Knowledge and Reality (102)

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Course Description

The purpose of this subject is to enable you to examine some central questions about the nature of the world and the extent to which we can have knowledge of it.

In considering knowledge you will examine whether it is possible to attain knowledge of what the world is really like. Is our knowledge of the world necessarily limited to what we can observe to be the case? Indeed, are even our observational beliefs about the world around us justified? Can we have knowledge of what will happen based on what has happened? Is our understanding of the world necessarily limited to what we can prove to be the case? Or can we understand claims about the remote past or distant future which we cannot in principle prove to be true?

In considering reality you will focus on questions such as the following. Does the world really contain the three-dimensional objects and their properties - such as red buses or black horses - which we appear to encounter in everyday life? Or is it made up rather of the somewhat different entities studied by science, such as colourless atoms or four-dimensional space-time worms? What is the relation between the common sense picture of the world and that provided by contemporary science? Is it correct to think of the objects and their properties that make up the world as being what they are independently of our preferred ways of dividing up reality? These issues are discussed with reference to a variety of specific questions such as 'What is time?', 'What is the nature of causation?', and 'What are substances?' There is an opportunity in this subject to study such topics as reference, truth and definition, but candidates taking 102 and 108 should avoid repetition of material across examinations, though it is safe to assume that good answers to questions would not involve repetition for which you might be penalised. (From *Course Handbook*)

**Lectures**

The Faculty of Philosophy provide two sets of lectures for Knowledge and Reality. One is on metaphysics. The other is on epistemology. **You should watch/listen to these lectures and read the handouts.** Some lectures and handouts from previous years may also be available; I encourage you to take a look because this year’s lectures may well focus on slightly different topics.

**Introductions and Useful Collections**

Epistemology

Dancy, J. 1985: *Introduction to Contemporary Epistemology*, London: Blackwell.

Audi, R. 2003: *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 2nd edition, London: Routledge.

Pritchard, D. 2006: *What is this thing called knowledge*? London: Routledge.

Steup, M. and Sosa, E. (eds.) 2005: *Contemporary Debates in Epistemology*. Blackwell.

Moser P. (ed.) 2002: *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bernecker, S. and Dretske, F. (eds.) 2000: *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary* *Epistemology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sosa, E. and Kim, J. (eds.) 2008: *Epistemology: An Anthology*, 2nd ed. Blackwell.

Metaphysics

Beebee, H. and Dodd, J. 2007: *Reading Metaphysics: Selected Texts with Interactive Commentary*. Blackwell.

Conee, E. and Sider, T. 2005: *Riddles of Existence: A Guided Tour of Metaphysics*. OUP.

Crane, T. and Farkas, K. (eds) 2004: *Metaphysics: A Guide and Anthology.* OUP.

Ney, A. 2014: *Metaphysics: An Introduction*. Routledge.

Loux, M. 2002: *Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction.* Routledge.

Loux, M. and Zimmerman, D. (eds) 2003: *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*.OUP.

Loux, M. (ed.), 2008: *Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings*, 2nd ed. Routledge.

Kim, J. and Sosa, E. (eds) 1999: *Metaphysics: An Anthology*.Blackwell.

Sider, T. et.al. (eds) 2007: *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics*.Blackwell.

Tutorial Readings Lists

**Tutorial Structure**

1. Each week you will be asked to write a brief essay on a specified question.
2. You must **email** the completed essay to me and to your tutorial partner by **NOON** the day before your tutorial.
3. I will provide written marks and feedback on your essay and we will discuss the essay during our tutorial.
4. If you are unable to complete your essay on time or unable to attend tutorial, please notify me as soon as possible.
5. In addition to the readings listed here, you should also look at the extensive Faculty readings lists.

Week 1: Scepticism

**Question**: Why do you need to rule out the possibility that you are dreaming in order to know anything at all about the external world?

*Primary Reading*

1. Moore, G. E. 1939: ‘Proof of an External World’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25: 273–300.
2. Nozick, R. 1981: ‘Knowledge and Skepticism’, in his *Philosophical Explanations,* Oxford: OUP, pp.167–247; extracted and reprinted in Kim and Sosa (eds) *Epistemology*; in DeRose and Warfield (eds) *Skepticism;* and in Bernecker and Dretske (eds).
3. Stroud, B. 1984: *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism*. ch. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*Additional Reading*

1. Brueckner, A. 1992: ‘Semantic Answers to Skepticism’, *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 73: 200–219.
2. McDowell, J. 1982: ‘Criteria, Defeasibility and Knowledge’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 68: 455–79.
3. Pryor, J. 2000: ‘The Skeptic and the Dogmatist’, *Nous* 34(4): 517–549.
4. White, R. 2006: ‘Problems for Dogmatism’, *Philosophical Studies* 131: 525–557.
5. Wright, C. 2002: ‘(Anti-)Sceptics Simple and Subtle: G. E. Moore and John McDowell’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65: 330–348.

Week 2: Contextualism

**Question:** Does the truth of knowledge ascriptions depend on context? If so, which aspects of context?

*Primary Reading*

1. David Lewis, ‘Elusive Knowledge’, Australasian Journal of Philosophy (1996). Reprinted in his Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology (Cambridge University Press, 1999).
2. Keith DeRose, ‘Solving the Skeptical Problem’, Philosophical Review (1995). Reprinted in DeRose and Warfield (eds.) Skepticism.
3. John Hawthorne, Knowledge and Lotteries (OUP, 2004), ch.2

*Additional Reading*

1. Jason Stanley, ‘On the Linguistic Basis for Contextualism’, Philosophical Studies (2004)
2. Jason Stanley, *Knowledge and Practical* Interests (OUP, 2005), chs 1, 5-6.
3. Keith DeRose, ‘The Ordinary Language Basis for Contextualism, and the New

Invariantism’, *Philosophical* *Quarterly* (2005)

1. MacFarlane, J., 2005, “The Assessment Sensitivity of Knowledge Attributions”, in T. S. Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Epistemology 1*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.197–233.
2. Neta, R. 2003, “Contextualism and the Problem of the External World”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 66(1): 1–31.
3. Schiffer, S., 1996, “Contextualist Solutions to Skepticism”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 96: 317–333.
4. Timothy Williamson, ‘Knowledge, Context, and the Agent’s Point of View’, in G.

Preyer and G. Peter (eds.), Contextualism in Philosophy (OUP, 2005)

Week 3: The Analysis of Knowledge

**Question**: Is having knowledge equivalent to having a true belief that meets some additional condition(s)? If so, what condition(s)?

*Primary Reading*

1. Gettier, E. 1963: ‘Is justified true belief knowledge?’, *Analysis* 23: 121–23.
2. Sturgeon, S. 1993. ‘The Gettier Problem’, *Analysis* 53(3): 156–164.
3. Williamson, T. 2000: *Knowledge and its Limits*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chs. 1 and 2.

*Additional Reading*

1. Blome-Tillmann, M. 2007: ‘The Folly of Trying to Define Knowledge’, *Analysis*.
2. Goldman, A. 1976: ‘Discrimination and Perceptual Knowledge’, *Journal of Philosophy* 73: 771–791
3. Kearns, S. 2007: ‘In Praise of Folly: A Reply to Blome-Tillmann’, *Analysis*.
4. Nagel, J. 2013. ‘Knowledge as a Mental State’, *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*
5. Sainsbury, R. M. 1997: “Easy Possibilities”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57: 907–919
6. Williamson, T. 2011: ‘Knowledge First Epistemology’, in S. Bernecker and D. Pritchard (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Epistemology*, Routledge.
7. Zagzebski, L. 1994: ‘The Inescapability of Gettier Problems’ *Philosophical Quarterly* 44: 65–73.

Week 4: Internalism and Externalism about Justification

**Question**: Whether or not a person's beliefs are justified depends on something internal to that person's mental life'. Discuss.

*Primary Reading*

1. Chisholm, R. 1988: “The Indispensability of Internal Justification”, *Synthese* 74: 285– 296
2. Pappas, G. ‘Internalist vs. Externalist Conceptions of Epistemic Justification’, Edward Zalta, ed., *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
3. Wedgwood, R. 2002: ‘Internalism Explained’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*: pp.349-352.

*Additional Reading*

1. Bonjour, L. 1980: ‘Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge’, *Midwest Studies in*

*Philosophy*: 53–73.

1. Conee, E. and Feldman, R. 1998: ‘The Generality Problem for Reliabilism’, *Philosophical Studies*.
2. Gibbons, J. 2006: ‘Access Externalsim’, Mind 115 (457):19-39.
3. Goldman, A. 1976: ‘What is Justified Belief?’ in G. S. Pappas (ed.), *Justification and Knowledge*.
4. Pryor, J. 2001: ‘Highlights of Recent Epistemology’, *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*.
5. Williamson, T. 2007: ‘On being justified in one’s head’, in Mark Timmons, John Greco, and Al Mele, eds., *Rationality and the Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Week 5: Necessity and Possibility

**Question**: Does the existence of possible worlds help us understand why certain things are metaphysically necessary?

*Primary Reading*

1. Hanks, P. 2008: ‘A Dilemma about Necessity’, Erkenntnis 68 (1):129 - 148.
2. Lewis, D. 1986: *On the Plurality of Worlds*. London: Blackwell chs.1-2.
3. Ney, A. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, London: Routledge, Chapter 7.
4. Rosen, G. 1990: “Modal Fictionalism”, *Mind* 99: 327–54

*Additional Reading*

1. Adams, R. M. 1979: ‘Primitive Identity and Primitive Thisness’ *Journal of Philosophy* 76: 5–26.
2. Chisholm, R. 1967: ‘Identity through possible worlds: some questions’ *Nous* 1: 1–8,
3. Lewis, D. 1973: *Counterfactuals*, London: Blackwell, ch. 4.
4. Lycan, W. 994: ‘The Trouble with Possible Worlds’, in Loux (ed.), *The Possible and the Actual. Reprinted in his Meaning and Modality*
5. Plantinga, A. 2003: ‘Two Concepts of Modality: Modal Realism and Modal Reductionism’, in Plantinga, *Essays in the Metaphysics of Modality*, ed. Matthew Davidson: Oxford University Press: pp. 192–228
6. Robert Stalnaker, ‘Possible Worlds’, Noûs (1976). Reprinted in his Ways a World Might Be (OUP, 2003).
7. Stalnaker, R. 2011: *Mere* *Possibilities*. Princeton University Press. ch.1
8. Ted Sider, ‘Reductive Theories of Modality’, in M. J. Loux and D. Zimmerman (eds.) The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics (OUP, 2003)

Week 6: Time

**Question**: Is time real?

*Primary Reading*

1. J.M.E. McTaggart, ‘The Unreality of Time’, Mind (1908). Reprinted in many collections including R. Le Poidevein and M. Macbeath (eds.) The Philosophy of Time (OUP, 1993)
2. Ney, A. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, London: Routledge, Chapter 7.
3. Sider, T. *Four-Dimensionalism.* Oxford: OUP. Chapter 2.

*Additional Reading*

1. A.N. Prior, ‘Changes in Events and Changes in Things’, in his Papers on Time and Tense (OUP, ch.1). Reprinted in Le Poidevein and Macbeath (eds.) The Philosophy of Time
2. Cameron, R. *The Moving Spotlight.* Oxford: OUP. Chapter 2.
3. Dean Zimmerman, ‘The Privileged Present: Defending an “A-Theory” of Time’, in

Sider, Hawthorne, and Zimmerman (eds.), Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics

1. J.J.C. Smart, ‘The Tenseless Theory of Time’, in Sider, Hawthorne, and Zimmerman (eds.), Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics
2. D.C. Williams, ‘The Myth of Passage’, *Journal of Philosophy* (1951)
3. Ned Markosian, ‘A Defense of Presentism’, *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics* (2004)
4. Kit Fine, ‘The Reality of Tense’, *Synthese* (2006)
5. Tim Maudlin, *The Metaphysics Within Physics* (OUP, 2007), ch.4

Week 7: Causation

**Question**: Can an omission be a cause?

*Primary Reading*

1. Lewis, D. 1986, “Causation,” in *Philosophical Papers 2*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 159–213.
2. Ney, A. *Metaphysics: An Introduction*, London: Routledge, Chapter 8.
3. Hall, N. 2004, “Two Concepts of Causation” in J. Collins, N. Hall, and L. A. Paul (eds.), *Causation and Counterfactuals*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 181–204.
4. Edgington, D. 2011. ‘Causation First: Why Causation is Prior to Counterfactuals?’

*Additional Reading*

1. Beebee, Helen, 2004a, “Causing and Nothingness,” in J. Collins, N. Hall, and L. A. Paul (eds.), *Causation and Counterfactuals*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 291–308.
2. Collins, John, Ned Hall, and L. A. Paul, 2004, “Counterfactuals and Causation: History, Problems, and Prospects,” in J. Collins, N. Hall, and L. A. Paul (eds.), *Causation and Counterfactuals*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, pp. 1–58.
3. Collins, John, 2000, “Preemptive Prevention,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 97: 223–34.
4. Dowe, P. 2001, “A Counterfactual Theory of Prevention and ‘Causation’ by Omission,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 79: 216–26.
5. Hitchcock, C. 2001, “The Intransitivity of Causation Revealed in Equations and Graphs,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 98: 273–99.
6. Lewis, D. 2000, “Causation as Influence,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 97: 182–97.
7. Mackie, J. L., 1965, “Causes and Conditions,” *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 2: 245–64.
8. McGrath, Sarah, 2005, “Causation by Omission: A Dilemma,” *Philosophical Studies*, 123: 125–48.
9. Schaffer, J. 2005, “Contrastive Causation,” *Philosophical Review*, 114: 327–58.

Week 8: Personal Identity

**Question**: What kind of thing is a person?

*Primary Reading*

1. Lewis, D. 1983: ‘Survival and Identity’, in Rorty, A. (ed.) *The Identities of Persons* , University of California Press.
2. Madden, R. 2011: ‘Brain Transplants and Externalism’, in *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics vol.* 6, K. Bennett and D. Zimmerman, eds. Oxford University Press.
3. Snowdon, P. 1990: ‘Persons, Animals, and Ourselves’, in Christopher Gill, *The Person and the Human* Mind. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
4. Williams, B. 1970: ‘The Self and the Future’, *The Philosophical Review* 79: 161–180.

*Additional Reading*

1. Nozick, R. 1981: ‘Personal Identity through Time’, from his *Philosophical Explorations*.
2. Madden. R. ‘Human Persistance’ *Philosophers’ Imprint*.
3. Olson, E. 2003. ‘An Argument for Animalism’ in R. Martin and J. Barresi (eds) *Personal Identity*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp.318–334
4. Parfit, D. 1971. ‘Personal Identity’ *Philosophical Review* 80: 3–27. Reprinted in Perry (ed.) *Personal Identity.*
5. Schechtman, M 1990: ‘Personhood and Personal Identity’, *Journal of Philosophy* 87: 71-92.
6. Shoemaker, S. 2008: ‘Persons, Animals, and Identity’, *Synthese* 162: 313–324.
7. Thomson, J. J. 1997: ‘People and their Bodies’ in J. Dancy (ed.) *Reading Parfit*, Oxford,
8. Wiggins, D. 2001: *Sameness and Substance Renewed*, ch. 7.