to Logical Theory* London: Methuen.
- * Adam Morton (2003). *A Guide Through the Theory of Knowledge* London: Blackwell.
- * The Stanford Encyclopedia Entry on the Problem of Induction.
- # David Papineau (1992). 'Reliabilism, Induction and Scepticism' *Philosophical Quarterly* 42:1-20.
- # Hans Reichenbach (1940). 'On the Justification of Induction' *Journal of Philosophy* 37:97-103.
- # Karl Popper (1935). *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* London: Routledge.

Question: How, if at all, can induction be justified?

8.2 Study Questions

9 Tutorial 4 – Mind and Body

One of the oldest puzzle in philosophy concerns how our mental lives interact with our physical lives. It looks as though my desire for food leads me to go and find something to eat. There's an interesting question about how this happens, though. On the one hand, it looks as though things like desires and other mental events aren't just the same thing as physical events. But on the other hand, if they aren't the same things as physical events, then it's hard to see how they can interact with them. We'll think about these topics in this tutorial.

9.1 Readings

- † Rene Descartes (1641). *Meditations on First Philosophy* Cambridge: Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. Meditations 2 and 6.
- † Frank Jackson (1982). 'Epiphenomenal Qualia' *Philosophical Quarterly* 32:127-136.
- † Margaret D. Wilson (1976). 'Descartes: The Epistemological Argument for Mind-Body Distinctness' *Nous* 10:3-15.
- * John Heil (2004). *Philosophy of Mind: A Contemporary Introduction* London: Routledge. Chapters 2 and 3.
- * The *Philosophy TV* debate between David Papineau and Philip Goff. Available [here](#).
- # Frank Jackson (1986). 'What Mary Didn't Know' *Journal of Philosophy* 83:291-295.
- # Louise Antony (2007). 'Everybody Has Got It: A Defence of Non-Reductive Materialism' in Brian McLaughlin and Jonathan Cohen (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in the Philosophy of Mind* London: Blackwell, pp. 143-149.
- # David Papineau (2001). 'The Rise of Physicalism' in Carl Gillett & Barry M. Loewer (eds.), *Physicalism and its Discontents*. Cambridge University Press pp. 3-36.

Question: What is the best argument to the conclusion that the mind is distinct from the body? Does it succeed?

9.2 Study Questions

- (1) What is physicalism?
- (2) How can we individuate different versions of dualism?
- (3) What is the Cartesian distinction between clearly and distinctly perceiving, on the one hand and conceiving on the other?
- (4) How does Descartes' epistemological argument go?
- (5) Might *thought* and *extension* be the kinds of properties that could be inserted into the epistemological argument?
- (6) Can the existence of our bodies be called into doubt in a way that our minds can't?
- (7) Are we able to introspect on our minds in ways that we aren't able to introspect on our minds?
- (8) Can bodies be divided in ways that minds cannot?
- (9) How does Caterus object to Descartes by considering *extension*, *figure* and *motion*?
- (10) How does Descartes use the distinction between complete and incomplete things to respond?
- (11) What does Jackson take to be the major objection to the existence of epiphenomenal qualia?
- (12) How does Jackson try to respond to this objection?
- (13) What is the 'Knowledge Argument' that Jackson gives?
- (14) What is the 'Modal Argument' for dualism and what are its limitations?
- (15) In what way does the Modal Argument differ from the Knowledge Argument?
- (16) Is physicalism an immodest thesis?

10 Tutorial 5 – Personal Identity

It seems that we persist through time, I existed before now and I exist now. One of the jobs of metaphysics is to explain how this can be the case. According to one type of explanation, I continue to exist because the human being that I'm associated with continues to exist. According to another type of explanation, I continue to exist because I'm somehow psychologically connected to the previous thing that was me. In this class, we'll think about what questions about our survival mean for questions about what kind of thing we are.

10.1 Readings

- † Eric Olson (2003). 'An Argument for Animalism' in Raymond Martin and John Barresi (eds.), *Personal Identity* Malden: Blackwell Publishing pp. 318-334.
- † John Locke (1689). *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Book II, Chapter XXVII.
- † Sydney Shoemaker (1970). 'Persons and Their Pasts' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 7 (4):269-85.
- * The *Philosophy Bites* contribution on Personal Identity by Christopher Shields. Available [here](#).
- * John Perry (ed.), (1975). *Personal Identity* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 3-32.
- # Eric Olson (1997). 'Was I Ever a Fetus?' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (1):95-110.
- # W.R. Carter (1999). 'Will I Be A Dead Person?' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 59 (1):167-171.
- # Derek Parfit (1984). *Reasons and Persons* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 245-280.

Question: What does it take for people to persist through time?

10.2 Study Questions

- (1) What does a Lockean account of personal identity over time consist in?
- (2) Is there a problem if my 26-year-old self remembers being eight years old and my eight year old self remembers being five years old, but my 26-year-old self doesn't remember being five years old?
- (3) What is the difference between remembering that I shouted that Johnson should be impeached and that remembering someone else did it?
- (4) What does memory have to do with personal identity?
- (5) Could you be mistaken about your own identity?
- (6) If someone put your brain in someone else's body, who would the resulting person be?
- (7) What about if someone gave that person a drug to make them think that they were you (complete with your past experiences)?
- (8) Were you ever a foetus?
- (9) Will you ever be a dead person?
- (10) How does Olson propose to argue that we are animals?
- (11) Does psychology have anything to do with personal identity?
- (12) Should you care about your personal identity if your personal identity doesn't involve your consciousness?
- (13) How does the view that you are your body differ from the view that you are a human animal?
- (14) If we are identical to bodies, at what point do we stop existing?
- (15) What physical parts of us could we lose and continue to survive?
- (16) Could you survive losing all of your memories?

11 Tutorial 6 – Free Will

It seems to us as though we're free. You are, in an important sense, free to come or not come to this class. Those actions will have consequences, but you're nonetheless free. This class will examine what this freedom amounts to. Another common thought is that you can be responsible for what you do only if you're free. We'll look at various accounts of freedom and its relationship to (particularly moral) responsibility.

11.1 Readings

- † Galen Strawson (1994). 'The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility' *Philosophical Studies* 75:5-24.
- † Harry Frankfurt (1969). 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility' *Journal of Philosophy* 66:829-39.
- † Peter van Inwagen (1975). 'The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism' *Philosophical Studies* 27:185-199.
- * Robert Kane (2005). *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- * The *Philosophy Bites* contribution on Free Will by Daniel Dennett. Available [here](#).
- # Daniel Dennett (1984). *Elbow Room: The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting* Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- # Peter van Inwagen (1986). *An Essay on Free Will* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- # Kadri Vihvelin (2008). 'Compatibilism, Incompatibilism, and Impossibilism' in Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne & Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 303-318.

Question: What does it mean to say that you 'are able to do otherwise' and what does this have to do with being free?

11.2 Study Questions

- (1) What is the difference between *impossibilism* and *incompatibilism*?
- (2) What is *compatibilism*?
- (3) How does *soft determinism* relate to compatibilism?
- (4) Could a sentence of the form *I could X, but I'm not going to* ever be true?
- (5) What is the *consequence argument*?
- (6) What (if anything) is wrong with the idea that being free is just acting in line with your preferences?
- (7) If someone knows what you'll do in the future, can your future action be free?
- (8) Does your being free depend on your ability to do otherwise?
- (9) Could someone justifiably blame you for something even if you couldn't have done otherwise?
- (10) How does Frankfurt purport to show that someone could?
- (11) What is the relationship between freedom, the ability to do otherwise and (moral) responsibility?
- (12) In what way might *indeterminism* rule out free will?
- (13) Could I know what you were going to do even if you freely chose to do it?
- (14) What does Strawson mean by *causa sui*? How does Strawson use the idea of something being *causa sui* to argue against moral responsibility?
- (15) Is freedom a good thing?
- (16) What does having the ability to otherwise amount to?

12 Revision Reading

When you come to revise for this paper, you might want to do some reading to help get yourself started. Obviously, you will want to go over the reading on the list for each of these weeks to get you started. But if you want something new to help you think about things in a different way, I would recommend reading Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy* to get you started. Now that you also have a good overview of the issues, looking at the *Meditations* from Descartes as a whole or Hume's *Treatise* as a whole would be a useful thing to do. The reason that we have been proceeding thematically is that it is probably easier to get a grip on the theorists through an understanding of the issues first. But now that you have completed the course, you should have a good idea of what is involved in thinking about these issues and be in a position to think about the issues as a coherent whole through the work of one of the early modern authors. Aside from this, however, I would recommend mainly getting a good grip on the readings in this guide and focusing on understanding the issues involved in them and how they fit together.