

Knowledge and Reality

Stephen Wright
University College, Oxford
Trinity College, Oxford
stephen.wright@univ.ox.ac.uk

Trinity 2018

Contents

1	Course Content	2
1.1	Course Overview	2
1.2	Concept Map	3
2	Course Admin	3
2.1	Website	3
2.2	A Note on the Reading List	3
2.3	Essays and Assessment	4
2.4	Tutorials	4
2.5	Doing Philosophy	5
2.6	Preliminary Reading	5
3	Tutorial 1 – Metaphysical Necessity	7
4	Tutorial 2 – Time	8
5	Tutorial 3 – Four-Dimensionalism	9
6	Tutorial 4 – Personal Identity	10
7	Tutorial 5 – Foundationalism, Coherentism and Informatism	11
8	Tutorial 6 – Internalism	12
9	Tutorial 7 – Reliabilism	13
10	Tutorial 8 – Testimony	14

1 Course Content

1.1 Course Overview

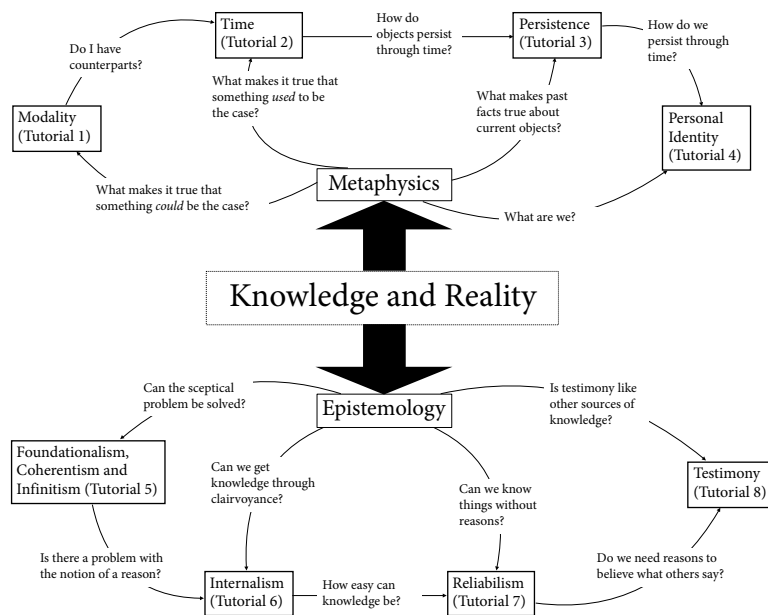
Week	Topic
1	Metaphysical Necessity
2	Time
3	Four-Dimensionalism
4	Personal Identity
5	Foundationalism, Coherentism and Informatism
6	Internalism
7	Reliabilism
8	Testimony

As part of the *Knowledge and Reality* course, we'll be considering some of the most fundamental questions about the world and our place in it. In doing so, we'll build on the foundations laid down by the *General Philosophy* course. We'll begin by discussing issues that concern what exists (in the world and beyond) and the ways that those things are. Firstly, we'll think about the different ways that things can be, considering how we should understand claims about possibility and impossibility. Then we'll think about questions concerning whether the past and/or the future exist. On a similar note, we'll think about what it means for us things to have existed in the past and to continue to exist into the future. Lastly, we'll think about the kind of things that you and I are.

In the second part of the course, we'll think about how we come to have beliefs about the world that are more than mere guesswork. We'll begin with the idea that reasons provide justification for beliefs and think about whether this applies to all beliefs or not. If so, we'll think about how those reasons need to be structured. Next, we'll think about the various ways in which beliefs might be justified without reasons, focusing on the question of whether or not something that you're unaware of can justify your beliefs. Lastly, we'll apply all of this to the thought that testimony can be a source of justified beliefs.

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

1.2 Concept Map



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 'Knowledge and Reality' link.

2.2 A Note on the Reading List

For each class I've identified two different types of reading. Readings marked as required are exactly that – they're readings you just have to do. Some of these are hard, but don't worry, we can discuss anything that you don't understand in tutorials. After this, there are some further readings. These you will want to look at in your own time, possibly after the tutorial (or maybe before) and they will help develop your thinking on these subjects further. For the purposes of the tutorial essay, however, I'd like you to focus particularly carefully on the readings that I've identified as required for the class. This is *not* to say that all of the readings for each week will be relevant to every essay for that week. You'll have to use (and develop) your judgement for working out what is and isn't useful in each case. But it is to say that you should read those required

readings particularly carefully because I'll be expecting you to know about them in advance of the tutorial.

† denotes required reading.

* denotes background reading.

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 any of the readings, I'll either email you a PDF of it or else replace it on the reading list with something that can be found or sent.

2.3 Essays and Assessment

This course is assessed by a three-hour unseen examination, which you will take along with your other Finals examinations. There are, however, weekly essays that must be written before each tutorial. If your other course requirements enable you to claim an exemption from writing essays in any particular week, then you must let me know about this in the week before you come to write the essay (so if you're claiming an exemption from an essay in 7th week, then you must let me know this by the end of the tutorial in 6th week.)

Exemptions aside, you are required to write and submit an essay of around 2,000 words each week. This needs 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. 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 on-line 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.

2.6 Preliminary Reading

Anything that you've had a look at as part of your *General Philosophy* tuition, would be a good place to start in thinking about these issues. For those wanting a particularly good introductory reading to the course as a whole, however, the following would be particularly suitable:

Peter van Inwagen (2009) *Metaphysics* (3rd Edition) Boulder: Westview Press.
Michael Williams (2001) *Problems of Knowledge: A Critical Introduction to Epistemology* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

If you would like to read this, but are unable to get hold of a copy of the book, then please email me for a PDF.

3 Tutorial 1 – Metaphysical Necessity

I'm not left handed, but I could have been. There aren't any three-sided squares and there couldn't have been. The idea is that what is and isn't the case tells us a lot, but it doesn't tell us everything. The study of modality is concerned with the way things might (or might not) and must (or couldn't) have been. In this class, we will think about what grounds these claims – what makes them true. We'll introduce the notion of a *possible world* as a way of thinking about what grounds modality. Possible worlds are a really useful philosophical tool for metaphysical necessity and beyond. If we want to talk about them, though, it would be a good thing to have some idea of what they are. We'll look at various accounts of what a possible world is as well as some competing accounts.

- † Lewis, David (1986). *On the Plurality of Worlds*. London: Blackwell, pp. 1-20.
- † Fine, Kit (1994). Essence and Modality, *Philosophical Perspectives* 8:1-16
- † Sider, Ted (2003). Reductive Theories of Modality. In Michael J. Loux & Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*. Oxford University Press. 180-208.
- * Bricker, Phillip (2008). Concrete Possible Worlds. In Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne & Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing pp. 111-134.
- * Zalta, Edward (2006). Essence and Modality, *Mind* 115: 659-693
- * Melia, Joseph (2003). *Modality*. Chesham: Acumen Press Chapters 6 and 7.
- * Hale, Bob (1997). Modality. in Hale, Bob and Wright, Cripsin (eds.), *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing pp. 487-514.
- * Rosen, Gideon (1990). Modal Fictionalism, *Mind* 99 (395):327-354.

Question: What are the truth conditions of a de re modal statement?

4 Tutorial 2 – Time

Issues about the nature and reality of time are central to contemporary issues in metaphysics. This class looks at a set of related questions. Firstly, we'll think about what time *is*. We'll think about whether there's anything more to time than the events that occur. In other words, if nothing happened, would time still continue to elapse? We'll also think about the question of whether or not the past, present and future exist.

- † Smart, J. J. C. (2008). The Tenseless Theory of Time. In Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne & Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing pp. 226-238.
- † Zimmerman, Dean (2008). The Privileged Present: Defending an "A-Theory" of Time. In Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne & Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing pp. 211- 225.
- † Maudlin, Tim (2002). Remarks on the Passing of Time. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. 102 (3):237–252.
- * Loux, Michael J. (2006). *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction (3rd Edition)*. London: Routledge, Chapter 7.
- * Lowe, E. J. (2002). *A Survey of Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 17.
- * McTaggart, J. M. E. (2004). Selection from "The Nature of Existence". In Tim Crane & Katalin Farkas (eds.), *Metaphysics: A Guide and Anthology*.
- * Williams, D.C. (1951). The Myth of Passage. *Journal of Philosophy* 48 (15):457- 472.
- * Shoemaker, Sydney (1969). Time Without Change. *Journal of Philosophy* 66 (12):363-381.

Question: Is there any good reason to think that time passes?

5 Tutorial 3 – Four-Dimensionalism

Whatever we want to say about time, we should want to make sense of the idea that objects can exist at more than one point in time by persisting. In this tutorial, we will look at different theories of how this happens. According to some, objects exist by being *wholly* present at different times. According to others, objects persist by having *parts* at different times. We will look at what there is to be said for the idea that objects have temporal parts as well as spatial ones. We will look at whether appealing to a framework of temporal parts can help with understanding coincident objects and whether we can make sense of the apparent difficulties of coincidence without recourse to a four-dimensionalist framework.

- † van Inwagen, Peter. (1990). Four-Dimensional Objects. *Nous*. 24 (2):245- 255.
- † Sider, Ted (1996). All the World's a Stage. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (3):433-453.
- † Thomson, Judith Jarvis (1983). Parthood and Identity Across Time. *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (4):201-220.
- * Hawthorne, John. (2006). "Three Dimensionalism." In John Hawthorne *Metaphysical Essays*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- * Hawley, Katherine. (2004). *How Things Persist*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- * Heller, Mark. (1990). *The Ontology of Physical Objects*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1 & 2.
- * Merricks, Trenton. (1994). Endurance and Indiscernibility. *Journal of Philosophy* 91 (4):165-184.
- * Fine, Kit. (2006). In Defense of Three-Dimensionalism. *Philosophy*. 103 (12):699-714.
- * McKinnon, Neil. (2002). The Endurance/Perdurance Distinction, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 80: 288–306.
- * Lowe, E.J. (1983). Instantiation, Identity and Constitution. *Philosophical Studies* 44 (1): 45–59.

Question: Do persisting objects have temporal parts?

6 Tutorial 4 – Personal Identity

In this tutorial we'll be thinking about what kind of thing you and I are. We might be animals, or we might be brains, or we might be something non-physical, or we might be the bodies that we are respectively associated with. To start our thinking off, we will think about the *too many thinkers* problem, put forward by Eric Olson. We'll have a think about what it shows and how we should go about formulating a theory of personal identity. We will also think about the question of how we persist and about whether or not this question might be more or less fundamental than the question of what kind of things we are.

- † Olson, Eric (1997). *The Human Animal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press pp. 124-153.
- † Shoemaker, Sydney (1984). Personal Identity and Memory. *Journal of Philosophy* 56 (22):868-882.
- † Thomson, Judith Jarvis (2008). People and Their Bodies. In Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne & Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing pp. 155-176.
- † Carter, W.R. (1999). Will I Be a Dead Person? *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 59 (1):167-171.
- * Olson, Eric (2004). Animalism and the Corpse Problem. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 82 (2):265-74.
- * Parfit, Derek (2008). Persons, Bodies, and Human Beings. In Theodore Sider, John Hawthorne & Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing pp. 177-208.
- * Perry, John (ed.) (1975). *Personal Identity*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- * Snowdon, P.F. (1990). Persons, Animals, and Ourselves. In Christopher Gill (ed.), *The Person and the Human Mind: Issues in Ancient and Modern Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- * van Inwagen, Peter (1990). *Material Beings*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Chapters 15&16.

Question: "If I'm not an animal, then there are two of us thinking my thoughts – me and the animal. Since there's no reason to think that there are two of us thinking my thoughts, there's no reason to think that I'm anything other than the animal. So it's impossible to provide a reason for any theory other than animalism." Is this argument any good? If so, why? If not, why not?

7 Tutorial 5 – Foundationalism, Coherentism and Infinitism

In this tutorial, we'll look at the *structure* of justification and knowledge. Suppose I ask you for something you believe. You tell me that ϕ . I ask why you believe that ϕ and you come out with some other belief. I then ask about what justifies your other belief and you come out with something else. Ultimately, one of three things happens. Either the structure of reasons goes on forever, or we get a belief that isn't supported by other reasons, or we move in what would appear to be a circle. According to the sceptic, whatever happens, we're in trouble. According to non-sceptics, at least one of these ways yields a justified belief. We'll look at which way, if any, can yield knowledge and justified belief.

- † Sosa, Ernest (1980). The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence Versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge. *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1):3-26.
- † Bonjour, Laurence (1985). *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapter 5.
- † Klein, Peter (2007). Human Knowledge and the Infinite Progress of Reasoning. *Philosophical Studies* 134 (1):1-17.
- * Goldberg, Sanford (2012). A Reliabilist Foundationalist Coherentism. *Erkenntnis* 77 (2):187-196.
- * Lehrer, Keith (2000). *Theory of Knowledge*. Westview Press.
- * Wright, Stephen (2013). Does Klein's Infinitism Offer a Response to Agrippa's Trilemma? *Synthese* 190 (6):1113-1130.
- * Klein, Peter & Warfield, Ted (1994). What Price Coherence? *Analysis* 54 (3):129-132.
- * Huemer, Michael (2010). Foundations and Coherence. In Dancy, Jonathan, Steup, Matthias and Sosa, Ernest (eds.), *A Companion to Epistemology*. Malden: Blackwell 33-42.
- * Kvanvig, Jonathan (2012). Coherentism and Justified Inconsistent Beliefs: A Solution. *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 50 (1):21-41.

Question: EITHER: Can empirical knowledge be foundational? OR Can we make sense of empirical knowledge without foundations?

8 Tutorial 6 – Internalism

In this class, we will look at *internalist* accounts of knowledge and justification. According to internalist theories, justification is a matter of what the individual is aware of, or what the individual has *reflective access* to. We'll look at the kinds of considerations that might motivate an internalist theory of justification and knowledge and some of the key considerations that might push against such theories. In particular, we'll look at the *clairvoyant* and *New Evil Demon* arguments in support of internalism. On the other side, we'll look at Bergmann's dilemma for internalist theories.

- † BonJour, Laurence (1985). *The Structure of Empirical Knowledge*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Chapter 3.
- † Bergmann, Michael (2006). *Justification Without Awareness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 1.
- † Cohen, Stewart (1984). Justification and Truth. *Philosophical Studies* 46 (3):279- 95.
- * Conee, Earl and Feldman, Richard (2004). *Evidentialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- * Comesaña, Juan (2005). We Are (Almost) All Externalists Now. *Philosophical Perspectives* 19 (1):59-76.
- * Gibbons, John (2006). Access Externalism. *Mind* 115 (457):19-39.
- * Lehrer, Keith & Cohen, Stewart (1983). Justification, Truth, and Coherence. *Synthese* 55 (2):191-207.

Question: Is there a difference 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?

9 Tutorial 7 – Reliabilism

The most prominent alternative to internalist theories claims that justification and knowledge is a matter of the reliability of the process(es) involved in the production of the listener's belief. These theories are *externalist*, since they deny the claim that only that which is reflectively accessible to a listener can justify her belief. We'll look at what the notion of reliability behind reliabilist theories amounts to and think about two major objections. The first is the *generality* problem. The second is the *problem of easy knowledge*.

- † Conee, Earl & Feldman, Richard (1998). The Generality Problem for Reliabilism. *Philosophical Studies* 89 (1):1-29.
- † Vogel, Jonathan (2000). Reliabilism Leveled. *Journal of Philosophy* 97 (11):602- 623.
- † Pritchard, Duncan (2012). Anti-Luck Virtue Epistemology. *Journal of Philosophy* 109 (3):247-279.
- † Comesaña, Juan (2011). Reliabilism. In Bernecker, Sven and Pritchard, Duncan (eds.), *Routledge Companion to Epistemology*. New York: Routledge 176-186.
- * Cohen, Stewart (2002). Basic Knowledge and the Problem of Easy Knowledge. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (2):309-329.
- * Alston, William (1993). *The Reliability of Sense Perception*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Chapter 1.
- * Heller, Mark (1995). The Simple Solution to the Problem of Generality. *Noûs* 29 (4):501-515.
- * van Cleve, James (2003). Is Knowledge Easy – or Impossible? Externalism as the Only Alternative to Skepticism. In Luper, Stephen (ed.), *The Sceptics: Contemporary Essays*. London: Ashgate.
- * Bishop, Michael (2010). Why the Generality Problem is Everybody's Problem. *Philosophical Studies* 151 (2):285-298.

Question: EITHER: In what sense is the generality problem everybody's problem? OR How should externalist theories respond to the problem of easy knowledge?

10 Tutorial 8 – Testimony

It seems relatively uncontroversial that, if we know anything at all, we know things by testimony. This tutorial will involve us looking at various issues in the epistemology of testimony. We'll examine the question of whether an internalist or externalist account of testimony is correct. We'll also look at the question of whether or not the speaker knowing what she says is a necessary condition of the listener's belief in the speaker's testimony amounting to knowledge.

- † Fricker, Elizabeth (1995). Critical Notice: Telling and Trusting: Reductionism and Anti-Reductionism in the Epistemology of Testimony. *Mind* 104 (414):393-411.
- † Burge, Tyler (1993). Content Preservation. *Philosophical Review* 102 (4):457-488.
- † Lackey, Jennifer (1999). Testimonial Knowledge and Transmission. *Philosophical Quarterly* 50 (197):471-490.
- * Goldberg, Sanford (2005). Testimonial Knowledge Through Unsafe Testimony. *Analysis* 65 (288):302-311.
- * Faulkner, Paul (2000). The Social Character of Testimonial Knowledge. *Journal of Philosophy* 97 (11):581-601.
- * Hinchman, Edward (2005). Telling as Inviting to Trust. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 70 (3):562-587.
- * Sosa, Ernest (2006). Knowledge: Instrumental and Testimonial. In Lackey, Jennifer & Sosa, Ernest (eds.), *The Epistemology of Testimony*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 116-123.
- * Wright, Stephen (2014). Sosa on Knowledge From Testimony. *Analysis* 74 (2):249-254.

Question: Critically assess Jennifer Lackey's rejection of transmission.