

# **Theory of Knowledge**

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# 1 Course Content

## 1.1 Course Overview

Week	Topic
1	Scepticism
2	Dogmatism
3	Coherentism and Infitism
4	Internalism
5	Externalism
6	Virtue Epistemology
7	Contextualism
8	Testimony

This is a set of tutorials for visiting students wishing to study the theory of knowledge. In it, we shall examine some of the issues that have dominated both classical and contemporary epistemology. Each week, we shall look at two significant papers on each issue. Since there is no exam for visiting students taking the course, the course assessment will be based on contributions during the course. By the end of the course students will have an understanding of some of the central issues in the theory of knowledge and also a familiarity with some of the most interest papers that have informed these issues. The course is divided into three sections. The first three tutorials investigate scepticism and responses to it. The second two tutorials consider the dispute between internalist and externalist approaches to epistemology. The final three tutorials will focus on themes that have emerged more recently in epistemology.

In the first tutorial, we shall investigate the issue of scepticism. Traditionally, epistemological discussions of scepticism have centred on texts by Descartes and Hume. We shall take the first *Meditation* from Descartes as a starting point, whilst also considering a more recent sceptical argument made by Peter Unger. With this in hand, we shall move to consider questions relating to dogmatism, understood as the view that some beliefs can amount to knowledge without independent supporting reasons. After this, we shall consider alternative accounts of the structure of knowledge, such as coherentism and infinitism.

Having considered these issues, we shall turn to assess competing internalist and externalist approaches of knowledge. We shall consider two of the most influential arguments for internalism in tutorial 4, before considering externalist theories in the form of reliabilist theories and the problems that confront them in tutorial 5.

The course will be concluded with discussions of virtue epistemology, contextualism and testimony. Virtue epistemology has been highly influential in recent years. It purports to accommodate an important connection between knowledge and achievement, but has attracted substantial amounts of recent criticism. We shall look at discussions of virtue epistemology from John Greco and Ernest

Sosa as well as objections to them. In considering contextualism, we shall investigate whether or not the standards for knowledge are context-sensitive before considering the sceptical importance of this. In the final tutorial we shall bring all of these issues together in considering testimony as a source of knowledge and justified belief.

## 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](http://www.stephenwrightphilosophy.com) on the right-hand side of the page using the 'Theory of Knowledge' link under 'Hilary 2017'.

### 2.2 A Note on the Reading List

For each class, I have identified two different types of reading. There are compulsory readings, which you will be required to have read before each class and you should come to each class prepared to discuss these. I have also included further readings on each tutorial, which you might find it helpful to consider as we move through the course. You will not, however, be expected to have read these before classes.

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 – Scepticism

### 3.1 Required Readings

- Peter Unger (1975). *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism* Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 92-151.
- Rene Descartes (1641). *Meditations on First Philosophy (1st Meditation)* Early Modern Texts: Available here.

### 3.2 Additional Readings

- Jonathan Dancy (1995). 'Arguments from Illusion' *Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 45, No. 181, pp. 421-438.
- Duncan Pritchard (2012). *Epistemological Disjunctivism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 109-158.
- Jonathan Bennett (2001). *Learning from Six Philosophers (Volume 1)* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 355-373.
- Michael Huemer (2001). *Scepticism and the Veil of Perception* Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 7-26.

*Question: What is the significance of the claim that we do not know anything at all?*

## 4 Tutorial 2 – Dogmatism

### 4.1 Required Readings

- James Pryor (2000). 'The Sceptic and the Dogmatist' *Noûs*. Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 517-549.
- Roger White (2006). 'Problems for Dogmatism' *Philosophical Studies*. Vol. 131, No. 3, pp. 525-557.

### 4.2 Additional Readings

- Michael Huemer (2001). *Scepticism and the Veil of Perception* Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, pp. 93-118.
- Ernest Sosa (1999). 'How to Defeat Opposition to Moore' *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 137-149.
- Michael Blome-Tillmann (2015). 'Solving the Moorean Puzzle' *Philosophical Studies*. Vol. 172, No. 2, pp. 493-514.
- Luca Moretti (2015). 'In Defence of Dogmatism' *Philosophical Studies*. Vol. 172, No. 1, pp. 261-282.

*Question: Is there any good objection to dogmatism?*

# 5 Tutorial 3 – Coherentism and Infinitism

## 5.1 Required Readings

- Laurence Bonjour (1985). *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 87-110.
- Peter Klein (2007). 'Human Knowledge and the Infinite Progress of Reasoning' *Philosophical Studies*. Vol. 134, No. 1, pp. 1-17.

## 5.2 Additional Readings

- Peter Klein and Ted Warfield (1994). 'What Price Coherence?' *Analysis*. Vol. 54, No. 3, pp. 129-132.
- Stephen Wright (2013). 'Does Klein's Infinitism Offer a Response to Agrippa's Trilemma?' *Synthese*. Vol. 190, No. 6, pp. 1113-1130.
- Ernest Sosa (1980). 'The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge' *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*. Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 3-26.
- Sanford Goldberg (2012). 'A Reliabilist Foundationalist Coherentism' *Erkenntnis*. Vol. 77, No. 2, pp. 187-196.

*Question: Is coherentism preferable to infinitism?*

## 6 Tutorial 4 – Internalism

### 6.1 Required Readings

- Stewart Cohen (1984). 'Justification and Truth' *Philosophical Studies*. Vol. 46, No. 3, pp. 279- 95.
- Bonjour (1985). *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 34-57.

### 6.2 Additional Readings

- John McDowell (1995). 'Knowledge and the Internal' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Vol. 55, No. 4, pp. 877-893.
- Michael Bergmann (2006). *Justification Without Awareness* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 3-24.
- Earl Conee and Richard Feldman (2004). *Evidentialism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 53-80.
- John Gibbons (2006). 'Access Externalism' *Mind*. Vol. 115, No. 457, pp. 19-39.

*Question: What differences are there between a subject seeing something and a brain in a vat having an indistinguishable visual experience? What does your answer say about internalist theories of justification?*

## 7 Tutorial 5 – Externalism

### 7.1 Required Readings

- Jonathan Vogel (2000). 'Reliabilism Leveled' *Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 97, No. 11, pp. 602-632.
- Earl Conee and Richard Feldman (1998). 'The Generality Problem for Reliabilism' *Philosophical Studies*. Vol. 89, No. 1, pp. 1-29.

### 7.2 Additional Readings

- Michael Bishop (2010). 'Why the Generality Problem is Everybody's Problem' *Philosophical Studies*. Vol. 151, No. 2, pp. 285-298.
- William Alston (1986). 'Epistemic Circularity' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Vol. 47, No. 1, pp. 1-30.
- David Papineau (1992). 'Reliabilism, Induction and Scepticism' *Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 42, No. 166, pp. 1-20.
- Juan Comesaña (2004). 'A Well-Founded Solution to the Generality Problem' *Philosophical Studies*. Vol. 129, No. 1, pp. 27-47.

*Question: Can reliabilist theories give a viable response to either the generality problem or the problem of easy knowledge?*

## 8 Tutorial 6 – Virtue Epistemology

### 8.1 Required Readings

- Ernest Sosa (2007). *A Virtue Epistemology* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 22-43.
- John Greco (2012). 'A (Different) Virtue Epistemology' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Vol. 85, No. 1, pp. 1-26.

### 8.2 Additional Readings

- Jennifer Lackey (2007). 'Why We Don't Deserve Credit for Everything We Know' *Synthese*. Vol. 158, No. 3, pp. 345-361.
- Duncan Pritchard (2012). 'Anti-Luck Virtue Epistemology' *Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 109, No. 3, pp. 247-279.
- Ralph Wedgwood (2014). 'Rationality as a Virtue' *Analytic Philosophy*. Vol. 55, No. 4, pp. 319-338.
- Christopher Hookway (2003). 'How to Be a Virtue Epistemologist' in Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski (eds.), *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology* Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. 183-202.

*Question: Can virtue epistemologists adequately account for knowledge from testimony?*

## 9 Tutorial 7 – Contextualism

### 9.1 Required Readings

- Stewart Cohen (2000). 'Contextualism and Skepticism' *Noûs*. Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 94-107.
- Ernest Sosa (2000). 'Skepticism and Contextualism' *Noûs*. Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 1-18.

### 9.2 Additional Readings

- John Hawthorne (2004). *Knowledge and Lotteries* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 51-112.
- David Lewis (1996). 'Elusive Knowledge' *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*. Vol. 74, No. 4, pp. 549-567.
- Keith DeRose (1995). 'Solving the Skeptical Problem' *Philosophical Review*. Vol. 104, No. 1, pp. 1-52.
- Tim Williamson (2005). 'Contextualism, Subject-Sensitive Invariantism and Knowledge of Knowledge' *Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 55, No. 219, pp. 213-225.

*Question: Is contextualism relevant to the sceptical paradox?*

# 10 Tutorial 8 – Testimony

## 10.1 Required Readings

- Elizabeth Fricker (2015). 'How to Make Invidious Distinctions Amongst Reliable Testifiers' *Episteme*. Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 173-202.
- Jennifer Lackey (2008). *Learning from Words: Testimony as a Source of Knowledge* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 37-71.

## 10.2 Additional Readings

- Tyler Burge (1993). 'Content Preservation' *Philosophical Review*. Vol. 102, No. 4, pp. 457-488.
- Richard Moran (2005). 'Getting Told and Being Believed' *Philosophers Imprint*. Vol. 5, No. 5, pp. 1-29.
- Sanford Goldberg (2010). *Relying on Others: An Essay in Epistemology* Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 79-104.
- Paul Faulkner (2014). 'A Virtue Theory of Testimony' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. Vol. 114, No. 2, pp. 189-211.

*Question: Does Fricker make a convincing case for the claim that a speaker's testimony is apt to provide knowledge gained in the proprietary manner only if the speaker knows what she says?*