

GENERAL PHILOSOPHY TUTORIAL READING AND ESSAYS

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INTRODUCTION

READING

Generally the reading is given in the order in which I'd suggest reading it. Usually I assign relatively little reading, but it's really important that you read it all: if you leave any out, you're likely to have a gap in your understanding of the topic that will make it very difficult to answer the essay question. (Note also that for the vast majority of papers, reading them once is not enough: there are very few papers that I could understand after one reading.) By all means let me know if there's any week in which you think I've assigned too much (or too little) reading.

ESSAY

Your essays should be around 2000 words; that's about four single spaced pages. A little more or less is fine, but keep it under 2500 words. When you email your essay to me, *cc everyone else in your tutorial group*. And be sure to read and think about your tutorial peers' essays. Email your essay to me by 3 PM the day before the tutorial (unless I specify another time). If it's later than this, I might not get a chance to read it.

Please pay close attention to the following pieces of advice, especially 1 and 2. They try to cater for the most common and most easily solved problems I find in students' essays.

- 1 *Explain*. In short: explain *everything*. It should be possible for an intelligent peer who hasn't studied philosophy to understand your essay without needing to look up the words you use or read the authors you're writing about. So, for example: if you use a technical term or mention a concept that has particular significance for an author, make absolutely sure you clearly define/explain it; similarly, for any argument or position you discuss, you must clearly explain this argument or position to your reader. This is partly because good academic writing should be easily understood, but this is not the only or even the main reason. Rather, your ability to explain the ideas you're discussing—clearly, precisely, and succinctly—is one of the principal things you're being assessed on. You might well know, say, what a categorical imperative is, but you need to *show* that you know it and how precisely you know it. Explaining even small, simple ideas well is a lot harder than you might think; don't underestimate how important it is, and how much work it takes.
- 2 *Justify*. Assume that for every claim you make, the reader is asking 'why should I believe that?' In a philosophy essay, there should always be an excellent answer to this question. You should consider this to be, above all else, your aim when writing an essay. The worst thing you can do is to make bold assertions without defending them, and the second worst is to make bold assertions and defend them weakly. Note that this includes interpretive claims: if you write 'Plato believes that p', you need to show your reader, perhaps by giving a supporting

quote, that this is indeed something Plato believes.

A bad essay: ‘p!’

A good essay: ‘For reasons x, y, and z, it seems that p.’

An excellent essay: ‘Reasons x, y, and z give us good grounds for thinking that p, although someone might offer an objection along the following lines ... However, I think there is a promising response to this objection ...’

- 3 *Use headings.* Before you start writing, sketch a structure for your essay. When writing, use headings that reflect this structure. A typical essay might have 2–4 headings.
- 4 *First understand, then assess.* Be careful not to rush into criticisms of what you read before you’ve fully understood it. Approach everything you read with charity. That is, assume (since it is likely) that the author has thought intelligently and carefully about what they’ve written, so is unlikely to have made simple, obvious mistakes. For example, if you notice a *prima facie* objection to something you’re reading, read it again carefully to see if there’s a way to understand it that avoids the objection or try to think of a plausible implicit assumption the author might have made that caters for the objection.
- 5 *Ensure your conclusions reflect your arguments.* You might have been taught that strong, persuasive prose requires confident assertions, rather than hesitant, qualified ones. This is not the case in philosophy: your assertions should reflect the actual degree of confidence that is warranted by the evidence you’ve provided. Decisive arguments are rare—even rarer are decisive arguments in just a few lines of a student’s essay. So be very careful not to mistake considerations that give us a good reason for believing that p for an argument that conclusively proves that p. A good essay is likely to have a large range of (appropriate) qualifying phrases: ‘this shows decisively that p’; ‘this is a very strong reason to believe that p’; ‘this suggests that p’; ‘this makes it less implausible that p’; and so forth.
- 6 *Use quotes.* Especially in historical subjects, including quotes from the relevant primary texts can be an excellent way to illustrate, justify, and give some focus to your discussion. One way (of many ways) to use a quote would be the following: make a claim; present a quote that you think backs up the claim; and then explain and interpret the text of the quote in order to show that and why it backs up your claim. (Two cautions: first, quotes from secondary sources are often less useful; second, avoid using a quote as a way of *saying* something; rather, a quote should play the role of evidence *about which* you have something to say.)
- 7 *Go from general to particular.* The topics we’ll look at are very broad. One could reasonably spend years writing hundreds of pages about them—you only have a few pages and one week. This presents a challenge: on the one hand, you want to cover the whole topic, showing that you’re familiar with all the major issues that arise; on the other hand, you want to do more than simply scratch the surface, never looking at any issue in detail. This can be a difficult balance to achieve, but in general it is much better to *err on the side of detail*. A good approach might be to devote about the first third or half of your essay to a more general discussion of the essay topic and then use the last half or two-thirds to examine one

or two smaller points in much greater detail—you might, for example, focus on one argument, premise, or objection that you think is especially important or interesting.

SOME BASICS OF TYPOGRAPHY

The following are a few typographic conventions worth learning:

- 1 *Indent paragraphs.* But do not indent the opening paragraph of the document or the first paragraph after a section heading. You may instead—not in addition—separate paragraphs with a blank line, although this is better suited to list-like texts, such as legal documents, than continuous prose.
- 2 *Use single line spacing.* It's easier to read. Double spacing is only necessary when a printed copy of your work will be annotated.
- 3 *A footnote mark is always placed after punctuation.*¹ It is almost always best to place a footnote at the end of the sentence, *after* the sentence-ending full stop, even if you are referring to something earlier in the sentence. Avoid consecutive footnotes; instead, place all information in one footnote if possible.
- 4 *Indicate quotes with either quotation marks or by using a block quote.* Extra flourishes, such as italicising, are unnecessary. And never place a block quote within quotation marks.
- 5 *Learn the difference between a hyphen (-), en-dash (–), and em-dash (—).* Use an en-dash like 'to' in ranges of dates or numbers (e.g. 87–142) and to express certain relationships between words: for example, an 'on–off switch' or 'Irish–American relations'. Either an en- or em-dash can be used to indicate a parenthetical phrase. If you use an en-dash, add a space either side – like so – but em-dashes are always unspaced—like so.
- 6 *Make ellipses with three full stops separated by spaces.* Like this . . . , with a space either side. You will most commonly use an ellipsis to indicate portions of text that you've omitted from quotes. Don't omit any sentence-ending full stops that precede an ellipsis (i.e. together they make four stops). For example:

[P]articulate care needs to be exercised when eliding text to ensure that the sense of the original is not lost . . . A deletion must not result in a statement alien to the original material. . . . Accuracy of sense and emphasis must accompany accuracy of transcription. (CMS, 16th, 13.49)

- 7 *Use a single space after full-stops.* A double space, once common, is now rightly recognised as unnecessary.

REFERENCING

In your essays you should reference both quotes and claims or arguments that originate from one of the authors you've been reading. You should also have a bibliography of all the works you've referred to in the text.

1. This includes full stops, commas, colons, semi-colons, and quotation marks.

You can use whatever bibliographical style you choose, so long as it's consistent. The following is an example of a typical author-year referencing style, starting with what the bibliography will look like:

Book: Author (Year) *Title*, Place: Publisher.

Fine, G. (1993) *On Ideas*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Freeman, S. (ed.) (2003) *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Article: Author (Year) 'Title', *Journal*, Volume, pp. Pages.

Irwin, T.H. (1977) 'Plato's Heracleiteanism', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 27, pp. 1–13.

Article in book: Author (Year) 'Article Title' in Editor(s) (ed(s)). *Book Title*, Place: Publisher.

Scanlon, T.M. (2003) 'Rawls on Justification' in S. Freeman (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

In-text citation: (Author, Year, Page(s))

It has been argued that the charge of conservatism laid against Rawls' idea of reflective equilibrium is unsound (Scanlon, 2003, pp. 150–151).

Scanlon argues that the charge of conservatism laid against Rawls' reflective equilibrium is unsound (2003, pp. 150–151).

PLAGIARISM

The university guidelines are here: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/epsc/plagiarism. From the college regulations:

Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's work without acknowledgement as if it were your own. Typically, this involves copying an essay from another student or from the Internet, or copying passages from a book without quotation marks and a clear page reference. It is a very serious offence to plagiarise someone else's work, and there are serious academic penalties which may include the offender being sent down from the College and the University. ... Please also be aware that poor academic work practices, such as copying sections directly from academic articles into your notes for information, might lead to unintentional plagiarism, but that this unintentional offence will still be dealt with severely by the University as 'reckless' plagiarism.

Two good reasons not to plagiarise. 1. I'll spot it. It's really easy. 2. If you think about it, there is really no advantage to plagiarising an essay, just serious disadvantage if you're caught. The most you'll gain, if you're lucky, is to make me believe that you wrote an essay when you didn't—but why would you care what I believe? If you genuinely can't write an essay for whatever reason, try to write part of an essay, some notes, or—in the worst case—nothing.

WEEK 1: SCEPTICISM

Sceptical arguments purport to show that we are not entitled to make even very ordinary, commonsensical knowledge claims, such as the claim that I know that I am now reading. A typical argument might, very roughly, run as follows: (i) Closure Principle: if I know that I am reading, and I know that if I am reading, then I am not dreaming (or a brain in a vat, in the Matrix, ...), then I must know that I am not dreaming; but (ii) I do not know that I am not dreaming; therefore (iii) I don't know that I am reading.

This week we'll look at Descartes' famous statement(s) of scepticism and two quite different responses, from Moore and Nozick. I haven't assigned a great deal of reading, but I strongly suggest that you also have a look at something from the optional reading.

ESSAY:

Give a clear statement of Descartes' argument for scepticism. Does this argument succeed?

READING:

- 1 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Meditation I
- 2 G.E. Moore, 'Proof of an External World' in Michael Huemer (ed.) *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings* (Routledge 2002) Chapter 9, pp. 602–605. First published in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 25 (1939) pp. 273–300. Also in G.E. Moore *Philosophical Papers* (Allen & Unwin, 1959) Chapter 7, pp. 127–150.
- 3 R. Nozick, 'Knowledge and Skepticism' in Nozick *Philosophical Explanations* (Oxford: OUP, 1981) pp. 167–185. Reprinted in: S. Bernecker and F. Dretske (eds.) *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology* (Oxford: OUP, 2000) pp. 347–354; J. Dancy (ed.) *Perceptual Knowledge* (Oxford: OUP, 1988); in K. DeRose and T. Warfield (eds.) *Skepticism: A Contemporary Reader* (Oxford: OUP, 1999) pp. 156–164; and E. Sosa and J. Kim (eds.) *Epistemology: An Anthology*, 1st edition (Blackwell, 2000), or 2nd edition, ed. Ernest Sosa, Jaegwon Kim, Jeremy Fantl and Matthew McGrath (Blackwell, 2008).

Optional reading:

- 4 David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section XII [Another approach to scepticism]
- 5 K. DeRose and T. Warfield (eds.) *Skepticism: a Contemporary Reader* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), chapter 1 [A good introduction to scepticism. Lots of helpful stuff in other chapters too]
- 6 S. Luper, 'The Epistemic Closure Principle', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [This is especially helpful for understanding, and assessing, Nozick's account. Read sections 1, 2, and 5]

- 7 H. Putnam, 'Brains in a Vat', in Michael Huemer (ed.) *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings* (Routledge, 2002), Chapter 9, pp. 524–538; also in Sven Bernecker and Fred Dretske (eds.) *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology* (OUP, 2000). First published in Putnam's *Reason Truth and History* (CUP, 1981), Chapter 1, pp. 1–21. [Another response to scepticism: an attempt to refute the possibility of the brains in a vat—or body in the Matrix—scenario]
- 8 P. Klein, '[Skepticism](#)', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* [Quite technical, but helpful]

WEEK 2: WHAT IS KNOWLEDGE?

In the last tutorial we saw that one way to respond to scepticism was to offer an account of knowledge that avoids the sceptic's argument. This week we're taking a closer look at how we should define knowledge.

Besides avoiding scepticism, another common aim of modern accounts of knowledge is to cater for so-called 'Gettier cases': putative counter-examples, presented by Edmund Gettier, to the plausible idea that knowledge is justified, true belief (the JTB account). We'll be looking at two papers that offer an 'externalist' account of knowledge (Armstrong and Goldman) and some 'internalist' objections to such accounts (BonJour).

ESSAY:

What is plausible about the idea that knowledge is justified, true belief? Clearly explain why Gettier cases cause trouble for this account. Is offering an externalist account of knowledge the right way to deal with Gettier cases?

READING:

- 1 E. Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', *Analysis* 23 (1963) pp. 121–123. Reprinted in M. Huemer (ed.) *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings* (Routledge, 2002), Chapter 8, pp. 444–446; also in Sven Bernecker and Fred Dretske (eds.) *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology* (Oxford: OUP, 2000)
- 2 D.M. Armstrong, 'The Thermometer Model of Knowledge', in S. Bernecker and F. Dretske (eds.) *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology* (OUP, 2000), pp.72–85. Originally published in Armstrong, *Belief, Truth and Knowledge* (CUP, 1973), pp.162–175, 178–183
- 3 A.I. Goldman, 'A Causal Theory of Knowing', *The Journal of Philosophy* 64 (1967) pp. 357–372
- 4 L. BonJour, 'Externalist Theories of Empirical Knowledge', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5 (1980) pp. 53–73. Reprinted in S. Bernecker and F. Dretske (eds.) *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology* (OUP, 2000) [Objections to externalist accounts]

Optional Reading

- 5 A.J. Ayer, *The Problem of Knowledge* (Macmillan/Penguin, 1956), Chapter 1, pp. 7–35 [A statement of the justified, true belief account of knowledge]
- 6 G. Pappas, 'Internalist vs. Externalist Conceptions of Epistemic Justification', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
- 7 J.J. Ichikawa, 'The Analysis of Knowledge', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

WEEK 3: PERSONAL IDENTITY

ESSAY:

Explain Locke's account of personal identity. What (if anything) is wrong with this account? What (if any) would be a better account?

READING:

- 1 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter XXVII
- 2 Eric Olson, 'Personal Identity', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
- 3 Bernard Williams, 'The self and the future', *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970) 161–180; also in: Williams, *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge UP, 1973); John Perry (ed), *Personal Identity* (University of California Press, 1975); and Raymond Martin and John Barresi (eds) *Personal Identity* (Blackwell, 2003)
- 4 Derek Parfit, 'Why Our Identity is Not What Matters', in Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford UP, 1984), Chapter 12, pp. 245–280; also in Raymond Martin and John Barresi (eds) *Personal Identity* (Blackwell, 2003), 115–143
- 5 Paul Snowdon, 'Persons, Animals, and Ourselves', in Christopher Gill (ed), *The Person and the Human Mind* (Oxford UP, 1990), Chapter 4, pp. 83–107; also in Tim Crane and Katalin Farkas (eds) *Metaphysics: A Guide and Anthology* (OUP, 2004), pp. 578–596

Optional reading:

- 6 Sydney Shoemaker and Richard Swinburne, *Personal Identity* (Blackwell, 1984)

WEEK 4: MIND AND BODY 1

This week we're meeting as a larger group, for 90 minutes. You have no essay—your essay will be for week 8—but instead you'll be writing, in pairs, a brief summary of one of articles (4)–(7).

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Write a short—maybe one or two pages—summary of **one** of articles (4)–(7). If you wish you can include some brief assessment of the article, but your focus should be on giving a clear exposition of what the author argues. A good exposition is more than just a rephrasing of what the author says. Once you've acquired a deep enough understanding of the author's position, you should be able to find your own way of expressing and defending it, which may be very different—and perhaps even better—than the author's. A really great exposition can be a worthy and original piece of philosophy in its own right.

You'll be doing this task in pairs, numbers permitting. After you've both done all your reading, you should meet at least once to discuss the article you've been assigned. How you go about writing is up to you (perhaps, for example, you could create a collaborative Google document).

READING:

- 1 Descartes, *Meditations*, Meditation II and VI
- 2 M.D. Wilson, 'Descartes: The Epistemological Argument for Mind-Body Distinctness' *Noûs* 10 (1976) pp. 3–15
- 3 J. Kim, *Philosophy of Mind*, 2nd edition (Westview Press, 2005), Chapters 1 and 2

Also read at least **two** of the following:

- 4 F. Jackson, 'Epiphenomenal Qualia' *Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1982) pp. 127–136 reprinted in P. Ludlow, Y. Nagasawa, and D. Stoljar (eds.) *There's Something About Mary* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004)
- 5 F. Jackson, 'What Mary Didn't Know' *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986) pp. 291–295; reprinted in Ludlow *et al.* *There's Something About Mary*
- 6 D. Lewis, 'What Experience Teaches' in W.G. Lycan (ed.) *Mind and Cognition* (Blackwell: 1990); reprinted in Lewis, *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology* (CUP, 1999) pp. 262–290; D. Chalmers (ed.) *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (OUP, 2002); and T. O'Connor and D. Robb (eds.) *Philosophy of Mind: Contemporary Readings* (Routledge, 2003); and Ludlow *et al.* *There's Something About Mary*
- 7 M. Tye, 'Knowing What It Is Like: The Ability Hypothesis and the Knowledge Argument' in M. Tye *Consciousness, Color, and Content* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000); reprinted in Ludlow *et al.* *There's Something About Mary*

WEEK 5: MIND AND BODY 2

ESSAY:

Your essay title is up to you this week. Choose a question that both interests you and allows you to draw upon the majority of the reading. Be sure, however, to have a question that is focused enough to allow you to look at some aspect of the topic in *detail*.

As a guide, here are a few previous exam questions: Is mind–body dualism tenable? What is materialism? Is mind matter? Could a machine have a mind? How, if at all, can the dualist account for mental causation?

READING:

Same as last week, but now also read the two articles you didn't look at last time.

WEEK 6: GOD & EVIL

ESSAY:

Should the existence of extreme human suffering lead a religious believer to abandon their faith?

READING:

- 1 J.L. Mackie, 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind* 64 (1955) 200–212; also in M. M. Adams and R. M Adams (eds) *The Problem of Evil* (OUP, 1990), Chap. 1
- 2 A. Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford UP, 1974), Chapter 9; Reprinted as 'God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom' in Adams and Adams (eds) *The Problem of Evil*, Chapter 5.
- 3 Peter van Inwagen, 'The Argument from Evil', in Peter van Inwagen (ed.), *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2004), pp. 55-73.
- 4 Stephen Griffith, 'The Problem of Pomegranates', in Peter van Inwagen (ed.) *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2004), pp. 85-94.

Optional reading:

- 5 M. Tooley, '[The Problem of Evil](#)' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

WEEK 7: FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM 1

ESSAY:

In order to have ϕ -ed [some action] freely, is it necessary that—without changing the circumstances of the action in any way—it was possible for me to have not ϕ -ed?

READING:

- 1 A. J. Ayer, 'Freedom and Necessity', in Ayer, *Philosophical Essays* (Macmillan, 1954), Chapter 12; also in Gary Watson (ed) *Free Will* (1st edition) (OUP 1982), Chapter 1, 15–23
- 2 Peter Van Inwagen, 'The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism' *Philosophical Studies* 27 (1975) 185–99; also in Watson (ed) *Free Will*, 1st edition (OUP, 1982)
- 3 H. Frankfurt, 'Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 66, No. 23. (Dec. 4, 1969), 829–839. Also in Gary Watson (ed.) *Free Will* (2nd edition) (OUP 2002), Chapter 8, pp.167–176
- 4 M. McKenna, '[Compatibilism](#)' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Also many other useful articles: e.g. 'Free Will', 'Determinism: causal' etc.

Optional reading:

- 5 J.M. Fisher, 'Free Will and Moral Responsibility' in David Copp (ed) *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (OUP: Oxford, 2006) [Some good analysis of Frankfurt cases]
- 6 J. Copeland, *Artificial Intelligence: A Philosophical Introduction* (Blackwell, 1993), chapter 7

WEEK 8: FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM 2

ESSAY:

Am I morally responsible for my actions only if I am morally responsible for my character?

READING:

- 1 J. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Penguin, 1977), chapter 9
- 2 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book III, chapters 1 & 5
- 3 G. Strawson, 'The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility' *Philosophical Studies* 75 (1994) 5–25
- 4 J. M. Fischer, 'The Cards That Are Dealt You' *The Journal of Ethics* 10 (2006) 107–129

Optional reading:

- 5 J.M. Fisher, 'Free Will and Moral Responsibility' in David Copp (ed) *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (OUP: Oxford, 2006) [Useful to get an overview of a variety of issues relating to moral responsibility]
- 6 P. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment' *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962) pp. 1–25. [Galen's father. An influential account of moral responsibility according to which it can be explained entirely in terms of the kinds of 'reactive attitudes' (e.g. resentment) that people hold towards others' actions.]