

## KNOWLEDGE AND REALITY SYLLABUS

St John's College, Trinity Term 2020

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### I. General information

#### 1. Assignments

You must email me your 1500-word essay 24 hours before our meeting. During the class, I will ask you to summarise it so that we both have a clear picture of your essay's argumentative structure. You can replace any week with an improvement week to extend and revise one of your essays. For valuable tutorials, you must do the readings, at least the mandatory readings (marked with a star).

#### 2. Tips for essay writing

Here are ten tips to help you writing your essays.

*General writing:*

- (1) Reread your essay at least twice before sending it to me.
- (2) Use topic sentences, that is reread the first sentence of each of your paragraphs: ideally, this would give you a summary of your essay.
- (3) Upon rereading a sentence, if you do not immediately understand it, rewrite it.
- (4) Never write sentences that are longer than three lines.

*Essay structure:*

- (5) Spare us long and literary introductions.
- (6) State your conclusions clearly at the beginning and end of the essay and include plenty of 'signposts' throughout the essay so that the intended structure of your argument is easy to discern.
- (7) Make sure that your conclusion does not 'come out of nowhere', as a whimsical synthesis of opposing arguments.

*Content:*

- (8) Never use technical vocabulary without defining it. If you feel like there are too many definitions, try to cut down the number of technical words you are using.

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the readings of this syllabus come from the reading list provided by the Oxford Philosophy Faculty.

(9) Always illustrate abstract principles with examples, but do not spend too long describing them unless it is necessary.

(10) If you present a counterexample to a principle, try not only to make it clear how it is a counterexample, but what structural reason we have for believing that the principle is false.

### **3. Marking and late work**

If you hand in your essay on time, I will read it and supply written comments, and email it to you in the tutorial or a few hours before. You get to decide whether you want me to give you a general grade (2.2, low-high-mid 2.1, first) or not. If your essay is late or that you don't submit it in time, I might ask you to read it out loud to me. If you do not send me an essay, I reserve the right to skip the tutorial. It is still important that you hand your essay in even if I do not have time to comment on it. (I am required to report to your college how many pieces of work you have completed to a satisfactory standard.) Notify me by email as soon as possible, and at any rate before the start of the tutorial, if you will be late handing in your essay, and/or unable to attend one of the tutorials, giving your reasons. If you are experiencing difficulties (academic or otherwise) that are affecting your ability to work at your normal standard, or you are concerned about your level of understanding of this topic, don't suffer in silence. Rather, let me know as soon as possible.

### **4. Study questions and finals preparation**

Finals questions are quite specific. They do not simply say 'write an essay on Gettier cases', and you cannot count on the Finals paper containing questions that happen to match your tutorial essay questions. Every single examiners' report complains that many students simply recycle their tutorial essays in response to related but different questions. To be well prepared for Finals, you will ideally master at least three topics with enough depth and breadth that you can understand and intelligently discuss almost anything the examiners choose to ask on that topic.

## **II. Material and Readings**

For further readings, see the Philosophy Faculty's reading list. The term is divided in four topics, each of which takes two weeks.

### **W0. Improvement Week**

If you prefer, you can replace any of the weeks with this improvement week. Select one of your former essays, make relevant modifications to it, extend it to a 2500-word paper. If possible, ask a colleague to re-read it.

**TOPIC 1: Scepticism**

## QUESTION WEEK 1 (SCEPTICISM AND CLOSURE):

Lay out the sceptical argument against the existence of knowledge.  
Should we reject it by denying closure?

## READINGS WEEK 1:

Nozick, Robert (1981). Knowledge and skepticism. In Nozick, *Philosophical explanations*, Oxford: Clarendon Press. Reprinted in Bernecker and Dretske.

Dretske, Fred (2013). The case against closure. In Matthias Steup, John Turri and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *Contemporary debates in epistemology*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hawthorne, John (2013). The case for closure. In Matthias Steup, John Turri and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *Contemporary debates in epistemology*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Hawthorne, John (2003). *Knowledge and lotteries*, ch. 2 Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Unger, Peter (1971). A defense of skepticism. *Philosophical Review* 80, 198-219. Reprinted in Bernecker and Dretske.

Lewis, David (1996). Elusive knowledge. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74(4), 549-567.

## QUESTION WEEK 2:

‘There is no point trying to answer the sceptic on her term; scepticism is just a useful foil in epistemology which supports externalism.’  
Comment.

## READINGS WEEK 2:

Stroud, Barry (1984). *The significance of philosophical scepticism*, ch.1. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Moore, G. E. (1959). Proof of an external world. In G. E. Moore, *Philosophical papers*, Allen & Unwin. Relevant extracts reprinted in Sosa and Kim.

Kelly, Thomas (2005). Moorean facts and belief revision or Can the skeptic win? *Philosophical Perspectives* 19, 179-209.

Rinard, Susanna (2013). Why philosophy can overturn common-sense. In Tamar Gendler and John Hawthorne (eds.), *Oxford studies in epistemology: Volume 4*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hill, Christopher S. (1996). Process reliabilism and Cartesian scepticism. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 56, 567-581.

Williamson, Timothy (2000). *Knowledge and its limits*, ch.8. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bergmann, Michael (2008). Externalist responses to scepticism. In John Greco (ed.), *The Oxford handbook to scepticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**TOPIC 2: Social epistemology — *Testimony, Disagreement and Epistemic Injustice***

QUESTION WEEK 3 (DISAGREEMENT):

What is the rational response to learning that an epistemic peer disagrees with you?

READINGS WEEK 3:

Christensen, David (2007). Epistemology of disagreement: The good news. *Philosophical Review* 116, 187-217.

Elga, Adam (2010). How to disagree about how to disagree. In Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield, *Disagreement*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kelly, Thomas (2005). The epistemic significance of disagreement. In John Hawthorne and Tamar Gendler (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Epistemology, Volume 1*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Conee, Earl (2010). Rational disagreement defended. In Richard Feldman and Ted A. Warfield, *Disagreement*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lackey, Jennifer (2010). A justificationist view of disagreement's epistemic significance. In Adrian Haddock, Alan Millar and Duncan Pritchard (eds.), *Social epistemology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hawthorne, John and Srinivasan, Amia (2013). Disagreement without transparency: Some bleak thoughts. In David Christensen and Jennifer Lackey (eds.), *The epistemology of disagreement: New essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

QUESTION WEEK 4 (TESTIMONY):

Can testimony be analysed in terms of other sources of knowledge?

READINGS WEEK 4:

- Lackey, Jennifer (2010) Testimonial knowledge. In Sven Bernecker and Duncan Pritchard (eds.) *The Routledge companion to epistemology*, London: Routledge.
- Coady, C. A. J. (1992) *Testimony: A philosophical study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Burge, Tyler (1993) Content preservation. *The Philosophical Review* 102(4), 457-488.
- Fricker, Elizabeth (1995). Telling and trusting: Reductionism and anti-reductionism of testimony. *Mind* 104(414), 393-411.
- Fricker, Elizabeth (2006) Second-hand knowledge. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 73(3), 592-618.
- Lackey, Jennifer (2006) It takes two to tango: Beyond reductionism and non-reductionism in the epistemology of testimony. In Jennifer Lackey and Ernest Sosa (eds.) *The epistemology of testimony*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### TOPIC 3: Causation

QUESTION WEEK 5 (CAUSATION AND COUNTERFACTUALS):

Can causation be understood in terms of counterfactuals?

READINGS WEEK 5:

- Lewis, David (1986). Causation (including postscripts). In David Lewis, *Philosophical Papers: Volume 2*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, David (1979). Counterfactual dependence and time's arrow. *Nous* 13(4), 455-476.
- Lewis, David (2000). Causation as influence. *Journal of Philosophy* 97(4), 182-197.
- Paul, Laurie A. (2011). The counterfactual analysis of causation. In Helen Beebe, Christopher Hitchcock and Peter Menzies (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook on Causation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Edgington, Dorothy (2011). Causation first: Why causation is prior to counterfactuals. In Christoph Hoerl, Theresa McCormack and Sarah R. Beck (eds.), *Understanding counterfactuals, understanding causation: Issues in philosophy and psychology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Maudlin, Tim (2004). Causation, counterfactuals, and the third factor. In John Collins, Ned Hall and Laurie A. Paul (eds.), *Causation and counterfactuals*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press

QUESTION WEEK 6 (CAUSATION AND OMISSION):

‘Omissions are absences of action and absences cannot cause anything. So, when I forget to call you as promised, I did not cause you distress.’ Discuss.

READINGS WEEK 6:

Lewis, David (2004). Void and object. In John Collins, Ned Hall and Laurie A. Paul (eds.), *Causation and counterfactuals*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press

Beebe, Helen (2004). Causing and nothingness. In John Collins, Ned Hall and Laurie A. Paul (eds.), *Causation and counterfactuals*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press

McGrath, Sarah (2005). Causation by omission: A dilemma. *Philosophical Studies* 123(1-2), 125-148.

Clarke, Randolph K. 2014. *Omissions: Agency, Metaphysics, and Responsibility*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press — ch. 2, 3, 5.

#### **TOPIC 4: Personal Identity**

QUESTION WEEK 7 (ENDURANTISM AND PERDURANTISM):

What is the significance of the problem of temporary intrinsics?

READINGS WEEK 7:

Lewis, David (1986). *On the plurality of worlds*, ch.4. Oxford: Blackwell. Relevant selections reprinted in Haslanger and Kurtz *Persistence: Contemporary readings*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Sider, Theodore (1997). Four-dimensionalism. *Philosophical Review* 106(2), 197-231. Reprinted in Haslanger and Kurtz.

Heller, Mark (1999). Temporal parts of four-dimensional objects. In Jaegwon Kim and Ernest Sosa (eds.), *Metaphysics: An anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Hawthorne, John (2007). Three Dimensionalism vs. Four Dimensionalism. In John Hawthorne, Theodore Sider, and Dean Zimmerman, *Contemporary debates in metaphysics*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Zimmerman, Dean (1998). Temporary intrinsics and presentism. In Peter van Inwagen and Dean Zimmerman (eds.), *Metaphysics: The big questions*, Oxford: Blackwell. Reprinted in Haslanger and Kurtz.

Fine, Kit (2006). In defense of three-dimensionalism. *Journal of Philosophy* 103(12), 699-714.

Magidor, Ofra (2016). Endurantism vs. perdurantism?: A debate reconsidered. *Nous* 50(3), 509-532.

QUESTION WEEK 8 (FUSION AND FISSION):

Do fusion and fission cases teach us the same thing about personal identity?

READINGS WEEK 8:

Parfit, Derek (1971) Personal identity. *Philosophical Review* 80, 3-27.

Nozick, Robert (1981). Personal identity through time. In Robert Nozick, *Philosophical Explanations*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hawley, Katherine (2005). Fission, fusion and intrinsic facts. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 71(3), 602-621.

Gendler, Tamar Szabo (2002). Personal identity and thought-experiments. *Philosophical Quarterly* 52(206), 34-54.

Lewis, David (1986). Survival and identity (including postscript). In D. Lewis, *Philosophical Papers: Volume I*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Liebman, David (2015). We do not count by identity. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 93(1), 21-42.