

General Philosophy

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1 Course Content

1.1 Course Overview

Week	Topic
1	Mind & Body
2	Personal Identity
3	Free Will
4	God and Evil
5	Scepticism
6	Knowledge
7	Induction
8	Writing Philosophy and Revision

There are two aims to the tuition for the *General Philosophy* paper. The first is to introduce you to some of the central issues that concern philosophers working in the analytic tradition in philosophy. The second is to give you an idea of how philosophers go about investigating those problems. This involves developing a feel for how philosophers develop theories, the kinds of problems that they are interested in and the type of argumentative moves that philosophers make in the course of evaluating their theories. The work done during the *General Philosophy* course will thus form a foundation for your future work in philosophy.

During the course, we will think about various topics in contemporary philosophy. These can be divided into two very broad camps. Our initial investigations will be focused on issues in *metaphysics*. We will start off by thinking about whether there is anything more to us than the physical bodies that we are individually connected with. From this point, we will move on to think what matters to our survival over time. Regardless of whether we think we are anything more than physical beings, we might think that some parts of us are more and less dispensable to our continued existence. It seems to us that, at least sometimes, we do things that are free. With our discussion of persistence in hand, we will think about what it means for us to act freely. Some people think that our being free involves our being able to do evil. Having considered what it means to be free, we will consider whether the existence of evil in the world provides us with evidence that there is no God.

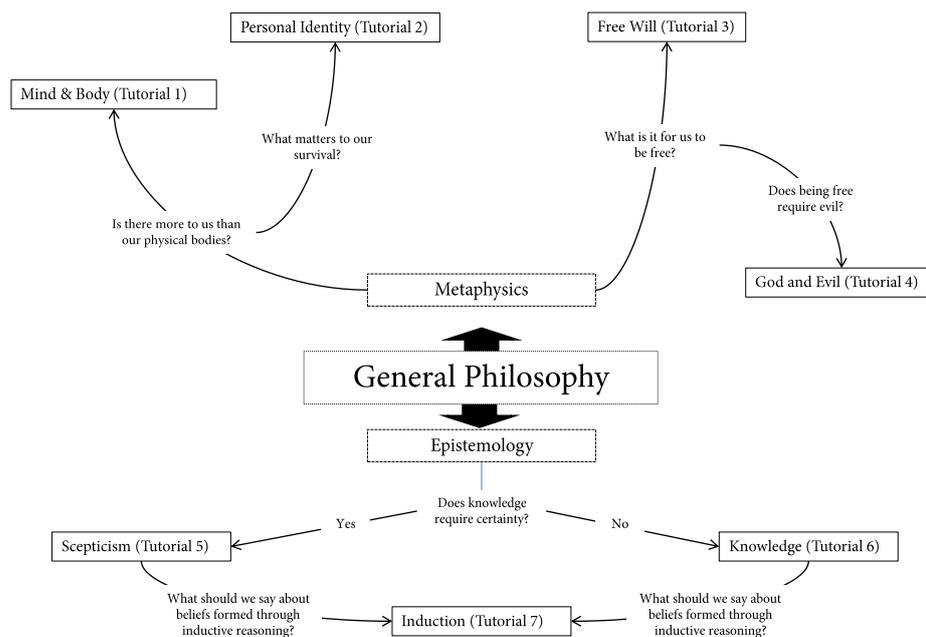
Having thought about these issues, we will move on to thinking about some topics in *epistemology*. Our general inquiry will seek to investigate the question of what we can know and how we can know it. First, we will think about the provocative thesis that nobody knows anything at all. Having understood the puzzling motivations for this idea, we will then go on to develop an account of what it is to know something, bearing in mind the various difficulties associated with attempts that philosophers have traditionally made at providing accounts of knowledge. Lastly, we will apply the observations that we have made about knowledge and our understanding of the problems associated with it to the issue of beliefs formed through inductive reasoning.

As you can tell from this, our approach to the course will be thematic. The *General Philosophy* paper is taught in one of two different ways (different tutors take different approaches). One approach involves teaching the course with a primary focus on Descartes and Hume. In thinking through the course in this way, students use the issues to form a general understanding of the broad theories developed by Descartes and Hume. The second way of approaching the course involves thinking about the themes as the most important point and using Descartes, Hume and other great philosophers to illustrate the issues that we will be discussing. In this course, we will be taking the second approach. We will look at writings by Descartes, Hume and other great philosophers, but we will do this with a primary focus on the issues that they are discussing. The reason that we will take this approach is because I think that it is easier to get a view of the issues first and then turn our attention historically. Approaching the issues through the eyes of historical writers is difficult, not least because of how they tend to write. Focusing on the issues first helps us bypass this difficulty.

If you are taking this paper as an 8 week course, we will be doing all of the above tutorials. If you are doing it as part of a 4 week course, we will be doing tutorials 1, 3, 5 and 6.

An idea of how all of this fits together is given below:

1.2 Concept Map



Obviously, there are more points of intersection between the different tutorials and there are more questions that connect the different issues than I've been able to map here. But these will come out more clearly as the course progresses. The map here gives you some idea of how interest in these topics gets going and how the course will progress.

2 Course Admin

2.1 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.

2.2 A Note on the Reading List

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 video 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. If you can't find something, I'll either email you a PDF of it, or else replace it with something that you can find (or I can send you). The challenge is supposed to be in doing the readings and digesting them and writing essays. It isn't supposed to be in finding the readings.

2.3 Essays and Assessment

Exactly how the course is assessed depends on what degree course you're enrolled in. If you're one of the Philosophy joint schools, the course is assessed as part of the Prelims exam, along with the other papers you've been doing. If you're a Classics student, the paper is assessed as a three hour paper along with the rest of your Mods papers. As well as this, there are weekly essays that must be written before each tutorial. These will need to be around 2,000 words. If they are significantly shorter, you won't be able to do an adequate job of discussing the material that you've been looking at during the week. If they are significantly longer, they won't be as useful to you as preparation for when the examinations come around.

Essays need to be written and emailed to me (address above) at least 24 hours in advance of the tutorial. I'll read them and comment on them and get them back to you before the tutorial starts.

This is another reason that they shouldn't be too long. If they're substantially over 2,000 words, then I won't have time to read them. During the tutorial, I won't get you to read out your essay, but you should have it with you, because the material that you've developed will be relevant to the questions that we'll be thinking about and you're warmly encouraged to use the content of your essays in discussion.

2.4 Tutorials

In tutorials, we'll be talking about four things:

- (1) The readings that you've been looking at.
- (2) The essay that you've written.
- (3) Anything that you're particularly keen to discuss.
- (4) A set of questions on the subject that I've prepared.

Different tutorials might give different weight to each of (1)-(4) and that's absolutely fine. In some tutorials we might discuss your essay less, or you might have fewer questions occurring to you in other tutorials. If nothing obvious emerges, then we'll work through a set of pre-prepared questions that I'll have put together on the topic of the tutorial. I'll give you a copy of these at the end of the tutorial and at the end of the course, I'll make a copy of the course outline with all of the questions available. But I won't tell you what the questions will be in advance. The reason is that you will ultimately be assessed by an unseen examination and this will test your understanding and your ability to think on your feet. One of the best ways to prepare for this is to confront questions that you haven't previously seen and think your way through them, with some support, advice and guidance. That's what having an unseen question sheet in tutorials simulates. After the tutorials, you can use the questions to structure your own revision, if you wish. The questions won't be a comprehensive list of everything that might come up and they won't all be essay questions. Some will simply test your understanding. But working your way through them would be a good way to start your revision when the time comes.

2.5 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.

There is a skill to writing philosophy papers. It is invariably one that you will develop as the course goes along. But for a general idea of what makes for a good philosophy essay, you could usefully look at the following guide for students, by James Pryor: <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>.

Equally, there are certain things that really wind up philosophers when they're reading essays. There's a good list of some of these things, compiled by Jimmy Lenman on the right-hand side of this page: <http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/philosophy/staff/profiles/lenman>.

Obviously, nobody expects you to have a flair for essay writing at this early stage. And we'll be looking to improve your essay-writing skills throughout the course, particularly in the final tutorial. But it would be good if we didn't have to go over all of these points then and were able to get stuck into some of the finer points of writing good philosophy essays.

3 Tutorial 1 – Mind & Body

We will begin our work on the *General Philosophy* paper by thinking about the question of whether or not there is anything more to us than our physical selves. Obviously, each of us is intimately associated with a physical body in some way, but each of us also appears to have a mental life as well. In this tutorial, we will think about whether our mental lives should be thought of as separate from our physical selves and if so, in what sense they are separate. We will begin by looking at some of the arguments that Descartes brought to bear on the subject and his argumentative strategy. With this in hand, we will turn to consider modern day approaches to dualism.

- † 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?

4 Tutorial 2 – Personal Identity

Having thought about the question of whether there is more to us than the physical beings that we are closely associated with, we will turn our attention to consider what kind of thing we are and how we persist. It seems natural, at first sight, to think that there is an open question of whether we continue to exist through time by virtue of our mental lives continuing or our physical lives continuing. In this tutorial, we will be focused on thinking about what matters for our persistence over time. We will look at Locke's view that our persistence is a matter of a psychological connection with our past selves and compare this to some more recent views that place the significance elsewhere.

- † John Locke (1689). *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Book II, Chapter XXVII.
- † Eric Olson (2003). 'An Argument for Animalism' in Raymond Martin and John Barresi (eds.), *Personal Identity* Malden: Blackwell Publishing pp. 318-334.
- † 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?

5 Tutorial 3 – Free Will

Human beings often contend that they are free, at least some of the time. In this tutorial we will organise our thinking around the question of what it means for human beings to be free. According to one set of views, human freedom cannot exist in a deterministic universe, but not in an indeterministic one. According to another set, human freedom can exist in both a deterministic universe and an indeterministic one. And according to a final set of views, human freedom cannot exist in either a deterministic universe or an indeterministic one. We will assess each of these positions and seek to figure out what it means to say that human beings are free and what this has to do with moral responsibility.

- † David Lewis (1969). 'Are We Free to Break the Laws?' *Theoria*, 47:113-121.
- † 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.
- # Galen Strawson (1994). 'The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility' *Philosophical Studies* 75:5-24.
- # 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: Should philosophers be interested in the question of whether or not determinism is true?

6 Tutorial 4 – God and Evil

Having thought about what it means to be free in the previous tutorial, we will turn our attention in this tutorial to thinking about an issue in which the idea of being free plays a significant role. We will be thinking about the relationship between God and evil. One line of argument for atheism appeals to the idea that evil exists in the world and this provides evidence for atheism. In this tutorial we will think about two related questions. The first concerns how far the existence of evil in the world really does indicate that God doesn't exist. The second is how far an appeal to free will can go towards providing a response to this argument.

† David Hume (1779). *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* Indiana: Hackett, Parts X and XI.

† David Lewis (1993). 'Evil for Freedom's Sake?' *Philosophical Papers* 22 (3):149-172.

† William Rowe (1979). 'The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 37:405-419.

* Justin McBrayer's overview of the Problem of Evil, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_Ul1pC

* T.J. Mawson (2005). *Belief in God: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 12.

Nelson Pike (1963). 'Hume on Evil' *Philosophical Review* 72:180-197.

J.L. Mackie (1955). 'Evil and Omnipotence' *Mind* 64 (254):200-212.

Richard Swinburne (2004). *The Existence of God* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 11

Question: In what sense, if any, does the existence of evil indicate against God's existence?

7 Tutorial 5 – Scepticism

In this tutorial, we will begin our thinking about epistemology. We will consider two lines of sceptical argument that indicate that we don't know anything much at all. We will think about the consequences of these arguments and examine various strategies for resisting them. One such strategy comes from Descartes. Another takes off from the point that Descartes' argument leaves things. In particular, we will think about the question of whether or not we can know something even if we don't have evidence that guarantees its truth. Put another way, we will examine the relationship between knowledge and certainty.

- † 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.
- † Laurence Bonjour (1980). 'Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge' *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1):53-73
- * 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.
- # G.E. Moore (1939). 'Proof of an External World' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25:273-300.
- # 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?

8 Tutorial 6 – Knowledge

Following on from our discussion of scepticism and the relationship between knowledge and certainty, we will think about what it means to say that someone knows something. If we want to allow that people can know things even if they are not certain of them, it seems as though we should give an account of knowledge that encapsulates this thought. The trouble is, however, once we start thinking of knowledge in terms of belief that isn't guaranteed to be true, it becomes difficult to see how we can distinguish between beliefs that amount to knowledge and beliefs that don't. In this tutorial, we will look at the philosophical problem of Gettier cases and think about how we might respond to this problem.

- † 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.
- † Duncan Pritchard (2012). 'Anti-Luck Virtue Epistemology' *Journal of Philosophy* 109:247-279.
- * 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.
- # 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.

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

9 Tutorial 7 – Induction

In this tutorial, we will come to consider an application of our previous theorising about epistemology. It seems as though one way of forming knowledge or justified belief involves reasoning on the basis of previous observations. But an interesting question concerns which inferences of this type yield justified beliefs and which do not. We will look at the problem of induction, concerning how beliefs formed through inductive reasoning can be justified and we will consider Nelson Goodman's new riddle of induction, which challenges us to distinguish between inductive reasoning that yields justified belief and inductive reasoning that doesn't. We will examine these problems from the perspectives of the epistemological positions that we have examined in the previous two tutorials.

- † 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?

10 Tutorial 8 – Writing Philosophy and Revision

Exactly how we will approach this tutorial depends on how the rest of the tutorials have gone. There are several things that we can do. One thing we could do is try to improve your general ability to write philosophy essays. There are a couple of ways in which we can go about this. One is the writing project, which involves you writing a summary of a philosophical paper, looking for specific details from it. The second involves you writing timed responses to particular exam questions, which we can then discuss in the tutorial and set about figuring out how to improve them.

Another option for the tutorial involves using it to go back over particular parts of the previous tutorials that you're unclear on, or would like to discuss further in a bit more detail. Doing this won't involve redoing any of the tutorials, but we'll pick out particular themes that might be worth exploring and see about investigating these in more detail. It will give you a chance to develop your views on some of this material further and think about it more carefully with a view to preparing for the exam. In this way, we could also think about some of the connections between the different areas that we haven't been able to bring out in thinking about the issues individually during the tutorials.

Lastly, we could spend the tutorial expanding your knowledge of the material by thinking about the philosophy of Descartes and Hume more generally. During the tutorials, we will be thinking about the issues with one eye on Descartes and Hume and their contributions to those issues. We can think about the bigger pictures concerning Descartes and Hume and get a broader perspective on their general philosophical approaches. As I described earlier in this document, this is one way of approaching this tutorial course. It isn't the way that we take, but we could have a think about the general philosophical overviews of Descartes and Hume in the final tutorial to give a broader perspective on the issues that we have been thinking about.